



DOMENICO LOSURDO

STALIN

HISTORIA Y CRÍTICA DE UNA LEYENDA NEGRA

EL VIEJO TOPO

This is an unfinished, amateur translation of the Spanish translation of Domenico Losurdo's *Stalin: History and Criticism of a Black Legend*, the product of running the whole thing through Google Translate and then using my extremely rudimentary Spanish to try to fix it up. I probably shouldn't have spent several weeks of my life on something I was clearly woefully unqualified to do, but hopefully some of the people reading this will find it helpful or maybe even pick up where I left off.

All of the numerous errors in translation are my own.

Last modified 3/11/18.

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STALIN

History and Criticism of a Black Legend

With an essay by Luciano Canfora

Translation by Antonio Antón Fernández

El Viejo Topo

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Original title: Stalin. Storia e critica di una leggenda nera

Edition copyright: Ediciones de Intervención Cultural/El Viejo Topo

Design: Miguel R. Cabot

ISBN: 978-84-15216-00-1

Legal deposits: B-10.028-2011

Printed by: Novagráfik Impreso en España

Acknowledgements

Bruno Böröcz and Eric Le Lenn assisted me with bibliographic research; Paolo Ercolani and Giorgio Grimaldi helped me with drafting. My thanks to all of them.

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Preface

The radical turn in the history of the image of Stalin

From the Cold War to the *Khrushchev Report*

The death of Stalin was followed by impressive demonstrations of mourning: in anguish, “millions of people crowded into central Moscow to pay their last respects” to the deceased 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 country, for example in a “small village” where, as soon as they heard what happened, the inhabitants fell into a spontaneous and unanimous mourning². “General dismay” spread beyond the borders of the USSR: “Men and women wept in the streets of Budapest and Prague”³.

In Israel, thousands of kilometers from the socialist camp, the reaction was also mournful: “All members of MAPAM, without exception, wept”; this was a party composed of “all senior leaders” and “almost all ex-combatants.” The pain was followed by anxiety: “The sun has set” headlined the newspaper of the kibbutz movement, “Al-Hamishmar”. Such sentiments were expressed for some time by those at the highest ranks of the state and military apparatus: “Ninety officers who had participated in the war of ‘48, the great war of Jewish independence, joined a clandestine, armed, pro-Soviet [and pro-Stalin], revolutionary organization. Of these, eleven became generals and one a minister, and they are still honored today as fathers of the nation of Israel”⁴.

In the West, the leaders and activists of the Soviet-linked Communist parties were not alone in paying tribute to the late leader. A historian (Isaac Deutscher) who was otherwise a fervent admirer of Trotsky wrote an obituary full of praise:

In three decades, the face of the Soviet Union was completely transformed. The essence of the historical actions of Stalinism is this: it found a Russia that worked the land with wooden plows, and left it the owner of a nuclear arsenal. It raised Russia to the level of the second-most powerful industrial nation in the world, and it was not just a matter of mere material progress and organization. No one could have obtained a similar result without a cultural revolution in which an entire country was sent to school to give it a broad education.

In short, although it was conditioned and partly distorted by the Asiatic and despotic heritage of tsarist Russia, “the socialist ideal had an innate, compact integrity” in Stalin’s USSR.

In this historical account, there was no longer room for the fierce accusations directed by Trotsky to the late leader at the time. What sense did it make to condemn Stalin as a traitor to the ideal of world revolution and the advocate of socialism in one country at a time when a new social order was spreading across Europe and Asia and revolution was breaking free from its “national shell”?⁵ Though ridiculed by Trotsky as a “minor provincial transported, like a joke of history, to the plane of major world events”⁶, Stalin, in the opinion of a famous philosopher (Alexandre Kojève), had emerged in 1950 as the incarnation of the Hegelian world spirit, and therefore called to unify and lead humanity, using forceful methods and combining wisdom and tyranny in his practice⁷.

Outside of communist circles, that is, outside of the pro-communist left, and in spite of the outbreak of the Cold War and the persistence of a hot war in Korea, obituaries for Stalin in the West were generally “respectful” or “balanced”. At that moment, 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 helped save Europe from Nazi barbarism”⁸. The ideas, impressions, and emotions of the years of the Great Alliance against the Third Reich and its allies had not diminished, to the extent that, 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.

The “impressed” even included those who had supported military intervention against the land of the October Revolution, namely, Winston Churchill, who on multiple occasions said of Stalin: “I like that man”¹⁰. During the Tehran Conference in November 1943, the English statesman had greeted his Soviet counterpart as “Stalin the Great”, worthy successor to Peter the Great; he was the savior of his country, and had prepared it to defeat the invaders¹¹. Averell Harriman, US ambassador to Moscow from 1943 to 1946, had also been fascinated by certain aspects of Stalin, always describing the Soviet leader’s military skill quite positively: “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 Gasperi emphatically celebrated “the immense, historic, and

secular merit of the armies organized by the genius of Joseph Stalin.” The eminent Italian politician’s accolades extended beyond the military plane as well:

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 Catholicism¹³.

The high standing that Stalin enjoyed and continued to enjoy was no less intense or less widespread among the great intellectuals. Harold J. Laski, a renowned exponent of the British Labor Party, in an autumn 1945 conversation with Norberto Bobbio, declared himself an “**admirer of the Soviet Union**” and of its leader, describing him as someone “very wise” (*très sage*)¹⁴. That same year, Hannah Arendt had written that the country led by Stalin had distinguished itself by “**its entirely new and successful approach to nationality conflicts, its new form of organizing different peoples on the basis on national equality**”; it was a kind of model, it was “**what every political and national movement should give its utmost attention to**”¹⁵.

In turn, writing shortly before and after the end of World War II, Benedetto Croce had credited Stalin for promoting freedom internationally, for contributing to the fight against Nazi fascism, including in his own country. Indeed, he saw in the leader of the USSR “a gifted man of political genius” who played a historical role that was, on the whole, positive: relative to pre-revolutionary Russia, “Sovietism was a progress of freedom”, just as “in relation to the feudal regime” the absolute monarchy was “a progress of freedom which generated further and greater progresses.” The doubts that the liberal philosopher had were focused on the future of the Soviet Union, but these very doubts, by contrast, only emphasized Stalin’s greatness even more: he had taken the place of Lenin, so that one genius had followed another, but what successors would “Providence” have in store for the USSR?¹⁶

As the crisis of the Great Alliance began, those who started to equate Stalin’s Soviet Union with Hitler’s Germany were harshly reproved by Thomas Mann. What had characterized the Third Reich was the “racial megalomania” of the self-styled “master race” which had launched a “diabolical policy of

depopulation,” and prior to that, of eradicating culture in the territories it conquered. Thus, Hitler had adhered to Nietzsche’s maxim: [“if one wants slaves, then one is a fool if one educates them to be masters.”](#) The orientation of “Russian socialism” was in direct contradiction; by massively spreading education and culture, it proved it did not want “slaves” but rather “thinking men” and therefore, despite everything, had been directed “toward freedom.” Equating the two regimes was therefore unacceptable. Moreover, those who argued that way could well be suspected of complicity with the fascism they claimed to condemn:

To place Russian communism and Nazi fascism on the same moral plane, insofar as both are totalitarian, is at best a superficiality. At worst it is fascism. Those who insist on this equation may consider themselves to be democrats, but in truth and at the bottom of their hearts they are fascists, and only fight fascism in an obvious and hypocritical way, while saving all their hatred for communism¹⁷.

Following the outbreak of the Cold War, Arendt carried out precisely what Mann had denounced by publishing her book on totalitarianism in 1951. And yet, at almost the same time, Kojève was pointing to Stalin as the instigator of a decidedly progressive historical turn of global dimensions. In the West itself, the new truth—the new ideological motif of the equanimous struggle against the various manifestations of totalitarianism—was still having difficulty taking hold.

In 1948, Laski had in some ways reaffirmed the viewpoint he had expressed three years earlier: in defining the USSR, he borrowed a phrase used by another top-level representative of the British Labor Party, Beatrice Webb, who as early as 1931, and into World War II and until her death, had spoken of the Soviet country in terms of a “new civilization.” Laski agreed: with the formidable impetus that it gave to promoting social classes that had for so long been exploited and oppressed, and introducing new relations in the factory and the workplace that were 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, the two of them were quick to point out that the “new civilization” that was emerging was still being weighed by the burden of “barbaric Russia”. This found its expression in despotic forms, but in forming a correct judgment of the Soviet Union, Laski emphasized in particular, it was necessary not to lose sight of one 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 “state of siege” that was more or less permanent and by a “potential or actual war”. Moreover, in situations of acute crisis, England and the United States, too, had limited the traditional freedoms more or less drastically¹⁸.

In reference to Laski’s admiration for Stalin and the country he led, Bobbio would much later write: “immediately after Hitler’s defeat, to which the Soviets had made a decisive contribution at the battle of Stalingrad, [this statement] did not make any particular impression.” In fact, the British Labor intellectual’s tribute to the USSR and its leader had gone well beyond just military terms. And yet, was it that much different from the position of the Turinese philosopher at that time? In 1954, the latter published an essay that praised the Soviet Union (and the socialist states) for having “initiated a new phase of civil progress in politically backward countries, introducing traditional democratic institutions: institutions of formal democracy, as in universal suffrage and eligibility to seek office, and institutions of real democracy, as in the collectivization of the means of production”. What was needed, then, was to add “a drop of [liberal] oil to the machinery of the revolution already achieved”¹⁹. As we can see, the judgment expressed then was anything but negative about the country that was still mourning the death of Stalin.

In 1954, the legacy of liberal socialism was still pulsing within Bobbio’s thought. Despite strongly emphasizing the inalienable value of freedom and democracy, in the years of the war in Spain, Carlo Rosselli had negatively contrasted the liberal countries (“England is officially with Franco, and starves Bilbao to death”) with a Soviet Union committed to helping the Spanish Republic, which was under assault by Nazi fascism^{20*}. He was not only talking about international politics either. Faced with a world characterized by “the stage of fascism, imperialist wars, and capitalist decadence”, Carlo Rosselli gave the example of a country that, though still far from a mature democratic socialism, had in any case left capitalism behind and represented “a source of valuable experience” for anyone committed to building a better society: “Today, with the enormous Russian experience [...] we have a huge amount of positive material. We all know what socialist revolution means, what socialist organization of production means”²¹.

In conclusion, for an entire historical period, in circles that went well beyond the communist movement, the country that Stalin led, and Stalin himself, enjoyed interest, sympathy, esteem, and perhaps even admiration. Of course, we must

reckon with the severe disappointment provoked by the pact with Nazi Germany, but Stalingrad had already been working to delete it. It is for this reason that in 1953, and in subsequent years, celebration of the late leader united the socialist camp, seemed to strengthen, at times, the communist movement despite its earlier defeats, and ended up resonating in certain ways in the liberal West itself, which had already thrown itself into a Cold War waged uncompromisingly by both parties. It is no coincidence that in the Fulton speech with which he officially began the Cold War, Churchill declared: [“I have a strong admiration and regard for the valiant Russian people and for my wartime comrade, Marshal Stalin”](#)²². Undoubtedly, as the Cold War increased in intensity, the tones of voice would become harsher. Yet still, in 1952, a great English historian who had worked in the service of the Foreign Office, Arnold Toynbee, allowed himself to compare the Soviet leader to “a man of genius: Peter the Great”; indeed, “the test of the battlefield has justified Stalin’s tyrannical push for technological Westernization, just as it had for Peter the Great.” And it would continue to be justified even beyond the Third Reich’s defeat: after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Russia would again face “the need to accelerate the race to catch up with Western technology” that was again “advancing explosively”²³.

Towards a global comparative

Another historical event marked a radical turn in the history of Stalin’s image even more than the Cold War did. Churchill’s speech of March 5, 1946 played a less important role than another speech, given ten years later, on February 25, 1956, by Nikita Khrushchev on the occasion of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

For more than three decades this *Report*, which painted a portrait of an insanely bloodthirsty dictator, conceited and profoundly mediocre—or even ridiculous—in the intellectual sphere, has been satisfactory to almost everyone. It allowed the new leadership group that ruled the USSR to present itself as the sole repository of revolutionary legitimacy in the country, in the socialist camp, and in the international communist movement, which saw Moscow as its nerve center. With their old convictions confirmed, and with new arguments for waging the Cold War at their disposal, the West also had reason to be satisfied (or enthusiastic). In the United States, Sovietology displayed a tendency to develop around the CIA and other military and intelligence agencies, subject to the elimination of elements suspected of sympathizing with the land of the October

Revolution²⁴. The discipline underwent a process of militarization, which was key to the development of the Cold War. In 1949, the president of the American Historical Association declared: “One cannot afford to be unorthodox”, and the “plurality of aims and values” could no longer be permitted. It was 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”²⁵. In 1956, not only did the strength of these slogans not dissipate, but thereafter, a more or less militarized Sovietology could enjoy comfort and support from the very heart of the communist world.

Granted, the *Khrushchev Report* pointed an accusatory finger at a single individual rather than at communism as such, but in those years it was opportune, from the point of view of Washington and its allies, to not spread their targets too wide, and instead focus their fire on the country of Stalin. With the signing of the “Balkan pact” of 1953 with Turkey and Greece, Yugoslavia became a sort of external member of NATO, and some twenty years later China, too, would form a *de facto* alliance against the Soviet Union. The superpower had to be isolated, and it would be pressured to carry out a more and more radical “de-Stalinization” until it was deprived of all identity and self-esteem, and was forced to resign itself to surrender and to final dissolution.

Finally, due to the “revelations” from Moscow, the great intellectuals could quietly forget the interest, sympathy, and even admiration with which they had viewed Stalin’s USSR. Apart from them, the intellectuals who took Trotsky as their point of reference also found comfort in these “revelations”. For the enemies of the Soviet Union, Trotsky had long been the embodiment of the ignominy of communism, the privileged exemplar of the “exterminator”, or for that matter, the “exterminator Jew” (see below, pp. 268). As late as 1933, when Trotsky had been exiled for some years, Spengler continued to see him as the representative “Bolshevist mass-murderer” (*bolschewistischer Massenmörder*)²⁶. With the turn made at the 20th Congress of the CPSU, the museum of horrors was reserved solely for Stalin and his closest collaborators. Above all, and exerting its influence well beyond the Trotskyists, the *Khrushchev Report* served as comfort for certain Marxist left circles who felt freed from the painful task of reconsidering the theory of the masters and the history of its effects. It is true that, rather than withering away, the state was quite oversized in the countries that communists ruled; far from dissolving, national identity assumed an increasingly important role in the conflicts that led to the final dismemberment

and burial of the socialist camp; there was no sign of the abolition of money or the market, which tended to expand alongside economic development. Yes, all of this was indisputable, but the problem... was with Stalin and “Stalinism”! And so there was no reason to question the hopes or certainties that had accompanied the Bolshevik Revolution and that had referenced Marx.

Despite their opposition to each other, these political-ideological spheres elaborated an image of Stalin that begins with colossal, arbitrary abstractions. For the left, the history of Bolshevism was virtually eliminated, and the history of Marxism even more so, from the history of the person who, for longer than anyone else, held power in the country that emerged from the revolution that had been planned and carried out according to the ideas of Marx and Engels. In turn, the anti-communists brashly skipped over both the history of tsarist Russia and the history of the *Second Thirty Years’ War*, which made up the context for the contradictory and tragic development of Soviet Russia and its three decades under Stalin. And so each of the different political and ideological spheres took the impulse of 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 terrible term of comparison that allowed each of its opponents, by contrast, to bask in their infinite moral and intellectual superiority.

Though they were based on strikingly different abstractions, these interpretations nevertheless ended up producing a kind of methodological convergence. By investigating the terror without paying much attention to the objective situation, it was reduced to the initiative of a single personality or of a restricted class of leaders, determined to reassert their absolute power by any means necessary. Beginning from this assumption, if it could be compared to some other great political figure, this could only be Hitler; therefore, in order to understand Stalin’s USSR, the only comparison it was possible to make was with Nazi Germany. This is a motif that has been appealed to since the late 1930s by Trotsky, who repeatedly returned to the category of “[totalitarian dictatorship](#)” and within this *genus* distinguishes the “[Stalinist](#)” *species* on the one hand and the “[Fascist](#)” (and especially the *Hitlerian*) on the other²⁷, with a contextualization that would later become the common sense of the Cold War and the dominant ideology today.

Is this mode of argument convincing, or would it be better to turn to a global comparison, without losing sight of either Russian history as a whole or of all the countries involved in the Second Thirty Years’ War? Admittedly, this mode

of argument begins with a comparison of countries and leaders with very different characteristics, but should this diversity be explained exclusively through ideologies, or does the objective situation, i.e., the geopolitical positioning and historical background of each of the countries involved in the Second Thirty Years' War, also play an important role? When we speak about Stalin, our thinking leads us immediately to the personalization of power, the concentration camps, the deportation of entire ethnic groups. However, were these phenomena and practices only found in Nazi Germany and the USSR, or did they also manifest in other countries, in different ways according to the greater or lesser intensity of the state of emergency and its longer or shorter duration, including in those countries with a more consolidated liberal tradition? Of course, one should not lose sight of the role of ideologies, but can the ideology to which Stalin claimed to be heir really be equated with the one that inspired Hitler, or would an unbiased comparison end up producing unexpected results? Against the theoreticians of "purity", it should be pointed out that a political movement or regime cannot be judged based on the excellence of the ideals it claims to be inspired by: in evaluating those ideals we cannot go higher than the *Wirkungsgeschichte*, the "history of effects" produced by them. But should such an approach be applied globally, or only to the movements that were inspired by Lenin or Marx?

These questions will seem superfluous or even misleading to those who ignore the problem of the changing image of Stalin based on the belief that Khrushchev finally brought the hidden truth to light. However, it would demonstrate a complete disregard of methodology for a historian to consider 1956 the year of the definitive and final revelation, blatantly avoiding the conflicts and interests that spurred the campaign of de-Stalinization and its various aspects, and that had motivated the Sovietology of the Cold War even before then. The radical contrast between the different images of Stalin should drive the historian not only to not take one as absolute, but rather to call all of them into question.

1

How to cast a god into hell: the Khrushchev Report

A “huge, grim, whimsical, morbid, human monster”

If we now analyze *On the Cult of Personality and its Consequences*, read by Khrushchev at a closed meeting of the Congress of the CPSU and remembered afterwards as the *Secret Speech*, one detail immediately catches our attention: this is a speech of censure that advocates liquidating Stalin in every respect. Responsible for many heinous crimes, he was a despicable individual both morally and intellectually. Besides being ruthless, the dictator was also ridiculous: he knew the countryside and the agricultural situation “[only from films](#)”, films that, after all, “[beautified](#)” reality beyond the point of recognition²⁸. Rather than political logic or *Realpolitik*, the bloody repression he unleashed was dictated by personal whim and a pathological *libido dominandi*. From this—observed Deutscher with satisfaction in June 1956, shaken by Khrushchev’s “revelations” and so forgetting his own respectful and sometimes admiring portrait of Stalin from three years before—emerged the portrait of a “[huge, grim, whimsical, morbid, human monster](#)”²⁹. The ruthless despot was so unscrupulous that he was suspected of plotting the murder of Kirov, the man who was, or seemed to be, his best friend, so that his opponents, actual or potential, real or imaginary, could be accused of this crime and be eliminated one after another³⁰. The ruthless repression had not only fed upon individuals and political groups. No, it brought about “mass deportations of entire populations”, arbitrarily accused of collusion with the enemy and convicted en masse. Had Stalin at least helped to save his country and the world from the horror of the Third Reich? On the contrary, insisted Khrushchev, the Great Patriotic War was won *despite* the madness of the dictator: the troops of the Third Reich managed to penetrate so deep into Soviet territory, sowing much death and destruction, and were defeated only because of their own shortsightedness, stubbornness, and blind trust in Hitler.

Because of Stalin, the Soviet Union had come to the tragic meeting unprepared and helpless: “[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 person responsible abandoned himself to gloom and even apathy. Overcome by the feeling of defeat ([“Lenin left us a great legacy and we’ve lost it forever”](#)), unable to react, Stalin [“for a long time actually did not direct military operations and ceased to do anything whatsoever”](#)³¹. Sure, after some time, he finally yielded to the insistence of the other members of the Politburo and returned to his post. If only he had not! The one who led the Soviet Union and its military as a dictator, when faced with mortal danger, had been so incompetent that he did not [“\[know\] the basics of conducting battle operations”](#). The *Secret Speech* is adamant about this point: [“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”](#)³². Despite everything, the war ended favorably, and yet the dictator’s bloodythirsty paranoia worsened further. At this point we can consider the portrait that emerged from the *Secret Speech* of, as Deutscher observed, the “morbid, human monster”, complete.

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

[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 Twentieth 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.](#)³³

Perhaps this accounts for the characteristics of the text we are examining. A bitter political struggle was being waged in the USSR and the socialist camp, and the caricatural portrait of Stalin served perfectly to delegitimize the “Stalinists” who might cast a shadow on the new leader. The “cult of personality,” which had prevailed until then, did not allow for nuanced judgments: a god must be cast into hell. A decade earlier, during another political battle that had different characteristics but was no less intense, Trotsky had also sketched a portrait of Stalin not only aimed at condemning him politically and morally, but also with the intention of ridiculing him on a personal level: he was a “minor provincial,” an individual characterized from the beginning by an irremediable mediocrity and dullness, who often made an

extremely bad impression in the political as well as in the military and ideological spheres, and was never rid of his “peasant coarseness.” Of course, in 1913 he had published an essay of undeniable theoretical value (*Marxism and the National Question*), but its real author was Lenin, while the person who signed the text was one of the “usurpers” of the great revolutionary’s “intellectual rights”.

There are many points of convergence between these two portraits. Khrushchev hinted that the real instigator of the murder of Kirov was Stalin, and the latter had been accused (or at least suspected) by Trotsky of having accelerated, with “Mongol ferocity,” the death of Lenin³⁴. The *Secret Speech* criticizes Stalin’s cowardly evasion of his responsibilities at the beginning of Nazi aggression, but on September 2, 1939, even before Operation Barbarossa, Trotsky had written that “[the new aristocracy](#)” in power was characterized “by its incapacity to conduct a war”; the “ruling caste” in the Soviet Union was destined to adopt the attitude “[of all doomed regimes: ‘after us the deluge’](#)”³⁵.

To what extent do these two widely converging portraits stand up to the historical record? We should start by analyzing the *Secret Speech*, which, delivered officially to a Congress of the CPSU and to the top leaders of the ruling party, was quickly asserted as the revelation of a long-hidden but indisputable truth.

The Great Patriotic War and the “inventions” of Khrushchev

Stalin had gained enormous prestige worldwide following Stalingrad and the defeat of the seemingly-invincible Third Reich. It is no accident that Khrushchev lingers on this point. The new leader described in catastrophic terms the lack of military preparedness of the Soviet Union, whose army, in some cases, lacked even the most basic weapons. This is the complete opposite of the picture that emerges from an investigation that appears to have come from Bundeswehr* circles and, at any rate, relies extensively on its military archives. It describes the “multiple superiority 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’”. This grew at an increasingly intense rhythm as Operation Barbarossa approached. One statistic is especially revealing: in 1940 the Soviet Union had manufactured 358 tanks, considerably more than other armies had available, but in the first half of the following year it manufactured

1,503³⁶. In turn, the documents from the Russian archives show that, at least in the two years immediately prior to the Third Reich's invasion, Stalin was literally obsessed with the problem of "quantitative increase" and "qualitative improvement of all military apparatus." Some data are revealing in themselves: the defense budget was 5.4% of state spending during the first five-year plan, and was up to 43.4% in 1941. "In September 1939, under orders from Stalin, the Politburo took the decision to build nine new aircraft manufacturing factories before 1941", and at the time of the Nazi invasion "the industry had produced 2,700 aircraft and 4,300 modern tanks"³⁷. There are many things that can be said about these data, but not that the USSR came to the tragic meeting of the war unprepared.

As a matter of fact, ten years have passed since an American historian dealt a blow to the myth of the Soviet leader's moral collapse and evasion of responsibility upon the start 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"³⁸. We now have access to the register of visitors to Stalin's office in the Kremlin, discovered in the early 1990s: it appears that, in the hours immediately after the military aggression, the Soviet leader was immersed in an endless succession of meetings and initiatives to organize the resistance. These days and nights were characterized by "activity" that was "strenuous", but orderly. In any case, "the whole episode [narrated by Khrushchev] is a complete fabrication"; this "story is false"³⁹. In fact, from the beginning of Operation Barbarossa, Stalin not only made the most difficult decisions, giving orders for the transfer of the population and industrial facilities away from the front, but "retained minute control over everything, from the size and shape of bayonets to the *Pravda* headlines and who wrote the articles"⁴⁰. There is no evidence of panic or hysteria. Dimitrov's corresponding journal entry reads: "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 surprising is the clarity of ideas. It was not just about planning "measures for mobilization." It was also necessary to define the political situation. Indeed, "only the Communists can defeat the fascists" and end the seemingly unstoppable rise of the Third Reich, but we 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”⁴¹.

The political strategy that preceded the Great Patriotic War is clearly seen. A few months earlier, Stalin had stressed that against the expansionism applied by the Third Reich “for the subjugation, the submission of other peoples”, they were responding with justified wars of resistance and national liberation (see below, p. 214). Incidentally, before Hitler’s aggression, the Communist International had already made a reply to those who scholastically opposed patriotism against internationalism, as shown in Dimitrov’s diary entry of May 12, 1941, that

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.⁴²

Far from being an improvised and desperate reaction to the situation at the start of Operation Barbarossa, the strategy of the Great Patriotic War marked a general theoretical orientation that had been maturing for some time: internationalism and the international cause of the emancipation of the people specifically indicated wars of national liberation, which were necessary given Hitler’s aim of resuming and radicalizing the colonial tradition, of subjugating and enslaving the supposed slavish races of Eastern Europe firstly. These were issues that Stalin would take up again in speeches and statements during the war: they constituted “major milestones in the declaration of Soviet military strategy and political aims”⁴³. They also had international significance: regarding Stalin’s speech broadcast on July 3, 1941, Goebbels observed with annoyance that it “drew enormous admiration in England and the USA”⁴⁴.

A series of disinformation campaigns and Operation Barbarossa

Even in the narrow field of military affairs, the *Secret Speech* has lost all credibility. According to Khrushchev, Stalin rushed into disaster, ignoring the “warnings” that came to him from all sides about the impending invasion. What

can we say about this accusation? Meanwhile, information from friendly countries could be misleading as well: for example, on June 17, 1942, Franklin Delano Roosevelt alerted Stalin to an impending Japanese attack, which ended up not happening⁴⁵. The fact is that, in the early days of the Nazi invasion, the Soviet Union was forced to contend with major campaigns of distraction and disinformation. The Third Reich was intensely dedicated to making it seem that the troop buildup in the east served only as a distraction from an imminent invasion across the English Channel, which seemed quite plausible after the conquest of the island of Crete. “All state and military apparatuses are mobilized”, noted Goebbels with satisfaction in his diary (May 31, 1941), to stage the “first great wave of camouflage” for Operation Barbarossa. Thus, “14 divisions have been transported westward”⁴⁶; additionally, all troops on the Western Front were put on high alert⁴⁷. About two weeks later, the Berlin edition of the “Völkischer Beobachter” published an article identifying the occupation of Crete as a model for the planned reckoning with England; within a few hours, the original was seized in order to give the impression that a secret of great importance had been treacherously revealed. Three days later (June 14) Goebbels wrote 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]”⁴⁸. To this disinformation campaign Germany added another: rumors were circulated that the military deployment in the east was intended to pressure the Soviet Union, by means of an ultimatum if necessary, to have Stalin accept a redefinition of the terms of the German-Soviet pact and to agree to export more grain, oil, and coal, all needed by a Third Reich engaged in a war with no end in sight. It wanted to make it seem that the crisis could be resolved with new negotiations and additional concessions from Moscow⁴⁹. This was the conclusion reached by the army intelligence services and military commanders of Great Britain, who had advised the war cabinet on May 22 that “Hitler has not finally decided whether to obtain his wishes [the USSR] by persuasion or force of arms”⁵⁰. On June 14, Goebbels noted in his diary with satisfaction: “They still generally believe that it is a bluff, or an attempt at blackmail”⁵¹.

We should also not underestimate the disinformation campaign staged on the opposite side, which had begun two years earlier: in November 1939, the French press published a nonexistent speech (supposedly delivered to the Politburo on August 19 of that year) in which Stalin exposed a plan to weaken Europe, promoting a fratricidal war within it, in order to then Sovietize it. There is no

doubt that it was a forgery intended to break the German-Soviet non-aggression pact and direct the expansionist fury of the Third Reich eastward⁵². According to a widespread historiographical legend, on the eve of the Nazi attack, the government in London warned Stalin repeatedly and unselfishly, but, like a good dictator, Stalin had only faith in his Berlin counterpart. In reality, while London communicated to Moscow information concerning Operation Barbarossa on the one hand, on the other Great Britain was spreading rumors about an imminent attack by the Soviet Union against Germany or the territories it occupied⁵³. The British were clearly and understandably interested in hastening conflict between Germany and the Soviet Union or making it inevitable.

This came into play following Rudolf Hess's mysterious flight to England, clearly motivated by the hope of rebuilding the unity of the West in the fight against Bolshevism, and so giving concreteness to the program set out in *Mein Kampf* of the 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 undertaken the initiative with the acquiescence of the Führer⁵⁴. Conversely, important figures within the Third Reich strongly defended the theory that Hess had been encouraged by Hitler. In any case, the Führer felt the need to immediately send Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop to Rome in order to clear Mussolini's suspicions that Germany was preparing an exclusive peace accord with Great Britain⁵⁵. Obviously, Moscow was even more worried by this maneuver, especially because of the British government's attitude of only fueling the rumor: it did not take the opportunity to "made maximum propaganda capital out of Heß's capture—something Hitler and Goebbels both expected and feared"; moreover, the interrogation of Hess—reported Ambassador Ivan Maysky to Stalin from London—is committed to a policy promoting appeasement. While leaving the door open to an Anglo-Soviet rapprochement, His Majesty's secret services were committed to feeding the existing rumors of an imminent peace to be signed between London and Berlin; all with the aim of increasing the pressure on the Soviet Union (which may have sought to avoid the dreaded alliance between Britain and the Third Reich with a preemptive attack by the Red Army against the Wehrmacht) and strengthening the bargaining power of England in any case⁵⁶.

The Kremlin's caution and distrust is easily understood: the danger of a repeat of Munich, on a wider and more tragic scale, was very present. Perhaps it can be speculated that the second disinformation campaign staged by the Third Reich

played an important role. Based at least on the transcript preserved in the archives of the Soviet Communist Party, despite taking for granted entry of the USSR in the conflict in the short term, Stalin emphasized in his speech on May 5, 1941 to graduates of the Military Academy that Germany had historically achieved victory when it had focused on one front, while it had suffered defeat when it was forced to fight east and west simultaneously⁵⁷. Of course, Stalin could have underestimated the seriousness with which Hitler valued the opportunity to attack the USSR. On the other hand, he knew that a hasty total mobilization would have provided the Third Reich with the *casus belli* on a silver platter, as had happened in World War I. There is in any case a definite question: despite moving circumspectly in a remarkably complicated situation, the Soviet leader proceeded with “**acceleration of his preparations for war.**” Indeed, “between May and June 800,000 reservists were called to service, with 28 divisions moving into the western territories of the Soviet Union in mid-May”, while steadily continuing the work of fortifying borders and camouflaging the most sensitive military targets. “**On the night of 21–22 June this vast force was put on alert and warned to expect a surprise attack by the Germans**”⁵⁸.

To discredit Stalin, Khrushchev stresses the spectacular initial victories of the invading army, but ignores the forecasts made in the West at the time. After the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia and the entry of the Wehrmacht into Prague, Lord Halifax continued to reject the idea of a rapprochement of England and the USSR, arguing that there was no sense in allying with a country whose armed forces were “insignificant”. At or just before the time Operation Barbarossa began, the British secret services calculated that the Soviet Union would be “**liquidated with eight to ten weeks**”; while advisors to the US Secretary of State (Henry L. Stimson) had predicted on June 23 that everything would be over in a period of between one and three months⁵⁹. Moreover, a current illustrious military historian observes, the devastating penetration of the Wehrmacht into Soviet territory was easily explained with a little 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 thrusts⁶⁰.

The quick unraveling of the blitzkrieg

One should not be blinded by appearances: carefully observed, the Third Reich's attempt to replicate in the east the triumph of the *Blitzkrieg* in the west began to show problems in the first weeks of the gigantic shock⁶¹. The diaries of Joseph Goebbels are revealing here. On the eve of the attack highlights the unstoppable would result in the end the German attack, "certainly the most powerful that history has ever known"; no one could argue with the "most powerful display in world history"⁶². And then: "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"⁶³. Hitler was in fact no less certain; some months prior, in front of a Bulgarian diplomat, he had referred to the Soviet army as "no more than a joke"⁶⁴.

Nevertheless, in reality the invaders were met with unpleasant surprises from the beginning: "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"⁶⁵. Within ten days of war, the formerly self-assured began 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"⁶⁶. Events followed that caused the mood of the Nazi leaders to change radically, as it can be seen in Goebbels's 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 through⁶⁷.

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 believed⁶⁸.

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 Bolsheviks⁶⁹.

September 16:

We calculated the potential of the Bolsheviks in a completely erroneous way⁷⁰.

Researchers of military strategy highlight the unforeseen difficulties in which to enter the Soviet Union is immersed machinery powerful, experienced and surrounded by war myth of invincibility as was the German⁷¹. 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)”⁷². The observation of an illustrious German historian, quoting these eloquent journal entries by General Fedor von Bock, 20 and 26 July respectively:

The enemy wants to retake Smolensk at any price and is constantly mobilizing new troops over there. The hypothesis expressed by some that the enemy acts without a strategy is not based on any fact [...]. It is confirmed that the Russians have carried out for me a new and compact deployment of forces around the front. In many places they try to go on the attack. Surprising for an adversary who has suffered similar blows; they must have an incredible amount of material, in fact our troops still lament the potent effect of enemy artillery.

Even more restless and in fact decidedly pessimistic is Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, leader of counterespionage, who, speaking to General von Bock on July 17, says: “I feel very hopeless”⁷³.

Not only did the Soviet army not flee in disarray during the first days and weeks of the attack, indeed opposing it with a “fierce resistance”, it proved to be well managed, as revealed otherwise “Stalin’s decision to halt the German advance only at the right time and at the right point for himself.” The results of this careful military leadership are also revealed at the diplomatic level: “impressed by the tenacious combat given in the Smolensk area”, Japan, who had observers present, decided to reject the proposal of the Third Reich to join the war against the Soviet Union⁷⁴. Analysis of the German historian, fiercely anticommunist, is fully confirmed by Russian investigators who supported the *Khrushchev Report* and stood out as champions of the fight against “Stalinism”: “The [German] blitzkrieg plans had already been wrecked by the middle of July”⁷⁵. In this context, the homage Churchill and FD Roosevelt gave on the August 14, 1941 to the “splendid defense” of the Soviet army does not seem like a mere formality⁷⁶. Outside of diplomatic and government circles, in Britain, we are informed by a diary entry by Beatrice Webb, ordinary citizens, even conservative ones, show a “[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](#)”⁷⁷. In Germany itself, three weeks after the start of Operation Barbarossa, voices that radically questioned the triumphalist version of the regime began to be heard. This is shown in 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”⁷⁸.

Long considered an expression of political-military ignorance or even blind trust of the Third Reich, the extremely cautious behavior of Stalin in the weeks preceding 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 the most valiant generals were drawn to the trap, and anticipating the arrival of the enemy, urged a massive deployment of troops to the border. “Stalin categorically

rejected this demand, insisting on the need to maintain large-scale reserves at a considerable distance from any conceivable front line.” Later, aware of the strategic plans of the plotters of Operation Barbarossa, Marshal Georgy K. Zhukov recognized the success of the line followed 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”⁷⁹.

In fact, in the months preceding the invasion of the USSR, the Führer says, arguing with his generals: “Problem of Russian space. The infinite range of space requires the concentration at decisive points”⁸⁰. Later, with Operation Barbarossa already begun, in a conversation he later clarified his opinion: “In world history there have been so far only three battles of annihilation: Cannes, Sedan and Tannenberg. We can be proud of the fact that two of them have been victoriously fought by German armies. ” However, for Germany the third and greatest decisive battle of annihilation and subjugation, as desired by Hitler, became increasingly complicated, and a week later he was forced to admit that Operation Barbarossa had seriously underestimated the enemy, “the Russian military preparation must be considered fantastic”⁸¹. This is, of course, the attitude of a card player trying to justify the failure of his predictions. And yet, the British expert in military strategy quoted above does not come to very different conclusions: the reason for the defeat of the French resided “**not in quantity or quality of equipment, but in their theory**”; moreover, deploying the army too far ahead has disastrous effects, “**he had largely cast away his strategic flexibility**”; Poland had also made a similar mistake, favored by “**buttressed by national pride and military over-confidence.**” None of this was the case with the Soviet Union.⁸²

More important than each of the battles is their combined image: “The Stalinist system was able to mobilize the vast majority of the population and virtually all of its resources”; in particular the “capacity of the Soviets” was “extraordinary”, in a situation as difficult as the first months of the war, “the time to evacuate and then convert a considerable number of industries to military production”. Indeed, “two days after the German invasion, the Evacuation Committee managed to shift 1,500 large factories east, after performing titanic operations of logistical complexity”⁸³. On the other hand, this relocation process had already begun in the weeks or months preceding the Nazi aggression (see below, p. 319), further confirming the fantastic character of the accusation launched by Khrushchev.

There is more. The Soviet leadership had intuited somehow the development of war looming on the horizon, and from that moment drove the country's industrialization: a radical departure from the previous situation, had identified "made Asian Russia a focal point" remote and sheltered from possible aggressors⁸⁴. Indeed, Stalin had insisted on it strongly, repeatedly.

January 31, 1931: the task of "[creating new, technically well-equipped industries in the Urals, in Siberia, in Kazakhstan](#)" was imposed. A few years later, the *Report* presented on 26 January 1934 at the 17th Congress of the CPSU had proudly pointed out 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.](#)"⁸⁵ The implications of all this did not escape Trotsky, who a few years later, while analyzing the dangers of war and the preparedness of the Soviet Union and stressing the results achieved by the "planned economy" in the "military" field, had noted: "[the industrialization of the outlying regions, especially Siberia, has given a wholly new value to the steppe and forest spaces](#)"⁸⁶. Only now was the value of space realized, making the blitzkrieg used by the German general staff more complicated than ever.

It is precisely in the field of industrial equipment built in anticipation of war that the Third Reich was forced to confront the bitter surprises, as shown by two entries by Hitler.

November 29, 1941: "How can such a primitive people manage such technical achievements in such a short time?"⁸⁷

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"⁸⁸.

At this point it is convenient to give the floor to three experts, notably different from each other (one Russian and the other two Western). The first, who once headed the Soviet Institute of Military History, and shared the militant anti-Stalinism of the Gorbachev years, seems moved by the intention to resume and radicalize the indictment of the *Khrushchev Report*. And yet, by the very results

of his research, he is forced to make a rather more nuanced judgment: without being a specialist, much less the genius described in official propaganda, in the years preceding the outbreak of the war, Stalin dealt extensively with the problems of defense, the defense industry and the war economy as a whole. Yes, in the strictly military level, only through trial and error, even severe, and “thanks to the hard praxis of everyday military life” he “gradually learns the basic principles of strategy”⁸⁹. In other fields, however, his thinking appears “more developed than many Soviet military leaders.” Thanks also to his experience in the management of political power, Stalin never lost sight of the central role of the war economy and contributed to the resilience of the USSR with the transfer of the industrial war machine to the interior: “it is almost impossible to underestimate the importance of this endeavor”⁹⁰. In the end, the Soviet leader paid great attention to the political and moral dimension of war. In this area “he had ideas totally out of the ordinary,” as evidenced by the “courageous and far-sighted” decision, taken despite the skepticism of his colleagues, to hold the military parade commemorating the anniversary of the October Revolution on 7 November 1941, in a Moscow besieged and harassed by the Nazi enemy. In short, we can say that with respect to the military careerists and the circle of his collaborators, “Stalin testifies to a more universal thought”⁹¹. And this thought—it can be added—did not overlook even the smallest aspects of life and morale of the soldiers: informed that they had run out of cigarettes, thanks to his ability to dispatch “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!’ ”⁹²

On the positive assessment of Stalin as a military leader the two Western authors go even further. If Khrushchev insists on the sweeping initial successes of the Wehrmacht, the first of the two mentioned experts describes the same evidence with a very different language: no wonder that “the greatest invasion in military history” has achieved initial successes: the reply of the Red Army after the devastating blows of the German invasion in June 1941 was “the greatest feat of arms the world had ever seen”⁹³. The second researcher, a professor at an American military academy, understanding the conflict in terms of its long duration, the attention paid to both the rear and the front, the economic and political dimension, as well as the actual military war, talks about Stalin as a “great strategist”, in fact, “the first true strategist of the twentieth century”⁹⁴. This assessment broadly coincides with the other Western researcher cited

above, whose basic thesis, summarized in the flaps of his book, sees in Stalin the “greatest military leader of the twentieth century.” Obviously you can discuss or clarify these valuations so flattering; but it is clear that, at least as regards the issue of the war, the scene drawn by Khrushchev has lost all credibility.

Especially that time of the final exam, the USSR shows quite well prepared from another essential point of view. Let us turn back to Goebbels, who, explaining the unforeseen difficulties of Operation Barbarossa, besides the military potential of the enemy, also refers 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.⁹⁵

The lack of “common sense” and “mass deportations of entire peoples”

Having authored in 1913 a book that established him as a theoretician of the national question, and People’s Commissar for Nationalities immediately after the October Revolution, through which he developed his work, Stalin had earned the recognition of personalities as different as Arendt and De Gasperi. Reflection on the national question had finally resulted in an essay on language aimed at demonstrating that, far from dissolving after the overthrow of a certain social class, the language of a nation has a remarkable stability, as well as enjoying the stability of the nation that uses it. This essay also helped to consolidate Stalin’s fame as a theoretician of the national question. As late as 1965, despite doing so from a position of harsh condemnation, Louis Althusser credited Stalin with having opposed the “madness” which claimed “making strenuous efforts to prove language a superstructure”: thanks to these “simple pages”, concludes the French philosopher, “we could see that there were limits to the use of the class criterion”⁹⁶. The desacralization/liquidation in which Khrushchev participated in 1956 could not help but pay attention to, to ridicule, the theorist and politician who had devoted special 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 persons⁹⁷.

Out of the question are collective punishment, deportation imposed on poor populations suspected patriotic loyalty. Regretably, far from referring to the madness of a single individual, this practice profoundly characterized the Second Thirty Years' War, beginning with Tsarist Russia, which despite being an ally of the liberal West, during the First World War called "a wave of deportations" of "unknown proportions in Europe", which affected about one million people (mostly of Jewish or German origin)⁹⁸. Of smaller proportion but of equal significance was the measures taken during the Second World War against Japanese Americans, who were deported and imprisoned in concentration camps (see below, pp. 177-178).

Besides attempting to eliminate a potential fifth column, expulsion and deportation of entire peoples can be carried out according to the reconstruction or redefinition of political geography. During the first half of the twentieth century, this practice intensified on a global level, from the Middle East, where the Jews who had escaped the "final solution" forced to flee to the Arabs and Palestinians, to Asia, where the division of the crown jewel of the British Empire into India and Pakistan resulted in the "largest forced migration, globally, of the century"⁹⁹. Remaining on the Asian continent, it is worth taking a look at what happens in a region administered by a personality or *name of a personality* (the 14th Dalai Lama), who is later destined to win the Nobel Peace Prize and become synonymous with nonviolence: "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.¹⁰⁰

This is a practice carried out not only in the most varied geographical and political-cultural areas, but also in those years theoretically backed by great personalities. In 1938 David Ben Gurion, the future father of the nation of Israel, declared: "I support compulsory transfer [of the Palestinian Arabs]. I don't see anything immoral in it."¹⁰¹. In fact, he would adhere to this very program ten

years later.

But here it is necessary to focus attention particularly in Central and Eastern Europe where a silent tragedy occurred, despite being one of the largest of the twentieth century. In total, about sixteen and a half million Germans were forced to leave their homes, and two and a half million did not survive the massive ethnic cleansing, or counter-cleansing.¹⁰² In this case it is possible to make a direct comparison between Stalin on the one hand, and western statisticians and pro-Westerners on the other. What attitude did the latter assume in such circumstances? As always, we begin analysis starting from a historiography that can not be suspected of being lenient toward the Soviet Union:

It was the British government that since 1942 promoted a transfer of populations from East Germany and the Sudeten territories [...]. Undersecretary of State Sargent went further than anyone by asking for an investigation to determine “whether Britain should not encourage the move to Siberia of Germans from East Prussia and Upper Silesia.”¹⁰³

Speaking at the House of Commons on December 15, 1944, on the proposal for the “[transference of several millions](#)” of Germans, Churchill made clear his view this way:

[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 transferences, which are more possible in modern conditions than they ever were before.](#)¹⁰⁴

FD Roosevelt would adhere shortly thereafter, in June 1943, to deportation plans; “Stalin gave way almost immediately to pressure from Beneš for the expulsion from Czechoslovakia of the Germans in the Sudeten territories’¹⁰⁵ . An American historian believes he can now conclude that

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, Beneš and Gottwald, Mikolajczyk and Bierut,

Stalin and Churchill all danced to the same tune.¹⁰⁶

This conclusion alone would suffice to refute the implicit black-and-white contrast in the *Khrushchev Report*. In fact, at least as regards the Germans of Eastern Europe, the person who took the initiative regarding the “mass deportations of entire nations” was not Stalin; the responsibility are not shared equally. Eventually the American historian cited above would recognize the same. 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 is not an isolated attitude: “Even the Czech Catholic Church got into the act. Monsignor Bohumil Stasek, the 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 therefore does not apply”¹⁰⁷. In 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”¹⁰⁸. But there’s more. Let us again call on 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 Soviet *secret report* delivered to the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Moscow reported the pleas addressed to Soviet troops to remain, “‘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 who I quote, “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”¹⁰⁹. A similar thing 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 indifference¹¹⁰.

The American historian speaks of “Czechs” or “Poles” in general, but not entirely correctly, as seen in the same story:

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-educated¹¹¹.

“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”¹¹².

Contrary to what Khrushchev insinuated, compared with the bourgeois leaders of Western and Central-Eastern Europe, at least in this case Stalin and the Communist movement led by him proved to be less devoid of “common sense”.

That was no accident. If towards the end of the war FD Roosevelt claimed to be “more thirsty for German blood than ever” because of the atrocities committed by them, and even comes to cherish for some time the idea of “castration” of such a wicked people, Stalin acts very differently, and just as Operation Barbarossa was unleashed, said that the Soviet resistance can count on the support of “all the finest men and women of Germany” and “the German people which is enslaved by the Hitlerite misrulers”¹¹³. Especially solemn is the stance of February 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 peoples¹¹⁴.

Even an anti-Communist as uncompromising as Ernst Nolte is forced to acknowledge that the attitude of the Soviet Union towards the German people does not show the racist tones otherwise displayed by the Western powers¹¹⁵. To conclude on this topic: although unequally distributed, the lack of “common sense” was quite widespread among political leaders of the twentieth century.

So far I have dealt with the deportations caused by the war and the war period,

i.e. by the rebuilding and redistribution of political geography. At least until the 1940s, the United States continued carrying out deportations in urban centers, which wanted to be, as posters in entrances warned, for whites only . Apart from African Americans, Mexicans were also affected, reclassified as non-whites based on a census of 1930, resulting in “**thousands of Mexican workers and their families, including many Mexican Americans**” being deported to Mexico. Measures of expulsion and deportation by towns that want to be “whites only” or “Caucasians only” did not even exempt the Jews.¹¹⁶

The *Secret Speech* portrays Stalin as a tyrant so devoid of sense of reality that, by taking collective measures against certain ethnic groups, would not hesitate to punish the innocent or his own party comrades. It calls to mind the case of German exiles (mostly enemies of Hitler) who, just after the war with Germany, were held en masse in French concentration camps (see below, p. 177). But it is useless to look for an effort at comparative analysis in Khrushchev’s speech.

His intention was to reverse two issues that until then had been disseminated not only by official propaganda, but also by public opinion and the international media: the great leader who contributed decisively to the destruction of the Third Reich was transformed into a clumsy dilettante who could barely read a world map; the leading theoretician of the national question is revealed precisely as someone lacking any “common sense”. Acknowledgments rendered to Stalin before then are all attributable to a cult of personality that was now dealt with forever.

The cult of personality in Russia; from Kerensky to Stalin

The denunciation of the cult of personality is the main argument of Khrushchev. In his *Speech*, however, there is a seemingly vital question that is missing: Does the cult of personality have to do with the vanity and narcissism of an individual politician, or is it a more general phenomenon rooted in a certain objectively determined context? It may be interesting to read the comments made by Bukharin while US preparations for intervention in World War I were being finalized:

Since the state machine is more prepared for military tasks, it transforms itself into a military organization, under which there is a dictator. This dictator is President Wilson. It has granted him exceptional powers. It has an almost absolute power. And it tries to install in the people slavish

feelings towards the “great president”, as in ancient Byzantium, where the monarch was deified¹¹⁷.

In situations of acute crisis the personalization of power tends to intertwine with the transfiguration of the leader who holds it. When he arrived in France in December 1918, the victorious American president was hailed as the Messiah, and his Fourteen Points were compared with the Sermon on the Mount¹¹⁸.

It is especially sobering to consider the political processes that occurred in the United States from the Great Depression to World War II. Elected on the promise of remedying a rather worrying social and economic situation, FD Roosevelt held the post for four consecutive terms (although dying early in the fourth): a unique case in the history of his country. Beyond the long duration of this presidency, the predictions and expectations surrounding it were also extraordinary. Prominent figures spoke of a “national dictator” and invited the new president to demonstrate all his energy: “It becomes 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 emergency calls for not getting caught up in excessive legalistic scruples. The new leader of the nation is called to be and is already defined as “a providential person”, or, in the words of Cardinal O’Connell: “a God-sent man.” Ordinary people spoke and wrote about FD Roosevelt in even more emphatic terms, looking at him “almost as they look to God” and hoping to one day place him “in the halls of immortals beside Jesus”¹¹⁹. Invited to behave like a dictator and man of Providence, the new president makes a broad use of his executive power since the first day or hours of its mandate. In his inaugural message he calls for “broad executive power [...] as great as the power that would be given me if we were in fact invaded by a foreign foe”¹²⁰. With the outbreak of hostilities in Europe, even before Pearl Harbor, FDR begins on his own initiative to drag the country into war alongside England; then an executive order issued sovereignly imposes imprisonment in concentration camps of all American citizens of Japanese origin, including women and children. It is a presidency that, if on one hand enjoys great popular devotion, on the other hand rings alarm bells for the “totalitarian” threat: this occurs at the time of the Great Depression (when pronouncing the charge is specifically former President Hoover¹²¹) And especially in the months preceding the intervention in the Second World War (in which time Senator Burton K. Wheeler accuses Roosevelt of exercising a “dictatorial power” and promoting a “totalitarian form of government”)¹²². At

least from the point of view of the opponents of the President, totalitarianism and the cult of personality had crossed the Atlantic.

Of course, the phenomenon we are investigating here (the personalization of power and the cult of personality associated with it) is manifested only in embryonic form in the American Republic, protected by the ocean from any attempted invasion, and carrying a political tradition quite different from that of Russia. It is on this country that we should focus attention. Let's see what happens between February and October 1917, before the Bolsheviks take power. Driven by his personal vanity, but also by the desire to stabilize the situation, we find Kerensky beginning "to model himself on Napoleon": inspecting the troops, he "even wore his right arm in a sling"; on the other hand "A bust of the French Emperor stood on his desk at the Ministry of War." The results of this staging occur early: poems that pay tribute to Kerensky as a new Napoleon flourished¹²³. On the eve of the summer offensive, which decisively changed the fate of the Russian army, the cult of Kerensky (restricted in certain circles) reaches its paroxysm:

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.'¹²⁴

As can be seen, it does not make much sense to explain, as did Khrushchev, the exalted form that reaches at a certain point the cult of personality seen in the USSR, through the narcissism of Stalin. Actually, when Kaganovich proposes replacing the expression of Marxism-Leninism by that of Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism, the leader who is intended as homage replies: "How can you compare a dick to a watchtower?"¹²⁵. At least compared to Kerensky, Stalin seems perhaps more modest. Confirms the attitude that assumes the conclusion of a war won in reality, not in imagination, as was the case of the Menshevik leader who loved strike Napoleonic poses. Immediately after the victory parade, a group of marshals contacted Molotov and Malenkov: proposed solemnizing the victory achieved during the Great Patriotic War, granting the title of "Hero of the Soviet Union" to Stalin, who however declined the offer¹²⁶. The Soviet leader also shuns the rhetorical exaggeration on the occasion of 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 honour”¹²⁷ . Four years later, on the eve of his seventieth birthday, a conversation took place in the Kremlin that is worth quoting:

[Stalin] called Malenkov and warns: “Do not get the idea to honor me with a ‘star’ again.”

“But Comrade Stalin, a birthday like this! The people would not understand.”

“Do not make reference to the people. I do not want to argue. No personal initiative! Understood?” “Of course, Comrade Stalin, but the Politburo members say...”

Stalin interrupted Malenkov and declared the matter closed.

Naturally, it can be said that in the circumstances referred to here the political calculus plays a more or less important role (and it would be very strange if it did not); it is a fact, however, that personal vanity does not take the reins. And it played little role in vital decisions of a political or military nature: during World War II Stalin invited its partners to speak bluntly, discussed animatedly, and even fought with Molotov, who in turn, despite taking good care not to question the hierarchy, continued to defend his own opinion. Judging by the testimony of Admiral Nikolai Kuznetsov, the supreme leader “**even liked people who had their own point of view and weren’t afraid to stand up for it**”¹²⁸.

In seeking to condemn Stalin as solely responsible for all the catastrophes that occurred in the USSR, far from liquidating the cult of personality, Khrushchev merely transformed it into a negative cult. How clear is the image of *in principio erat Stalin!* Also in addressing the most tragic chapter in the history of the Soviet Union (the terror and bloody purges, which spread on a large scale without exception for even the communist party), the *Secret Speech* has no doubts: it is a horror that is to be blamed exclusively on a individual thirsty for power and possessed by a bloody paranoia.

The Bolsheviks, from ideological conflict to civil war

The Russian Revolution and the dialectic of Saturn

Khrushchev believed Stalin was guilty of heinous crimes against his own party comrades, deviating from Leninism and Bolshevism and betraying the ideals of socialism. Indeed, mutual accusations of treason, which stimulated or deepened the internal bloodshed of the group that led the October Revolution of 1917, were a major contributor to the tragedies that occurred in Soviet Russia. How can this bloodshed be explained? The dialectics of “Saturn devours his children” is certainly not exclusive to the October Revolution: the unity displayed by the majority of the population as it proceeds to overthrow the old regime inevitably decays or dissolves when it comes time to decide how the new order should be built. This also applies to the English Revolution and the American Revolution¹²⁹. But in Russia this dialectic manifested in a particularly violent and prolonged manner. As the tsarist autocracy was collapsing, while attempts were being made to restore the monarchy or establish a military dictatorship, those who were determined to avoid a return to the past were faced with quite painful decisions: should they strive first for peace or, as the Mensheviks argued, should the war effort be continued or even intensified, as calls for democratic interventionism began to be heard in Russia?

The consolidation of the victory of the Bolsheviks certainly did not end the dialectic of Saturn, but intensified it further. Lenin’s call to seize power and transform the revolution into a socialist one was an intolerable deviation from Marxism according to Kamenev and Zinoviev, who notified the Mensheviks and thus drew accusations of treason from the majority of the Bolshevik party. It was a debate that crossed the borders of Russia and the communist movement itself: the first to raise accusations of abandoning orthodoxy, which precluded socialist revolution in countries that had not already achieved full capitalist development, were the Social Democrats, as Karl Kautsky from one side and Rosa Luxemburg from another condemned Lenin’s acceptance of the slogan “land to the peasants” as abandoning the road to socialism.

But here it is worth focusing on the internal ruptures within the Bolshevik

leadership group. One explanation for the especially devastating effect of the dialectic of Saturn is the messianic attitude that is prompted by a combination of circumstances, objective and subjective. The universal embarrassment and indignation at the unspeakable carnage of war waged by states with the bloodthirst of Moloch, each sacrificing millions and millions of men on the altar of homeland defense but, in reality, competing in an imperialist race for world hegemony, generated the demand for a completely new political and social order: this demand sprung up all at once for all the nations where the horrors had arisen since 1914. Fueled later by a certain vision for the world (which with Marx and Engels seemed to invoke a future free of national borders, mercantile relations, the state apparatus, and even legal coercion) and by an almost religious relationship with the texts of the founding fathers of the communist movement, this demand could not be disillusioned as the construction of the new order began to take shape.

This is why, shortly before it burst into the heart of Trotsky's denunciation, and after it appeared during the collapse of the tsarist autocracy, the theme of the revolution betrayed began to follow history like a shadow beginning with the rise to power of the Bolsheviks. Accusations or suspicions of treason would emerge at every step of this especially torturous revolution, driven by the need for government action to rethink some of the original utopian motives and, in any case, to weigh grand ambitions against the extreme difficulties of the objective situation.

The first challenge faced by the new power was that of the dissolution of the state apparatus and the persistence of anarchism, widespread among peasants (who had still not arrived at any conception of the state and nation, and were thus substantially indifferent to the drama of the cities with their lack of food resources). Inclined to found ephemeral "peasant republics", anarchism was also present among deserters, already resistant to any discipline (as confirmed by the emergence of a "free Republic of defectors" in a district of Bessarabia). In this case, the one in a position to commit treason was Trotsky, who as head of the army was at the forefront of the restoration of central power and the principle of the state itself: thus, when peasants, deserters (including from the Red Army), and the displaced invoked "real" socialism and the "real" Soviets, they longed for Lenin (he had endorsed or stimulated revolt against state power) and considered Trotsky and the Jews to be the vulgar usurpers¹³⁰. The revolt of the Kronstadt sailors in 1921 can be placed in this context. It seems that, on this occasion, Stalin would have ruled in favor of a more cautious approach, that is,

to continue to wait, based on the food reserves and fuel available to the fortress under siege; but in a situation where the dangers of internal civil war and the intervention of the counterrevolutionary powers had not yet been quelled, the quick military solution ended up prevailing. Again, the one who could be considered the “defender of bureaucratic organization”, “dictator” and, in the last instance, traitor to the original spirit of the revolution, is the “gendarme” or “Marshal” Trotsky. He, in turn, suspected Zinoviev of fueling agitation for weeks after the revolution, demagogically waving the banner of “workers’ democracy [...] as in 1917”¹³¹. Judging from these facts, the first accusation of “treason” marks the step—inevitable in all revolutions, but all the more painful in the case of a revolution made in the name of the withering away of the state—from the overthrow of the old regime to the construction of the new order; from the “libertarian” phase to the “authoritarian” phase. And, naturally, accusations and suspicions of “treason” are intertwined with personal ambitions and the struggle for power.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs “shuts up shop”

Patriotic rhetoric and national odes, in part “spontaneous”, in part consciously incited, had led to the nightmare of imperialist war. The need to end all of it became imperative. Thus, in certain sectors of the communist movement arose a completely unrealistic internationalism, which tended to dismiss the various national identities as simple prejudice. Let us see in what terms Bukharin, in early 1918, opposed not only the peace of Brest-Litovsk but any attempt by the Soviet government to take advantage of the contradictions between the various imperialist powers, rejecting agreements or compromises with either: “**What are we doing? We are turning the party into a dung heap [...]. We always said... that sooner or later the Russian revolution would have to clash with international capital. That moment has now come**”¹³².

Bukharin’s disillusionment and despair are understandable; about two years before, against the deadly war between the major capitalist powers and the various nation states, and against the chauvinist turn of social democracy, he had upheld the prospect that humanity would finally become united and fraternal, 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](#)”¹³³.

This was not the fantasy of just one person. Upon taking the office of People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Trotsky declared: “I will issue a few revolutionary proclamations to the peoples of the world and then just shut up shop”¹³⁴. With the coming of a globally unified humanity, over the ruins of war and following the world revolution, the first ministry to become superfluous would be the one that normally handles relations between different states. In contrast with such an exalted perspective, how mediocre and degenerate must the reality and the political project outlined by the Brest-Litovsk negotiations have seemed, with the return of state and national boundaries, and even the reappearance of national interest! More than a few Bolshevik militants and leaders saw this event as the collapse, or worse, the vile and treacherous abandonment of a world of ideals and hopes. Of course, resisting the army of Wilhelm II was not easy, but yielding to German imperialism simply because the Russian peasants refused to continue fighting, small-mindedly attached to their own interests and ignorant of the tasks of world revolution ... was this not proof of incipient “peasant degeneration of our Party and of Soviet power”? At the end of 1924, Bukharin describes the dominant spiritual climate around Brest-Litovsk between “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”¹³⁵. Besides individual personalities, there were important party organizations which 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 Lenin¹³⁶, who, surrounded by suspicions and accusations of treason, even became the target of a plan—though with little apparent result—by Bukharin to launch a coup d’état¹³⁷.

All the prestige and all the energy of the great revolutionary leader were required to overcome the crisis. Crisis, however, would return a few years later. With the defeat of the Central Powers and the outbreak of revolution in Germany, Austria, and Hungary, along with its imminent arrival in other countries, the prospects which the Bolsheviks had to abandon at Brest-Litovsk seemed to be once again

within the realm of possibility. At the conclusion of the First Congress of the 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](#)”¹³⁸. Therefore, the imminent defeat of capitalism worldwide would be quickly followed by the fusion of different nations and different countries into a single body: again the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was about to become obsolete!

These illusions faded with the illness and death of Lenin. Much more serious was the new crisis that lay in the fact that the Bolshevik party now lacked an undisputed authority. From the point of view of Trotsky and his allies and followers there could be no doubt: what prescribed the choice of “socialism in one country”, with the consequent abandonment of the idea of world revolution, was not political realism and the calculus of power relations, but only bureaucratic routine, opportunism, cowardice; in the last instance, betrayal.

The first to be accused this way was Stalin, who from the beginning had devoted special attention to the national question, with a view to the victory of the revolution at the international level, but within Russia first. Between February and October 1917 he had presented the proletarian revolution as the tool necessary not only for building the new social order but also for reaffirming Russia’s national independence. The Entente tried to force Russia by any means available to continue to fight and bleed, while also looking for a way to transform it “[into a colony of Britain, America and France](#)”; worse, they meddled in Russia as they would “[in Central Africa](#)”¹³⁹; complicit in this were the Mensheviks, who, with their insistence on continuing the war, yielded to the imperialist *Diktat*, led towards the “[gradual bartering away of Russia to foreign capitalists](#)”, brought the country “to ruin”, and thereby revealed themselves as the real “traitors” to the nation. In contrast to all of this, the revolution that should be made would not only promote the emancipation of the working classes but “[pave the way for the real emancipation of Russia](#)”¹⁴⁰.

After October, the counter-revolution unleashed by the Whites, supported or spurred on by the Entente, had also been defeated thanks to the Bolsheviks’ call for the Russian people to reject the invasion of imperialist powers intent on reducing Russia to a colony or semi-colony of the West: this is why the new Soviet government had also gained the support of officers of noble background¹⁴¹. In upholding this line Stalin again distinguished himself, describing the situation during the civil war as follows:

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 country¹⁴².

On one side of the battlefield were “Russian officers, who have forgotten Russia, have lost all sense of honour 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”¹⁴³. From this perspective, social struggle and national struggle intertwine: replacing “imperialist unity” (i.e. a unity based on national oppression) with a unity based on the recognition of the principle of equality between nations, the new Soviet Russia would end the “complete disintegration” that had characterized the old czarist Russia; on the other hand, by increasing its “strength and prestige”, the new Soviet Russia contributed to the weakening of imperialism and the cause of the victory of the world revolution.¹⁴⁴

However, as the civil war and the struggle against foreign intervention were moving forward, the illusion spread of a rapid expansion of socialism in pace with the successes of the Red Army and its advance beyond the limits sanctioned by Brest-Litovsk. Thanks to his realism and especially his acute sensitivity to the national question, Stalin 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.

It was one thing to defeat an enemy in Russia who had been discredited at the

national level, but it was something else to face a nationally motivated enemy outside of Russia. Thus, calls for a “[march on Warsaw](#)” and statements that Russia would “[be satisfied only with a ‘Red Soviet Warsaw’](#)” were an expression of vacuous “[boastfulness and harmful self-conceit](#)”¹⁴⁵.

The failed attempt to export socialism to Poland, which until recently had been part of the tsarist empire, strengthened Stalin’s convictions. 1929 marks a phenomenon that was largely unexpected by the protagonists of the October Revolution: “[the colossal power of stability possessed by nations](#)”¹⁴⁶: they seemed destined to be a vital force for a long historical period. Consequently, for a long period of time humanity would continue to be divided not only between different social systems, but also between different linguistic, cultural, and national identities.

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

[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.](#)

Outraged, Trotsky says:

[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 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.](#)¹⁴⁷

With the darkened prospect of the quick arrival of the “international Soviet republic” and the final dissolution of state and national boundaries, Stalin asserted the principle of peaceful coexistence between countries with different social systems. But this new principle, which was the result of a learning process and that, in any case, guaranteed the Soviet Union the right to independence in a

hostile and militarily more powerful world, was to Trotsky a betrayal of proletarian internationalism; the rejection of the inescapable obligation of mutual solidarity with the oppressed and exploited of the world. His polemics were tireless against the transmutation of the initial “internationalist-revolutionary” policy into a “national-conservative” policy; against “[the national-pacifist foreign policy of the Soviet government](#)”; against the obligation of the principle according to which the only workers’ state must put the “leader of the world revolution” in isolation¹⁴⁸. In any case, as it is unthinkable for the transition from capitalism to socialism to be peaceful, “[a socialist state cannot peacefully merge \[hineinwachsen\] with a world capitalist system](#)”. Trotsky continued to maintain this attitude in 1940: it would have been better to not get involved in the war against Finland, but once it began, it should have been “[carried through to the end. That is, to the sovietization of Finland](#)”¹⁴⁹.

The decline of the “money economy” and “merchant morality”

The dialectic of Saturn manifests in many other areas of social and political life. In the domestic sphere, how should we understand the equality that was supposed to be realized by the regime born of October? War and poverty had led to a “communism” based on more or less equal distribution of miserable food rations. In relation to this practice and the ideology that developed around it, the outbreak of robbery caused by the NEP was overwhelming, with the emergence of new and strident inequalities brought about by the tolerance adopted towards certain sectors of the capitalist economy. The feeling of “betrayal” was a mass phenomenon, and was directed at the Bolshevik Party in particular: “[In 1921–2 literally tens of thousands of Bolshevik workers tore up their party cards in disgust with the NEP: they dubbed it the New Exploitation of the Proletariat](#)”¹⁵⁰. Outside Soviet Russia, we also see a French communist leader accepting the radical change, but also adding, writing in *L’Humanité*: “The NEP restored some of the capitalist decay that had completely disappeared during war communism”¹⁵¹.

Sometimes there is the impression that what was being regarded with suspicion or indignation was not just certain aspects of the economic situation, but the whole situation altogether. We must not lose sight of the messianic expectations that are characteristic of those revolutions that are linked with the lowest strata of the population and that come after a prolonged crisis. In France in 1789, even before the assault on the Bastille, from the meeting of the Estates-General and

the agitation of the Third Estate there stirred “in the popular mind the old millenarianism, the anxious wait for the revenge of the poor and the happiness of the downtrodden: it deeply pervades the revolutionary mentality”. In Russia, spurred by tsarist oppression and especially by the horror of World War I, this messianism was strongly demonstrated on the occasion of the February Revolution: hailing it as an Easter of resurrection, Christian circles and important sectors of Russian society had hoped for a total regeneration, with the emergence of an intimately unified community, and with the dissolution of the division between rich and poor, as well as of theft, lying, gambling, blasphemy, and drunkenness¹⁵². Disappointed by Menshevik politics and the prolongation of the war and bloodshed, this messianic expectation continued to inspire not a few supporters of the Bolshevik revolution.

This is the case, for example, with Pierre Pascal, a French Catholic who would later be deeply disappointed by the NEP, although he had initially greeted the events of October 1917 as follows:

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 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 it¹⁵³.

Reading this passage, we hear echoes of Marx's statement that “[nothing is easier than to give Christian asceticism a Socialist tinge.](#)” It should not be thought that this view circulated only among overtly religious circles. Even the *Communist Manifesto* notes that the “[first movements of the proletariat](#)” are often characterized by demands along the lines of “[universal asceticism and social levelling in its crudest form](#)”¹⁵⁴. This is what occurred in Russia after the catastrophe of World War I. In the 1940s, a Bolshevik effectively described the spiritual climate of the immediate aftermath of the October Revolution, having emerged from a war provoked by imperialist competition, by the plundering of the colonies, by the conquest of markets and raw materials, by the capitalist hunt for profits and super-profits:

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?¹⁵⁵

This is a sentiment that found expression in the work of eminent Western philosophers as well. In 1918 the young Bloch called for the Soviets to put an end not only to “all private economy” but also all “money economy” and, with it, “the merchant morality that praises everything that is evil in man.” Only by eliminating such rot as a whole was it possible to end once and for all the race for wealth and domination, for conquest of colonies and hegemony, which catastrophically leads to war. With the publication in 1923 of the second edition of *The Spirit of Utopia*, Bloch considered it appropriate to eliminate the quoted messianic passages. And yet the mood and vision that had inspired them did not wane within the Soviet Union or without¹⁵⁶.

If on the one hand the moral crisis was eased, the scarring over of the wounds opened by World War I and two civil wars (one against the Whites and one against the *kulaks*), as well as the economic recovery, would sharpen the crisis again. Especially after the collectivization of agriculture was completed and the new regime consolidated, it was no longer possible to refer to capitalist remnants and the immediate danger of collapse to explain the phenomenon of the persisting wage differentials: could they be tolerated, and up to what point?

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel emphasizes the contradiction contained in the idea of material equality, which is the basis of the demand for the “community of goods”: in order to equally satisfy the different needs of individuals, it is clear that this produces an inequality regarding the “participation fee”, i.e. the distribution of goods; but if there is an “equal distribution” of goods, then there is clearly an inequality between individuals’ “satisfaction of needs” (which differ from each other). In either case the “community of goods” fails to uphold its promise of material equality. Marx, who was very familiar with the *Phenomenology*, resolved the difficulty (in *Critique of the Gotha Program*) by mapping the two different modes of negating “equality” (which is always partial and limited) to two different phases of development of post-capitalist society: in the socialist phase, distribution according to the principle of “equal right”, i.e., remunerating based on the work contributed by each individual, which is always different for each person, produces a clear inequality in overall compensation and income; in this sense the “equal right” is nothing but the “right of inequality.” In the communist phase,

equal satisfaction of different needs also involves an unequal distribution of resources, unless the enormous development of the productive forces, allowing the full satisfaction of the needs of all, makes such inequality unimportant¹⁵⁷. That is, under socialism, material equality is not possible; under communism, material equality no longer makes sense. With inequality in the distribution of resources being understood, the step from unequal satisfaction of needs to equal satisfaction presupposes, besides the overthrow of capitalism, the prodigious development of the productive forces, and this can only be achieved through the affirmation, during the socialist phase, of the principle of compensation based on the different work each individual contributes. Hence Marx's insistence on the fact that once it takes power, the proletariat must struggle for, apart from the transformation of social relations, the development of the productive forces¹⁵⁸. On the other hand, however, in celebrating the workers of Paris facing the French bourgeoisie, who bathed in luxury as it carried out a bloody repression, Marx pointed out a measure the Commune adopted as a model: "[the public service had to be done at workman's wage](#)"¹⁵⁹. In this case, equality in remuneration and material distribution tended to be the objective of socialist society.

It is not easy to reconcile the two perspectives, and their divergence played an unavoidable role at the time that the Bolshevik party and leadership were irremediably divided and crippled. In reinforcing itself, Soviet power paid increasing attention to the problem of economic construction, both to consolidate the social basis of consensus and achieve national legitimacy for the Russian people, and to defend the "country of socialism" against the threats that loomed on the horizon. Referring to the *Communist Manifesto's* well-known polemic against "[universal asceticism and social levelling in its crudest form](#)", Stalin insisted: "[It is time it was understood that Marxism is an enemy of equalisation.](#)" The equality produced by socialism consists in the elimination of class exploitation, not in imposing uniformity and homologation, which is the ideal aspired to by religious primitivism:

[Equalisation 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 organised 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 equalisation of personal requirements and](#)

everyday life, but the abolition of classes¹⁶⁰.

Religious primitivism may be expressed as the aspiration to a community life in which individual differences are meant to be dissolved, to the detriment of the development of the productive forces:

Leftist blockheads [...] at one time idealised 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 industry¹⁶¹.

Stalin’s long-term goal was quite 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 labour which surpasses that of the foremost capitalist countries”¹⁶², which yet again involved the use of material incentives aside from moral ones, and therefore overcoming that egalitarianism which the Soviet leader considered crude and mechanical.

Again, and in fact more than ever before, a religious primitivism resurged, contemptuous of not only the pay gap, 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 idealise the poor as the eternal bulwark of Bolshevism under all conditions”¹⁶³. This brings us to the critical comments that Hegel made regarding the evangelical commandment to help the poor: sidestepping the fact that the commandment is a “contingency” and absolutizing it, Christians also end up absolutizing poverty, for only with poverty does a rule requiring relief to the poor make sense. And yet the sincerity of aid to the poor is measured by its contribution to overcoming poverty as such¹⁶⁴. In the climate of rejection of the bloodshed caused by capitalism and the *auri sacra fames*, the religious distrust of gold, of wealth itself, and the idealization of poverty, or at least of scarcity, were reproduced, understood and lived as an expression of spiritual fulfillment or revolutionary rigor. And Stalin felt compelled to emphasize a central point: “It would be absurd to think that socialism 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"¹⁶⁵. Like the Christian precept of helping the poor, the revolutionary precept, which urged the communist parties to concern themselves first with the exploited and poor, is also "contingent" and can really only be taken seriously when it is understood in its contingency.

Therefore, it was necessary for Stalin to intensify efforts to decisively increase the social wealth, introducing "a new wave of Socialist emulation"; he reimposed both material incentives (asserting the socialist principle of remuneration according to work) and moral incentives (such as giving "the highest distinction" to the most outstanding Stakhanovites)¹⁶⁶. Trotsky took a different and counterposed orientation: by restoring "ranks and decorations" and thus doing away with "socialist equality", the bureaucracy was setting the stage for changes in "property relations" as well¹⁶⁷. Though Stalin explicitly referred to the attacks against a socialism understood as synonymous with "universal asceticism and social levelling in its crudest form" in the *Manifesto*, the left opposition consciously or unconsciously supported the thesis contained in *The Civil War in France*, according to which leaders at even the highest levels should still be rewarded with "workman's wages". It was wrong, insisted Trotsky, for the bureaucracy and Stalin to resort to the *Critique of the Gotha Program* to justify their privileges: "Marx did not mean by this the creation of a new inequality but merely a gradual rather than a sudden elimination of the old inequality in the sphere of wage"¹⁶⁸.

On the basis of this political line (of levelling remuneration both in factories and in the state apparatus), it was quite difficult to promote the development of the productive forces. To Stalin, remunerative differences did not imply the restoration of capitalism: the social differences that persisted under the new regime did not have to be confused with the old antagonism between exploiting and exploited classes. But to Trotsky this was a clumsy attempt at simplification: "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 International¹⁶⁹.

According to Marx, socialism is also meant to overcome the opposition between mental and manual labor. In this way the problem reappeared: how could such an ambitious goal be achieved? And once again the Bolshevik leadership group became divided; here too, Stalin's position during the 1930s is characterized by caution:

Some people think that the elimination of the distinction between mental labour and manual labour can be achieved by means of a certain cultural and technical equalisation 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.¹⁷⁰

It was necessary to increase access to training for all the social strata that had until that time been excluded. On the opposite front, Trotsky acknowledged that there had been a "filling out of the scientific cadres by newcomers from below", and yet declared: "The social distance between physical and intellectual labor [...] has increased, not decreased, during recent years"¹⁷¹. 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 therefore the complete betrayal of socialist ideals:

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!¹⁷²

Therefore, the very presence of the social figure of the “[maid](#)” and of the servant in general was synonymous not only with exploitation, but with “[exploitation of man in its most barbarous form](#)”: how else can we explain the persistence or recurrence of such relationships in the USSR, if not by the abandonment of a genuinely socialist perspective, that is, by betrayal?

The long wave of messianism, implicit of course in the utopian aspects of Marx’s thought but intensified enormously in reaction to the horror of World War I, continued to echo. In his *Report* to the 17th 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 organise the direct exchange of products; that money will soon be abolished.](#)” Those who argue this “[do not realise 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](#)”¹⁷³. Though, on the one hand, Trotsky did not pass up the opportunity to criticize Stalin’s earlier “[economic adventurism](#)”, on the other hand he also mocked “[the rehabilitation of the ruble](#)” and the “[return to bourgeois methods of distribution](#)”¹⁷⁴. In any case, he continued to assert that under communism, “money” and all forms of the market are destined to dissolve along with the state¹⁷⁵.

“No more distinctions between yours and mine”: the dissolution of the family

Along with imperialism and capitalism, the October Revolution was also supposed to end the oppression of women. To enable their participation with equal rights in political and social life, it was necessary to free them, using the broadest possible development of social services, from domestic imprisonment and a division of labor that humiliated and brutalized them; with the critique of traditional morality and its double standards, it would also be possible to guarantee women a sexual emancipation hitherto reserved, but in a partial and distorted way, for men. After these major changes, would the institution of the family continue to make sense, or was it destined to dissolve? Alexandra Kollontai had no doubts: “[the family ceases to be necessary.](#)” In the interim, the family was in crisis due to the complete freedom, spontaneity and “[fluidity](#)” that would characterize sexual relations thereafter. Besides being in decline, the family seemed superfluous: “[the bringing up of children is gradually taken over](#)

by society”. Moreover, it had to not be swayed by lamentations: the family was a privileged place for the cultivation of selfishness, encouraging attachment to private property as well. 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 group as a whole. In particular, Trotsky, speaking in 1923, wisely pointed out that such a view ignored “the responsibility of father and mother to their child,” thus encouraging child abandonment and thus aggravating a scourge that was itself quite widespread in Moscow in those years¹⁷⁶. Nevertheless, in one form or another such ideas “remained widely popular in party circles”¹⁷⁷. As late as the early 1930s, a close associate of Stalin, Kaganovich, was forced to confront them. In the words of his biographer:

Despite fully adhering to the principle of women’s liberation, Kaganovich vehemently fought against extremist positions, which demanded the abolition of individual kitchens and supported forced coexistence in communes. Sabsovich, one of the leftist planners, had even proposed eliminating all living space shared by husband and wife, except for a small bedroom for the night. He had supported the idea of large buildings with a honeycomb structure, housing 2,000 people with all services in common, all to encourage “community spirit” and abolish the institution of the bourgeois family.¹⁷⁸

But Kaganovich’s (and Stalin’s) position drew harsh criticism from Trotsky, the leader of the opposition at the time: “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”¹⁷⁹. Therefore, the restoration of the institution of the family (and the rejection of the communes, designed to absorb and dissolve it) referred to the defense of the right of inheritance and property rights, and consequently assumed a clear counter-revolutionary meaning. And indeed, by a “providential coincidence”—noted Trotsky with irony—“the triumphal rehabilitation of the family” takes place simultaneously with the return with honors of money; “the resurrection of the family goes hand in hand with the increase of the educative role of the ruble”¹⁸⁰. The consecration of marital fidelity is on par with the consecration of private property: 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](#)¹⁸¹.

Actually, such an invocation was already on the horizon. Discussing the draft Constitution of 1936, Stalin polemicizes against those who demanded “the prohibition of religious rites” and that “[ministers of religion \[...\] be disenfranchised](#)”¹⁸². Trotsky again intervenes to denounce this unacceptable retreat from the initial attempt at the final liberation of society from the yokes 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](#)”¹⁸³. Together with the family and the right to inheritance and property, the Marxian opium of the people could not help but return.

Following this new chapter of the indictment against the “betrayal” is the dialectic we already know. Ending the bourgeois family, with its petty interests, inveterate prejudices and dead laws, the revolution would also create a space reserved exclusively for love, freedom and spontaneity. And yet ...

It is interesting to note that what caused the protest and indignation of Trotsky was still the idea of a legal regulation of family relationships:

[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](#)¹⁸⁴.

Condemnation of “political bosses” or the “transformation of power into love”

Thus, beyond the institution of the family (together with the rights of inheritance and property) and the religious consecration of power (of the head of the family and of the owner), Trotsky’s polemic was concerned with the problem of legal organization as a whole; the problem of the State. This is the central question behind all the particular issues discussed above: when and under what modalities did the process of the withering away of the state after the abolition of

capitalism, as envisaged by Marx, begin? The victorious proletariat—asserted *The State and Revolution* prior to Red October—“[needs only a state which is withering away](#)”; and yet, by initiating an enormous wave of nationalizations, the new power would give an unprecedented boost to the expansion of the state apparatus. Therefore, as the construction of the new society proceeded, Lenin was forced, consciously or not, to increasingly pull away from anarchism (as well as other of his previous opinions). This can be seen more clearly, just take a look at an important intervention, *Better Fewer, But Better*, published in *Pravda* on March 4, 1923. There, new slogans could be seen: “[improve our state apparatus](#)”, seriously “[strive to build up a state](#)”, “[the building of a really new state apparatus, one really worthy to be called socialist, Soviet](#)”, improve “[administrative work](#)”, and learn all that is necessary from the “[best models of Western Europe](#)”¹⁸⁵.

Doesn't massively expanding the state apparatus and resolving to address the problem of its improvement mean giving up in fact the ideal of the withering away of the state? Of course, the realization of such an ideal can refer to a fairly distant future, but meanwhile, how should public property, which has now seen a huge expansion, be managed, and what forms should power take in Soviet Russia as a whole? Even in *The State and Revolution*, written at the moment when the harshest, most necessary thing to do was to denounce the representative regimes who were equally responsible for the slaughter, we read that even the most developed democracy can not be without “[representative institutions](#)”¹⁸⁶. And yet, the wait for the withering away of the state continued to fuel distrust of the idea of representation precisely at the time when the leaders of Soviet Russia were multiplying the number of representative bodies (as was undoubtedly the case with the Soviets), without shying away from representation of the second and third degree: the lower-level Soviets elected their delegates to the Soviets at the higher level. Controversy was sparked without delay.

The problem of restoring order and revitalizing the productive apparatus, with the consequent recognition of the principle of competition, also arose in factories; thus, as at the beginning of the new regime, social and political environments reluctant to change denounced the rise to power of the “[bourgeois specialists](#)”, or a “[new bourgeoisie](#)”, and again chosen by Trotsky as the target of his criticism, who at that time plays an important role in the direction of the state-military apparatus¹⁸⁷. It is a controversy that ends up reaching far beyond Russia. Gramsci's criticism is significant, celebrating the new state being formed

in the country of the October Revolution and pays tribute to the Bolsheviks as “an aristocracy of statesmen” and Lenin as “the greatest statesman of contemporary Europe”: they have managed to end the “dark abyss of misery, barbarism, anarchy, decay” opened “by a long and disastrous war.” But, one anarchist objected, “this apology, full of lyricism” for the state and the “statolatry,” for a “statist, authoritarian, legalitarian and parliamentary socialism” was in contradiction with the very Soviet Constitution, which is committed to the establishment of a regime within which “there will be no class divisions, nor state power”¹⁸⁸.

It was not only circles and writers of a clearly anarchist orientation who adopted a critical stance. Exponents of the international communist movement also expressed dissatisfaction, disappointment and clear dissent. Let’s hear one of them, Pannekoek, who no longer recognized 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”¹⁸⁹. “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”¹⁹⁰.

Beyond Russia, such criticisms were also directed first and foremost towards the West: they appealed to put an end “to the bourgeois system of representation, to parliamentarism”¹⁹¹. More than the Bolshevik dictatorship, the principle of representativeness is condemned: “Some third person decides your fate: this is the whole essence of bureaucracy”¹⁹². The degeneration of Soviet Russia lied in the fact that whoever assumed a particular position was a particular person: in the factories, as at any level, “collective management” was being replaced by “one man management”, which “is a product of the individualist conception of the bourgeois class” and expresses “in principle an unrestricted, isolated, free will of one man, disconnected from the collective”¹⁹³. More than a “mass politics” (*Massenpolitik*), the Third International also employed “leader-politics” (*Führerpolitik*)¹⁹⁴.

As can be seen, the accusation of betrayal of the original ideals, rather than being addressed against the abuse of power, was charged against the organs of power, based on the distinction/opposition between rulers and the ruled, between leaders

and masses, between directors and directed, based on the exclusion of direct action or “mass politics”. If the Soviets did not escape distrust, equally explicit was the contempt for Parliament, trade unions and political parties, perhaps including the Communist Party which was also based on the principle of representation and, therefore, affected by the virus of bureaucracy. In the last instance, rather than the organs of power, it is power itself, power as such, which was being criticized. [“It is the curse of the Labour movement that, as soon as it has acquired a certain ‘power,’ it seeks to enlarge this power by unprincipled means.”](#) In this way it ceases to be “pure”: this is what happened with German Social Democracy, and this is also the case with the Third International¹⁹⁵.

In this context we can situate the young Bloch, who since the revolution and the Soviets, besides overcoming the economy, the commercial spirit and money itself, also expects the [“transformation of power into love”](#)¹⁹⁶. If the German philosopher, polishing up the second edition of *Spirit of Utopia* by eliminating these fragments and wishful propositions, distanced himself from the most clearly messianic aspects of his thought, there were not a few communists—in Soviet Russia and abroad—who cried out in scandal, ultimately due to the miraculous absence of the “transformation of power into love.”

In the early years of Soviet Russia, rather than Stalin, the “anti-bureaucratic” polemic first implicated Lenin and even Trotsky himself, who was included among the most prominent [“defenders and knights of bureaucracy”](#)¹⁹⁷. The situation changed significantly in the following years. Even before we consider its contents, the enactment of the 1936 Constitution represented a radical change by the very fact that it broke with anarchoid representations, which were tenaciously attached to the ideal of the extinction of the state, and on the basis of which “law is the opium of the people” and “the idea of the constitution is a bourgeois idea”¹⁹⁸. In the words of Stalin, the Constitution of 1936 [“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”](#)¹⁹⁹. If it is insufficient and does not constitute the essential aspect, the “formal” guarantee of rights does not seem to be irrelevant here. Stalin stressed with approval that the new constitution [“has ensured the introduction of universal, direct and equal suffrage with secret ballot”](#)²⁰⁰. But it was precisely on this point that Trotsky’s criticism intervened: in bourgeois society the secret ballot is used [“to defend the exploited from the terror of the exploiters”](#); the reappearance of this institution in Soviet society is also confirmation that in the USSR the people must defend

intimidation, if not a true exploiter class, in any case of a bureaucracy²⁰¹.

To those who demanded that the problem of the extinction of the state be readdressed, Stalin responded in 1938 asking them not transform the teachings of Marx and Engels into a dogma and an empty scholasticism; the delay in the realization of the ideal was explained by the ever-present capitalist siege. And yet, in enumerating the functions of the socialist state, apart from the traditional ones such as defense against class enemies, foreign and domestic, 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 Eighteenth 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.”](#) Theorizing of this “third function” was already an essential innovation. But Stalin went further, declaring: [“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”](#)²⁰².

Of course, this was a rather problematic, and mystifying, statement: it certainly did not reflect the situation of the USSR in 1939, when the terror was raging and the Gulag was growing 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”](#)²⁰³. Therefore, the realization of communism in the Soviet Union or in a certain number of countries would have led to the final decline of the first function of the socialist state (safeguarding the danger of counterrevolution in the domestic sphere), but not the second (protection against external threats) that, in the presence of powerful capitalist countries, continues to be vital even [“in the period of Communism”](#). But why should the collapse of capitalist attacks and the decline of the second function be followed by the decline of the “third function”, i.e., the [“work of economic organization”](#) and [“cultural education”](#), not to mention [“protecting Socialist property from thieves and pilferers of the people’s property”](#)? There is no doubt that Stalin reveals uncertainties and contradictions, probably also driven by the political necessity of moving with caution through a minefield, where every small deviation from the classic thesis of the extinction of the State exposed him to the accusation of treason.

The murder of Kirov: power play or terrorism?

From the beginning, the leadership group that took power in October 1917 was deeply divided over the most important questions of internal and international politics. Barely contained while Lenin was active, the fractures became irreparable once the charismatic leader passed away. Did that shock remain limited to the political-ideological sphere?

There were times in which, with respect to the case of Sergei M. Kirov (leader of the very first line of the CPSU, shot dead at the door of his office by a young communist, Leonid Nikolaev, on 1 December 1934 in Leningrad), it could be written that “that Stalin plotted the murder through his police agents is no longer seriously in doubt”²⁰⁴. The story and the insinuations contained in the *Secret Speech* had already aroused a patent perplexity in the mid-nineties²⁰⁵. But now we have the work of a Russian researcher, which was also published in French in a collection edited by Stéphane Courtois and Nicolas Werth, the editors of the *Black Book of Communism*. We are therefore in the presence of a work whose anti-Stalinist credentials are more than proven; and yet, despite denying that after the murder had a vast conspiracy, destroys the version contained or suggested in the *Secret Speech* to the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU. It reveals Khrushchev’s narrative to be at least “inaccurate” judging from a number of details; On the other hand, its author “knew that arguments were needed to cause a psychological shock amongst the followers of the “father of the peoples”; indeed, the thesis of “Stalin’s plot against Kirov fulfilled to this need admirably”²⁰⁶.

The actual relations of collaboration and friendship established between the leader and his collaborator emerges clearly from the Russian researcher’s portrayal of Kirov:

This open-minded man did not appreciate intrigue, lying, or deception. Stalin had to appreciate these character traits, which were the basis of their relationship. According to the testimonies of his contemporaries, Kirov was indeed able to make objections to Stalin, penetrating his suspicious spirit and roughness. Stalin was sincerely enthused by him and trusted him. An avid fisher and hunter, he often sent fresh fish and big game to Moscow. Stalin had such confidence in Kirov, who invited him several times to go to the sauna with him, “honor” that he gave to a single mortal, General

Vlassik, head of his personal guard.²⁰⁷

Until the end, nothing ever happened to disturb this relationship, as confirmed in the investigation of another Russian historian: the archives contain no evidence of a political divergence or a rivalry between the two. Even more ridiculous is this thesis that Kirov only “[had a minimal role in the highest bodies of the party](#)”, in the Politburo, focusing instead on the administration of Leningrad.²⁰⁸

But if “the idea of a rivalry pitting Kirov against Stalin is not based on anything”²⁰⁹, we must reconsider Trotsky’s reaction:

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.²¹⁰

The sympathy or understanding towards the perpetrator is transparent, and the contempt and hatred reserved for Kirov explicit. Far from pitying him as a victim of the Kremlin dictator, Trotsky labelled him as the “[clever and unscrupulous Leningrad dictator, a typical representative of his corporation](#)”²¹¹. And yet, *in crescendo*: “[the assassinated Kirov, a rude satrap, does not call forth any sympathy](#)”²¹². The victim was an individual against which the wrath of the revolutionaries had been growing for some time:

[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](#)²¹³.

At least at this moment—between 1935 and 1936—there is no mention in any way of a plot against Kirov’s life. Yes, it is stated that this may have been manipulated by the “[bureaucracy as a whole](#)”, but at the same time, it should be stressed, it would not been without complacency, that “[every bureaucrat trembles against terror](#)” from below²¹⁴. If these young people were also

deprived of “[experience of class struggle and revolution](#)”, they would be inclined to “[go underground and learn to struggle and temper their character for the future](#)” giving them a reason to hope.²¹⁵ Trotsky appealed to the Soviet youth, which has already begun inciting fear among members of the dominant caste, calling for a new revolution that seemed imminent. The bureaucratic regime had unleashed “[the struggle against the youth](#)”, as denounced in the title of one of the central paragraphs of *The Revolution Betrayed*. Now the oppressed would 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 mature stratum and even the old folks](#)²¹⁶.

This dialectic was destined to repeat itself. Owing to the immaturity of the forms it initially assumed, the revolt against oppression always has a positive value. Having reaffirmed his contempt and hatred of 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.](#)

As the “[Irish](#)” terrorists or those of other countries, the “[Russian](#)” terrorists, too, deserve respect²¹⁷.

Initially, the investigations of the authorities were directed towards the “White Guards”. In fact, in Paris their rings were well organized: they had managed to commit “a number of attacks in Soviet territory.” Similar rings were active in Belgrade: the monthly magazine published specified, in the November 1934 issue, that in order to “overthrow the leaders of the Soviet country” it was appropriate “to use the weapon of terrorist attack.” Among the leaders to be eliminated would have been Kirov. And yet, these investigations did not produce results; Soviet authorities then began to look to the leftist opposition.²¹⁸

As we have seen, it was Trotsky who supported the new track, who not only stressed the revolutionary potential among the Soviet youth but also made it clear

stressed the revolutionary turmoil among the Soviet youth but also made it clear that those who resort to violence are not and can not be classes that had been definitively defeated and consequently already close to giving up:

The history of individual terror in the Soviet Union clearly marks the stages in the general evolution of the country. At the dawn of the 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 infrequently from the offspring of the ruling stratum²¹⁹.

If the old classes, which had dealt with before the October Revolution and afterwards with the collectivization of agriculture, had given up, the case was not the same regarding the proletariat, the protagonist of the revolution and blocked and oppressed momentarily by the Stalinist bureaucracy. It is the latter that should tremble: the assassination of Kirov and the spread of terrorism among the Soviet youth were symptoms of the isolation and “hostility” that caught up to and surrounded the usurpers of Soviet power²²⁰.

True, Trotsky was quick to point out that individual terrorism is not really effective. But this observation is not entirely convincing, and perhaps Trotsky was not entirely convinced himself. Meanwhile, under the conditions found in the USSR, it was an inevitable phenomenon: “Terrorism is the tragic realization of Bonapartism”²²¹. Also, even if it was not able to resolve 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”²²².

Terrorism, coup and civil war

The overthrow of the Romanov dynasty had been preceded by a long series of terrorist attacks carried out by organizations that, despite the hard blows of repression, always managed to rebuild themselves. To Trotsky, a similar process was taking place in the USSR in response to the “betrayal” committed by the bureaucracy. What threatened it was not necessarily acts of individual terrorism but rather the beginnings of another 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 bureaucratic oligarchy. There is no peaceful outcome for this crisis [...]. The development leads obviously to the road of revolution.²²³

A decisive civil war was 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”²²⁴.

As we have seen, the murder of Kirov evokes the specter of civil war between the forces that had overthrown the old regime. In fact, this specter had haunted the history of Soviet Russia since the time of its constitution. To prevent the peace of Brest-Litovsk, which he considered a capitulation to German imperialism and a betrayal of proletarian internationalism, Bukharin momentarily considered the idea of a sort of coup d'état, in order to remove from power, at least for a time, the person who until then was the undisputed leader of the Bolsheviks (see above, p. 59). If the specter of an internal schism within the Bolshevik leadership group, even threatening civil war within the same organization, lurked while Lenin was alive—despite the enormous prestige he enjoyed—this specter would definitely take complete form in the following years. This can be unequivocally deduced from important testimonies from inside the anti-Stalinist opposition and defectors from the communist movement, whose old faith has been transformed into implacable hatred. Let's see how Boris Souvarine describes the situation created in the CPSU about ten years after the October Revolution:

The Opposition, on its side, completed its organisation as a clandestine Party within the only Party, with its own hierarchy in miniature, its Politbureau, its Central Committee, its regional and local agents, its foundation groups, its subscriptions, its circulars, its code for letters.²²⁵

The prospect was of not only a political clash but a military one as well. Immediately after the end of World War II, the memoirs of Ruth Fischer, who was at the forefront of German communism and a member of the Presidium of the Comintern from 1922 to 1924, were published in the United States. In these memoirs Fischer narrates how she participated in the organization of the “resistance” in the USSR against the “totalitarian regime” in Moscow. This was in 1926. Having broken with Stalin the year before, Zinoviev and Kamenev drew closer to Trotsky once again: the “bloc” was organized to take power. Thus a clandestine network developed which extended “as far as Vladivostok” and the Far East: messengers distributed confidential party and State documents, or transmitted encrypted messages; armed guards corps provided security for secret meetings. “The Bloc leaders began to plan the final steps”: on the basis that the clash with Stalin could only be resolved through “violence”, they met in a wood near Moscow in order to analyze in depth “the military aspect of their program”, beginning with the “role of those army units” willing to support the “coup d’état”. Fischer continues her story:

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 Stalin²²⁶.

It is in this context that we must frame the demonstrations organized in the following year to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution: from Moscow and Leningrad these should have spread to “other industrial centers” so that “the Party hierarchy would be forced to yield”²²⁷.

In those years, the severity of the political clash ongoing in Soviet Russia was no mystery to anyone 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’Etat*.” The brilliant organizer of the Red Army, who still enjoyed “tremendous popularity”, was of course not resigned 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.”²²⁸. The book that draws this picture is *The Technique of Coup d’Etat*, which appeared in Paris in 1931 and immediately

found remarkable success. The author, Curzio Malaparte, who had been to Moscow and conducted interviews with top figures, gives a reading of the tensions of 1927 that is confirmed by Ruth Fischer, that is, by an authorized representative of the anti-Stalinist 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 State²²⁹.

As we know, these plans failed and Trotsky, expelled from the party, was forced to go first to Alma Ata and then to Turkey. Here “Soviet consular authorities” would pay him “\$1,500 for copyright”²³⁰. Perhaps this was “a ridiculous sum” as a supportive historian and biographer of Trotsky said²³¹, but the gesture could be read as an attempt to not exacerbate the contradiction further.

Conspiracy, infiltration of the state apparatus, and “Aesopian language”

The exiled revolutionary did not renounce his projects. How 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 itself²³².

Were these imagined events or mere propaganda of the regime? The book cited here, after being published, circulated widely in Europe and the arguments contained in it do not seem to provoke wry smiles or cries of scandal. As for the “terrorism”, also with regard to “sabotage” we must not lose sight of the peculiar history of Russia. In 1908 the oil magnates as well as Stalin had repeatedly condemned, though with obviously different motivations, the tendency of certain

sectors of the working class to bolster their claims by resorting to “[economic terrorism](#)”. Despite emphasizing that the primary 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](#)”²³³. By the early 1930s, had this tradition completely dissolved, or did it continue to manifest itself in new ways? In any case, those who have been seen to cherish this tradition are the White Guards. And the leftist opposition?

There is at least one important confirmation of the projects of “insurrection” mentioned by Malaparte. Trotsky’s biographer refers to the attitude that his hero continued to take in exile: “[The advice is simple: the opposition must acquire a solid formation; be seriously and consciousness active in the party, and once they have been expelled, in the proletarian organizations and the Soviet organizations in general, always refer to the International](#)”²³⁴. The conspiratorial tradition that had contributed mightily to the establishment of Soviet power was now being stirred against it. In *What is to be Done?* Lenin had emphasized strongly: we revolutionaries “[must without fail devote the most serious attention to propaganda and agitation among soldiers and officers, and to the creation of ‘military organisations’ affiliated to our Party.](#)”²³⁵

Taking note of this lesson, the opposition organized a clandestine network that paid particular attention to the military apparatus in a strict sense. Its tormented process of formation made the task of infiltration easier. What happened at the time of formation of the Cheka, the first political police force of Soviet Russia, is significant. On July 6, 1918, an attempt was made on the life of the German ambassador in Moscow; the perpetrator was Iakov G. Blumkin, a revolutionary socialist seeking to protest the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and reopen the debate on it: when the head of Cheka, Felix E. Dherzhinsky, went to the German embassy in Moscow to present the Soviet government’s excuses, he was informed that the perpetrators of the attack had presented Cheka credentials. To confirm the truth, he headed for the institution headquarters, where he was arrested by “[dissident Chekists](#)”, either militants themselves or people close to the party of the Socialist Revolutionaries. Subsequently released by the Red Guard, Dherzhinsky then proceeded with the purging of the political police and the execution of those responsible for the conspiracy and mutiny. Thus, the victims of the first purge were Chekists, but ones who were part of the opposition²³⁶.

The perpetrator of the attack managed to escape, but there was another reason he

fled from the scene: “Trotsky publicly acknowledged in late 1929 that he had been visited by Blumkin, then still an agent of the information services of Red Army.” Lev Sedov, Trotsky’s son and collaborator, tried to make it seem that it was only something casual; however, a document preserved at Stanford “shows that Trotsky’s contacts with Blumkin were not born of a chance encounter, but from an organized link with the USSR”; in this context “the secret agent obviously played an important role.” It is this connection that pushed Stalin “to order the execution of Blumkin”²³⁷.

As can be seen, “agents” of the opposition “had gained an entry everywhere”²³⁸. Even “in the GPU” a “small group of Trotsky’s faithful” took refuge for some time²³⁹. According to a contemporary American historian, it is possible that the role of double agent was being played by Genrikh G. Yagoda himself, who led the first phase of the Great Terror, before he was himself consumed by it²⁴⁰. From the testimonies of anti-Stalinist militants it is known that “some of the leaflets [of the opposition] were printed in the GPU plant itself”; it can be seen that there were “continued tension in the [Soviet] Russian [state] terror machine”²⁴¹.

Infiltration was made even easier by the regime’s diffident opening moves. Calling for struggle against the “bureaucratic dictatorship”, Trotsky stressed that “the new constitution creates at the same time a semi-legal cover for the struggle against it”²⁴². The battle is even better under camouflage, concealing the intention to undermine and overthrow the power. This is a point on which the opposition leader leaves no doubt: “undermining demands conspirative measures”; it is necessary to “observe the precepts of conspiracy in the struggle”. Additionally:

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?²⁴³

Again the conspiratorial Bolshevik tradition turned against the regime that emerged from the revolution. In 1920, Lenin had called the revolutionaries’ attention 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”](#)²⁴⁴. This was precisely how the opposition was acting with respect to the political and social institutions and organizations of the hated “Thermidorian” regime.

The conspirators complied with strict rules of conduct:

[They make self-criticism, they recognize their “errors” and are often transferred. Those whom the Stalinist press calls “men of both sides” or even “the left-right fraction” from then on tried to establish contacts that would allow them to broaden the resistance against Stalin’s politics.](#)

[In this way, they came in contact with other groups...](#)²⁴⁵

We now understand the obsession with [“two-facers”](#), the obsession with which Khrushchev criticized Stalin²⁴⁶.

Meanwhile, with the abandonment of the NEP, the break with Bukharin had been completed. Regarding the attitude of the latter, it may be interesting to read the testimony of Humbert-Droz, leader of the Comintern, expelled from the Swiss Communist Party in 1942 because of his differences with Stalin. On a trip to the First Conference of the revolutionary unions in Latin America in the spring of 1929, he encountered Bukharin and held a meeting with him, as he recalls in these words: [“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”](#)²⁴⁷. Three years later, another representative of the “right”, Martemjan N. Riutin, forwarded and circulated a document, passing it from hand to hand, labeling Stalin an [“agent provocateur”](#) who needed to be removed, perhaps with the means of tyrannicide²⁴⁸. When Bukharin raises his plans, Humbert-Droz objected 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 not moved²⁴⁹. On the other hand, the aforementioned objection could hardly have had an effect of a man who was already—as he himself revealed confidentially in 1936—gripped

by a deep “hatred” toward Stalin, in fact the “absolute” hatred that is reserved for a “devil”²⁵⁰.

While expressing these sentiments in private, Bukharin was directing *Izvestija*, a Soviet government organ. Is this a glaring inconsistency? It was not from the point of view of the Bolshevik leader, who continued to alternate between legal and illegal work, with the goal of overthrowing a regime, following another indication of Lenin to such heights that seemed obnoxious. Referring to Tsarist Russia, we can read *What is to be Done?*

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 Aesopian language, is understood by all the “interested”²⁵¹.

It is precisely in this way that Bukharin used the platform of the Soviet government. Condemnation of the “omnipotent ‘total State’”, based on “blind discipline”, on “Jesuitical obedience”, on the “glorification of the ‘Leader’” claims to only be referring to Hitler’s Germany, but actually points to the USSR as well. The “Aesopian language” recommended by Lenin becomes immediately clear when the denunciation refers to “cruel, uncultured provincialism”²⁵². This is clearly the opposition’s portrayal of Stalin. We have seen Trotsky speak of him as a “minor provincial” (see above, p. 14), and in discussions behind closed doors it was Bukharin himself who expressed his disdain for a leader who has succeeded Lenin, despite ignoring foreign languages completely²⁵³.

Focusing on the efficacy of expressing a revolutionary message in “Aesopian language” in Tsarist Russia, *What is to be Done?* continues:

Quite a considerable time elapsed [...] before the government realised 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.²⁵⁴

Bukharin and the opposition hoped that a similar phenomenon had created a

climate favorable to the overthrow of Stalin. But Stalin had also read *What is to be Done?* and he knew the Bolshevik rules of conspiracy. In conclusion: we are witnessing a protracted civil war. The underground network reorganizes or attempts to reorganize despite the successive waves of repression that are becoming more and more ruthless. 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**”²⁵⁵. The Bolshevik leadership group was then broken by a pulse that is done without excluding blows and, at least in the calculations and hopes of the enemies of Stalin, from one moment to another can involve the whole country in an open and widespread manner. While the opposition abided by the lesson of Lenin and the conspiratorial tradition of Bolshevism, weaving its plans in the shadows, this double game arouses the indignation of Soviet power, which identifies false friends as the most dangerous and slippery enemy: the tragedy is way of their outcome.

Infiltration, disinformation and calls for insurrection

Do the “rules of conspiracy” theorized by Trotsky only involve concealing one’s true political identity, or could they include the use of false allegations, sowing confusion and chaos in the enemy camp and making it even more difficult to identify the clandestine network fighting for the overthrow of the Stalinist regime? In other words, were the “conspiratorial rules” meant only for the strict protection of confidential information or was the door open for the spread of misinformation too? Those who harbor these kinds of suspicion are not only limited to pro-government American journalist Anne Louise Strong²⁵⁶. It is the *Secret Speech* itself that speaks of false allegations and “**provocations**” made by both “**real Trotskyites**” who thereby took their “**revenge**”, as “**conscienceless careerists**” also likely to make their way through the most despicable means²⁵⁷. Significantly, this resulted in an episode that occurred at the time the murder of Kirov was announced. The predominant feelings—recalled Andrew Smith, who was working in the Elektrozavod factory in Kuznecov at that time—were of shock and anxiety about the future; but there are some who expressed regret about the fact that it was not Stalin who was murdered. An assembly was drawn later, during which the workers were invited to denounce the enemies or potential enemies of Soviet power.

With surprise, Smith remembered how, during the discussion, the group of dissidents with whom he was in contact had been the most active when it came to attacking opponents and deviants and calling for the most severe measures against them²⁵⁸.

Another symptomatic episode was one that occurred outside the USSR but is helpful for understanding what was happening inside that country. When General Alexandr M. Orlov, at that time already a collaborator at the highest level of the NKVD (and fleeing to the US in 1938), was accused by journalist Louis Fischer of having participated in the liquidation of anti-Stalinist communist cadres during the Spanish civil war, he responded with the false claim that his accuser was actually a spy for Moscow²⁵⁹.

In the Soviet Union in the 1930s we saw the opposition infiltrate the highest levels of the repressive apparatus: it would be rather strange if, after having achieved this result, it did nothing but execute the orders of Stalin! Disinformation, which has the double advantage of creating difficulties for the repressive machine and of getting rid of it precisely because it of any particularly detested enemy, is an integral part of war: and that is, judging from at least one intervention in July 1933 by Trotsky, who considered the counter-revolutionary civil war waged by the “[Stalinist bureaucracy](#)” and leading to the “[base persecutions of the Bolshevik-Leninists](#)” to be “[going on right now](#)”. It was then necessary to become aware of the new situation. “[The slogan of the reform of the CPSU](#)” no longer made sense. A frontal fight was imposed: the party and the International led by Stalin and already exhausted “[can give nothing to the world proletariat absolutely nothing, except evil](#)”; on the other side the true revolutionaries certainly could not be inspired by the practice of “[petty-bourgeois pacifists](#)”²⁶⁰. Undoubtedly: “[The bureaucracy can be compelled to yield power into the hands of the proletarian vanguard only by force](#)”²⁶¹. To Trotsky, the rise to power of Hitler did not mean that unity was necessary in order to confront the enormous danger being threatened from Germany, but rather that they could not stop halfway in fighting one power, the Stalinist, which had led the German and international proletariat to defeat.

As can be seen, the same opposition leader who spoke of “civil war” within the party was the one who had led both the October Revolution and Soviet Russia during the early years. We are in the presence of a category which is the leitmotif of the investigation of a Russian historian of certain and declared Trotskyist affiliation, author of a monumental work in several volumes dedicated

precisely to the detailed reconstruction of this civil war. Regarding Soviet Russia, it speaks of “preventive civil war” unleashed by Stalin against those who organized to overthrow him. Also outside the USSR, this civil war is manifested and sometimes escalates within the front fighting against Franco; in fact, in reference to Spain between 1936-1939, it speaks of not one but “two civil wars”²⁶². With great intellectual honesty and exhibiting the new and rich documentary material available due to the opening of the Russian archives, the author here quoted arrives at the following conclusion: “the Moscow Trials were not a senseless and cold-blooded crime, but Stalin’s counterblow in the sharpest of political battles”²⁶³.

Arguing against Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who described the victims of the purges as a group of “rabbits”, the Russian Trotskyist historian cites a leaflet that in the 1930s called for sweeping “the fascist dictator and his clique” from the Kremlin. He then comments: “Even from the standpoint of the Russian legislation now in force, this leaflet should be judged as a call for the violent overthrow of power (more specifically, the party leadership)”²⁶⁴. In conclusion, far from being an expression of “an outburst of irrational and senseless violence,” the bloody terror unleashed by Stalin was really the only way to break the “resistance of the genuine communist forces”. The Whites were “the party of the executed”, defined “in analogy with the term used to designate the French Communist Party, the main force of the anti-fascist resistance and the main target of Hitlerian terror”²⁶⁵. Stalin was thus compared to Hitler; it should be noted that French Communists and Partisans were not limited to opposing the latter by passive or non-violent resistance.

Civil war and international maneuvers

It is not surprising that one or another superpower occasionally tried to benefit from the latent civil war in Soviet Russia. Every time, those who requested or wanted to provoke foreign intervention were the losing side, who believed there was no other possibility of success. This dialectic was already developing in the first months of Soviet Russia’s existence. Let us return to the attack on 6 July 1918. This was an integral part of a very ambitious project. On the one hand, the leftist Socialist Revolutionaries promoted “counter-revolutionary risings against the Soviet Government [...] in several centres” 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 military response from Germany and a consequent resumption of the war. This would have been handled with a *levée en masse* of the Russian people, who would inflict defeat on both the government of traitors and the invading enemy simultaneously²⁶⁶. The perpetrator of the attack against the German ambassador was a sincere revolutionary: before making contact with Trotskyists circles, he tried to emulate the Jacobins, protagonists of the most radical phase of the French Revolution and of the heroic resistance of the masses against the invasion of counterrevolutionary powers. To the Soviet authorities, however, Blumkin could not have been anything but provocative: the success of his plan would have resulted in the army of Wilhelm II attacking and perhaps the collapse of the power established in the October Revolution.

The intertwining of domestic and international politics re-emerges with every historical change. Hitler's rise to power, with the destruction or decimation of the German section of the Communist International, represented a blow to the Soviet Union: what consequences would it have on the internal political balance? On March 30, 1933, Trotsky, who deemed the ruling bureaucracy in the USSR responsible for the defeat of the communists in Germany, wrote that "the liquidation of Stalin's regime" is "absolutely inevitable and [...] not far away"²⁶⁷. In the summer of the same year, in France, the Daladier government granted visas to Trotsky: only a few months had passed since Herriot had opposed doing so, and doubts began to arise regarding the reasons for this change of heart. Ruth Fischer believes that the French government was acting on a presumption about the "weakness of Stalin's position", the "regrouping of the opposition against him" and the impending return of Trotsky to Moscow with the highest level of authority.²⁶⁸

A new and dramatic turn of events occurred with the outbreak of the Second World War. In the spring of 1940, the Soviet Union was still outside the conflict, indeed, still bound by the non-aggression pact with Germany. This was an intolerable situation for the countries already surrounded by Nazi aggression; on the pretext of the Russian-Finnish conflict, they considered bombing the oil facilities of Baku. This would not only have been a matter of cutting the Third Reich's energy supply lines: "the Franco-British war plans were aimed at breaking the military alliance of the Soviet Union with Germany through attacks on the oil industry in the Caucasus, thus leading to a possible post-Stalin regime that would take their side against Germany"²⁶⁹.

Let us return for a moment to the attack on German ambassador Mirbach. The

perpetrator was of course trying to provoke Germany into attacking, but not because he expected it to win: on the contrary, he was hoping that the whiplash would awaken Russia, leading to a decisive response. Later we will see Blumkin participate in the Trotsky-led conspiracy. And this, in turn, to clarify its position, can be compared to French Prime Minister Clemenceau in 1927, who during World War I assumed the leadership of the country after denouncing his predecessors' military weakness and therefore presented himself as the only statesman capable of leading France to victory against Germany²⁷⁰. Of the numerous successive interpretations and reinterpretations of this analogy only one thing is clear: not even the invasion of the Soviet Union would have ended attempts by the opposition to seize power. Even more disturbing is the aforementioned comparison of Stalin with Nicholas II: during World War I, denounced as an imperialist war, the Bolsheviks had proclaimed the slogan of revolutionary defeatism and had identified as the main enemy the czarist autocracy and the internal enemy, who needed to be fought and defeated first.

In the following years Trotsky went far beyond evoking of the spirit of Clemenceau: on April 22, 1939 he declared his support for “[freeing the so-called Soviet Ukraine from the Stalinist boot](#)”²⁷¹. Once independent, it would have been unified with Western Ukraine, which would be wrested from Poland, and Carpathian Ukraine, which had been annexed shortly before by Hungary. We reflect on the time when this positioning appeared: the Third Reich had finished carrying out the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia and calls were increasing for the Soviet Union (and especially Ukraine) to be Germany's next target. In these circumstances, in July 1939 even Kerensky took a stand against Trotsky surprising project which, according to the Menshevik leader, would only favor Hitler's plans. “The same opinion is held also by the Kremlin”, quickly retorted a Trotsky who, on the other hand, had written in the April 22 article that with the independence of 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](#)”²⁷². Immediately after the invasion of Poland, Trotsky went further. Anticipating the final ruin of the Third Reich, he added: “[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](#)”²⁷³. This forecast (or hope) of a liquidation (also physical) of the “Bonapartist clique” or “caste” by a revolution from below or even a military invasion could only have appeared to Stalin as confirmation of his

suspicions about the at least “objective” convergence between the Nazi leadership and the Trotskyist opposition: both were interested in causing the collapse of the home front in the USSR, although the former saw this collapse as the antecedent to the Slavic country’s enslavement, and the latter saw it as the unleashing of a new revolution.

It was not a particularly ignominious suspicion either: referring to Lenin, Trotsky sought to use in his favor the dialectic which had at the time led to the defeat of the Russian army, the collapse of the czarist autocracy, and the victory of the October Revolution. Again, the previous history of Bolshevism turned against Soviet power. Kerensky, who in 1917 had denounced the treachery of the Bolsheviks, was now warning about the treason of those who identified as “Bolshevik-Leninists”. From Stalin’s point of view, a radical change had taken place since World War I: now he was facing a political party or a fraction which hoped, at least during the initial phase of the conflict, for the collapse of the country and the military triumph of a Germany that had not been worn down by three years of war, as was the case of Wilhelm II, but rather was at the height of its military power and explicitly dedicated to building its colonial empire in the east. Against this background, a charge of treason is of course unsurprising. Let us return to Trotsky’s article of 22 April 1939. In it is one statement that might have pulled the consensus in favor of Stalin: “[The impending war will create a favorable atmosphere for all sorts of adventurers, miracle-hunters and seekers of the golden fleece.](#)”²⁷⁴.

As the flames of World War II burned higher and higher, destined to reach the Soviet Union just as Trotsky predicted, he continued to make declarations and statements that were anything but reassuring. Here are some: “[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)²⁷⁵. It is quite understandable that, being labeled the “main enemy”, the “bureaucracy” or the “oligarchy” was convinced that the opposition, if not in the direct service of the enemy, would in any case be ready to accompany their action in principle.

Any government would identify organizations of this orientation as a threat to national security. Stalin’s concerns and suspicions were increased by Trotsky

throwing himself into predictions (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](#)”²⁷⁶. Where did this certainty come from? Was it a prediction based solely on developments within the country?

It is much more difficult to analyze the intertwining of Soviet Russia’s political conflict and international tensions, due to the fact that the suspicions and allegations were fed by the clear presence of the fifth column and disinformation operations, put in place by the secret services of Nazi Germany. In April 1938 Goebbels wrote in his diary: “Our clandestine radio transmitter from eastern Prussia to Russia is creating an enormous sensation. It operates in Trotsky’s name, and is causing Stalin plenty of trouble”²⁷⁷. Immediately after the start of Operation Barbarossa, the head of the Third Reich’s propaganda services was even more pleased: “[Now we work with three clandestine radio stations in Russia: first Trotskyist, the second separatist, third Russian-nationalists, all criticise Stalinism.](#)” It was an instrument to which the aggressors attach great importance: “[We make use of all means, in particular the three clandestine radio stations in Russia](#)”; they “[are an example of cunning and subtlety](#)”²⁷⁸. Regarding the role of the “Trotskyist” propaganda, a diary entry of July 14 is especially significant, which after referencing the treaty stipulated between the Soviet Union and Britain and the joint statement of the two countries, continues: “[This is a good opportunity for us to demonstrate the twinning between capitalism and Bolshevism \[in this case synonymous with official Soviet power\]. The statement will find little acceptance among Leninist circles in Russia](#)” (note that the Trotskyists liked to be defined as “Bolshevik-Leninists”, as opposed to “Stalinists”, considered traitors to Leninism)²⁷⁹.

Naturally, today Stalin and his collaborators’ condemnation of the opposition bloc as a nest of enemy agents seems grotesque, but we must not lose sight of the historical context broadly presented here. Above all, it is necessary to note that similar suspicions and accusations and sign in opposition were made against Stalin’s leadership. After describing Stalin as a “[fascist dictator](#)”, leaflets that the Trotskyist network was circulating in the Soviet Union added: “[The leaders of the Politburo are either mentally ill or mercenaries of fascism](#)”²⁸⁰. The opposition’s official documents also hinted that Stalin could be the protagonist of a “[gigantic conscious provocation](#)”²⁸¹. On one side and another, rather than pursue an arduous analysis of objective contradictions and conflicting options, as well as the political conflicts that developed over them, it is preferred to resort

hastily to the category of treason and, in its extreme form, the traitor becomes a conscious and valuable agent of the enemy. Trotsky never tires of denouncing “[conspiracy of the Kremlin bureaucracy against the working class](#)”, a plot even more despicable because “[the Stalinist bureaucracy](#)” is nothing but “[transmissive mechanism of imperialism](#)”²⁸². Needless to say, Trotsky was being repaid in kind: he lamented being described as an agent “[of this and that power](#)” but in turn labelled Stalin an “[agent provocateur in the service of Hitler](#)”²⁸³.

Between one side and the other the most insidious accusations were being exchanged; it is evident that the most fanciful were those from the opposition. The contradictory and tormented mood of its leader has been subtly analyzed by a Russian historian who can be little suspected of Stalinist sympathies:

Trotsky did not want the defeat of the Soviet Union, but the overthrow of Stalin. In his prophecies about the coming war, insecurity was noticeable: the exiled Trotsky knew that only a defeat of his homeland could break the power of Stalin [...]. He wanted war, because in this war he saw the only chance to overthrow Stalin. But this Trotsky would not admit even to himself.²⁸⁴

Between “Bonapartist overthrow”, “coups d’état” and disinformation: the case of Tukhachevsky

Civil war (latent or manifest) within the new leadership group that emerged from the collapse of the old regime, mutual accusations of treason and collusion with the imperialist enemy, and intense activity by secret services, dedicated as much to the recruitment of agents as to manipulation, make up the context in which we must place the matter that in 1937 led to the accusation and execution of Marshal Tukhachevsky and other numerous and prominent members of the Red Army.

Behind this case there is a long previous history. Years before Lenin saw the possibility of a Bonapartist period and also expressed his concern to Trotsky: would civil power really come to be obeyed by the military? In 1920 Tukhachevsky seems to independently decide on the longed-for victory march on Warsaw. The outline is clearly traced—as top historians now observe—of a trend of a brilliant general who “[might very well have become the Bonaparte of the Bolshevik Revolution](#)”²⁸⁵. Ten years later, Stalin was alerted by the GPU about plans being woven against him in military circles. Was this just a set-up?

²⁸⁶In April of the following year, Trotsky was the one who expressed deep doubts about Tukhachevsky, making this analysis of the situation created in the USSR after the political defeat of Bukharin and the “right”: now the main danger for socialism was represented not by the “**Thermidorian overthrow**”, which formally retains the Soviet character of the country and the communist character of the party in power, but rather the “**Bonapartist overthrow**” which assumes “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 such a case, “the **adventurist-praetorian elements of the type of Tukhachevsky**” could develop a role of great importance. Countering them “with arms in hand”, the “**revolutionary elements**” of the party, the state, and—note well—“the army” would have been reunited around the working class and the “**faction of the Bolshevik-Leninists**” (that is to say, the Trotskyists)²⁸⁷.

This position represents a novelty in the conflict between the Bolsheviks: despite having “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”²⁸⁸; the opposition was now clearly trying to get a foot in or consolidate its presence in the army on behalf of the fight against the Bonapartist danger, which only it would be capable of confronting. However, unimpressed by this Bonapartist danger, in 1936 Stalin promoted Tukhachevsky and four other military leaders to the rank of marshal. This was a promotion decided in the context of a reform which provided for the abandonment of the army’s “from a predominantly territorial into a standing force” and restoring “the old pre-revolutionary discipline”²⁸⁹. On December 21 of the same year, together with the other members of the Soviet political and military elite, the new marshal celebrated Stalin’s birthday at the latter’s house, “till 5:30 in the morning!” emphasizes Dimitrov²⁹⁰.

It was precisely this reform which drew Trotsky’s indignation, who took up an old accusation: the Red Army “has not stood aside, however, from the processes of degeneration 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.” The text cited here in a way suggests that such an opposition could have drawn in Tukhachevsky: who

in 1921 had even fought, “[somewhat too impetuous](#)”, for the formation of the “[international general staff](#)” could hardly have identified with the abandonment of internationalism and the “[deification of the status quo](#)” that had taken root in the USSR. What can we say about this new text? The agitation in the army continued and seems to intensify: only now the struggle on the horizon appeared to be between the “faction of the Bolshevik-Leninists” and the Bonapartist generals, but rather between a consistent part of the army and its top brass against the Thermidorian, traitorous leaders in the Kremlin. The Red Army’s resistance or rebellion against the central power would be all the more justified by the fact that the new course of policy was really “[a kind of two-fold state revolution](#)” that, breaking with the October Revolution, arbitrarily proceeded to the “[abolition of the militia](#)” and “[the restoration of officers’ castes 18 years after their revolutionary abolition](#)”²⁹¹; rebelling against Stalin, the Red Army would actually be stopping the coups designed by him and restoring the revolutionary law. As if all this were not enough, the Trotskyist “[Bulletin of the Opposition](#)” announced an imminent revolt of the army²⁹². A measure adopted in Moscow a month before the process was perhaps aimed addressing this potential danger: “[On 29 March 1937 the Politburo issued a resolution mandating retirement or dipatch to civilian work for Red Army officers who had been expelled from the party for political reasons](#)”²⁹³.

Rumors spread in the circles of the White Russians in Paris about the military coup was preparing to further feed the climate of suspicion and concern in Moscow²⁹⁴. In short: in the second half of January 1937, Czechoslovakian president Eduard Beneš received information regarding the secret “negotiations” under way between the Third Reich and “[the anti-Stalin clique in the U.S.S.R., Marshal Tukhatchevsky, Rykov and others](#)”²⁹⁵: were there any grounds for the accusation, or was it all staged by the German secret services? Still in early 1937, speaking with Foreign Minister Konstantin von Neurath, Hitler rejected the idea of improving relations with the USSR, but added: “It would be different if things in Moscow developed in the direction of an absolute despotism based on the military. In this case we could not legitimately squander the opportunity to make our presence felt again in Russia”²⁹⁶. Beneš sent word of the “negotiations” to the French leaders, “[whose confidence in the Franco-Soviet Pact was considerably weakened](#)”²⁹⁷. Thus it was not only Stalin who believed the voices or information conveyed by the Czechoslovak president. On the other hand, even after the end of World War II, Churchill seemed to support Moscow’s story while noting that, as discussed later (see below, p. 313), the

purge had struck “pro-German elements”, to which he added: “Stalin was conscious of a personal debt to President Benes”²⁹⁸.

The question however remains open, and a private conversation of Hitler’s in the summer of 1942 barely helps with a conclusive answer: despite not mentioning a specific military conspiracy, he noted that Stalin had serious reason to fear being murdered by Tukhachevsky’s circle²⁹⁹. If that had been set up under the direct supervision or consensus of the Führer³⁰⁰, perhaps he would have boasted about it, at a time when the first resounding successes of the Wehrmacht were still in recent memory.

The “proceedings” and execution having already taken place, in considering the key question (“was there really a military conspiracy?”), Trotsky gives an answer that gives us much to think about: “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 a totalitarian regime, without any doubt every opposition is the embryo of a conspiracy”; in this case an “embryo” was the aspiration of the generals to protect the army “from the demoralizing intrigues of the GPU.” Was this a refutation of the thesis of the conspiracy or a recognition of it, expressed in an “Aesopian language” imposed by the circumstances? The fervently Trotskyist Russian historian previously mentioned (Rogovin) calls attention to this ambiguous statement, and ends up adopting the thesis of Tukhachevsky’s “anti-Stalinist conspiracy”, placing it in a “Bolshevik” political context rather than a bourgeois one³⁰¹.

In conclusion; doubts remain, although it seems difficult to explain everything that happened through the usual *deus ex machina*: a power-hungry and bloodthirsty dictator, eager to surround himself with puppets ready for blind and unconditional obedience. Even greater is the fragility of this explanation insofar as in 1932 Stalin had no difficulties when he attended, along with Molotov, the classes of the director of the Military Academy, Boris M. Shaposhnikov; and these classes, taught by a highly respected strategist who was not a member of the Communist Party, Stalin seemed to have benefitted greatly³⁰². 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”³⁰³. The posts of

Tukhachevsky and his collaborators were occupied by generals who, far from being passive executors of orders, expressed their opinions openly and argued with independent judgment³⁰⁴, not hesitating to contradict the supreme leader, who on the other hand encouraged and occasionally rewarded such an attitude (see above, p. 53).

Three civil wars

In order to not get stuck in the caricature of Stalin drawn by Trotsky and Khrushchev for two different but equally bitter political struggles, we must not lose sight of the fact that the path that began in October 1917 was marked by three civil wars. The first saw the confrontation between revolution on one side and the front formed by its various enemies on the other, supported by capitalist powers fixated with the containment of the Bolshevik infection by all possible means. The second developed from the revolution from the top and from the outside, and consists substantially, despite some impulses from below by the peasantry, of the collectivization of agriculture. The third is the one that fractured the Bolshevik ruling group.

The last one was more complex to the extent that it was characterized by high mobility and even dramatic changes ahead. We have seen Bukharin, on the occasion of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, momentarily considering a kind of coup against Lenin, who he accused of wanting to transform “the party into a dung heap.” But if at this time Bukharin was placed in positions close to those of Trotsky, to the latter Bukharin would become the main incarnation of Thermidor and bureaucratic betrayal ten years later: “**With Stalin against Bukharin?—Yes. With Bukharin against Stalin?—Never!**”³⁰⁵ It is a time when Trotsky seemed to be warning Stalin about Bukharin: the latter could soon be able to “**hunt down Stalin as a Trotskyist, just as Stalin had hunted down Zinoviev.**” In 1928 the rupture was already beginning between Stalin and Bukharin, who indeed, because of the abandonment of the NEP, began “**describing Stalin privately as the representative of neo-Trotskyism**” and as “**an unprincipled intriguer**”, ultimately the worst and most dangerous enemy within the party³⁰⁶. The former member of the duumvirate thus headed towards a future bloc with Trotsky. Finally the different oppositions coalesced against the winner; it is clear that in the deadly conflict between the Bolsheviks alignments shifted quickly until the last moment.

In a country that lacked a liberal tradition and was characterized on the one hand by an extended state of emergency, and on the other by the persistence of an ideology inclined to consider the norms which govern the rule of law as merely “formal”, the third civil war assumed the ferocity of a religious war. Trotsky, who “considered himself the only man suitable to be leader of the revolution”, tended to use “any means to throw the ‘false Messiah’ from the throne”³⁰⁷. A “furious faith” also inspired the opposite side and Stalin was determined to liquidate any danger of conspiracy, even the most remote, to the extent that the clouds of war accumulating on the horizon threatened the very existence of Russia and the country of socialism and therefore represented a mortal danger both to the national cause and to the social cause, two causes for which Stalin felt the conviction to be the leader.

Not always easily distinguishable (acts of terrorism and sabotage could be the expression of counter-revolution or a new revolution), the three civil wars were in turn intertwined with the intervention of one or another great power. The convoluted and tragic set of these conflicts is dissolved in the context that was described in different ways by Trotsky first and Khrushchev second, telling the simple and uplifting fable of the monster who with only a touch transforms gold into blood and mud.

Between the twentieth century and its prior historical roots, between the history of Marxism and the history of Russia: the origins of “Stalinism”

A catastrophe foretold

So far we have concentrated on the intertwining between the ideological, political, and military contradictions within the revolutionary process, on the one hand, and international conflicts, on the other. But the combination would not be complete if it did not also involve the dimension of the long duration of Russian history. Observers from the most diverse ideologies had warned of approaching catastrophe long before 1917 and even well before the formation of the Bolshevik Party. In 1811, from the city of St. Petersburg, which was still shaking from the peasant revolt led by Pugachev (illiterate, but endowed with great political intuition) and quelled only with difficulty a few decades earlier, Joseph de Maistre expressed concern that a new “European” revolution could be set off, this time led by an intellectual class of popular background or sentiment; by a “Pugachev from the university”. By comparison, the events experienced in France seemed mere child’s play: “I cannot express all that one could fear as a result”³⁰⁸.

Let us jump ahead about half a century. A prophecy even more in tune with reality—really surprising in its lucidity—can be read in an article on Russia published by Marx in an American newspaper (the *New York Daily Tribune* of January 17, 1859): if the nobility continued to oppose the emancipation of the peasants, a great revolution will break out; “[the reign of terror of these half-Asiatic serfs will be something unequaled in history](#)”³⁰⁹.

Immediately after the revolution of 1905, Prime Minister Serge Witte would both highlight the unsustainability of the Russian situation and alert the czar to 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.³¹⁰

Witte was also involved in the fierce repression directed against the 1905 revolution and the often brutal *jacqueries* that often accompanied it: Interior Minister P. N. Durnovo ordered “governors to ‘proceed with the immediate execution’ of the rebels, and the burning and destruction of villages from which the turmoil had come”; what followed were multiple “military courts”, “collective reprisals”, death squads, and pogroms against the Jews, who were accused of fueling the subversion. This situation continued until the outbreak of the war. The Interior Minister himself warned: “Revolution in its most extreme form and an irreversible anarchy will be the only predictable results of an unfortunate conflict with the Kaiser”³¹¹.

And this was exactly what happened. Let’s look at the big picture of Russia on the eve of the Bolsheviks’ rise to power. The myth of a country happily following the path of liberalism and democracy after the collapse of the autocracy had already fallen into crisis. This myth was cultivated at the time by Churchill, who, as justification for his policy of intervention, accused the Bolsheviks of being fed by “German gold” and overthrowing the “Russian Republic” and “Russian parliament” by force³¹². It would be easy to accuse the English statesman of hypocrisy: he knew that, between February and October, London had regularly supported coup attempts aimed at restoring the tsarist autocracy or imposing a military dictatorship. Kerensky himself had emphasized that “the French and British governments seize[d] every opportunity to sabotage the Provisional Government” of Russia³¹³. And yet, in exile in the United States, the Menshevik leader continued to cultivate the myth until the last moment, accusing the Bolsheviks of double treason: first against the fatherland and second against the “newborn Russian democracy”³¹⁴.

If after the end of World War II and the rise of the Soviet Union as a superpower the accusation of treason against the nation becomes obsolete—Kerensky was one of the few defeated Menshevik leaders who maintained it—it was still common to talk of Bolshevik betrayal of Russian democracy, with its culmination in Stalin’s terror. But this assertion does not withstand any historical analysis. It was not only the obstinacy of the leaders who emerged in the

February days (first of all Kerensky), persisting in a bloodbath that the vast majority of the population was determined to end: this was a political line that could only be carried forward through the iron fist and terror on the front and at the rear. Nor was it the recurrent attempts to establish a military dictatorship (with which Churchill was not at all unfamiliar). 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 persistent myths about 1917, “which has now lost all credibility”³¹⁵. Observe the actual development of events: “The crowd exacted a violent revenge against the officials of the old regime. Policemen were hunted down, lynched and killed brutally”³¹⁶. In St. Petersburg “in a few days the death toll reached approximately 1,500”, with often ferocious lynching of the most hated representatives of the old regime; “the worst violence was perpetrated by the Kronstadt sailors, who mutilated and murdered hundreds of officers”³¹⁷. The mutineers were very young recruits: “the normal rules of naval discipline did not apply” to them, and the officers took the opportunity to treat them “with more than the usual sadistic brutality”; hence they exacted revenge with an “awesome ferocity”³¹⁸.

The situation escalated further in September, after the attempted coup by General Lavr Kornilov: there was an increase in the popular executions and murders that accompanied an “unprecedented violence”. Indeed, “the officers were tortured (with eyes and tongues torn out, ears cut off, nails in their jacket pads) and mutilated before being executed, hung upside down, impaled. According to General Brusilov, a large number of young officers committed suicide to escape a horrible death”³¹⁹. What is more, the soldiers’ “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” for committing suicide³²⁰. Moreover, anger was already present before October, and “in the resolutions of the Soviets, then largely dominated by the Socialist Revolutionaries, ‘the bloodthirsty capitalists, the bourgeois that suck the blood of the people’ were stigmatized as ‘enemies of the working people’³²¹.

On the other hand, “the crisis of trade between town and country, present well before the Bolsheviks took power” created a new and sharp focus of violence. In the tragic situation that arose after the catastrophe of the war, with depressed agricultural production and hoarding of the scarce food resources that were available, city dwellers ensured their survival through quite radical measures:

before the October Revolution, a minister who was also a “recognized liberal economist” announced that, if market incentives failed, he was in favor of requisitioning by “armed force”; the fact is that “the practice of requisitioning” was common to “all parties in the conflict”³²².

The linking of these multiple contradictions provoked a bloody anarchy, with the “collapse of all authority and all institutional structure”, with the explosion of savage violence from bottom to top (perpetrated first and foremost by the millions of deserting or discharged soldiers) and with “a general brutality and militarization in social behavior and political practices”³²³. It is “a brutality without any possible points of comparison with the brutality known in Western societies”³²⁴.

To understand this tragedy, it is necessary to take into account “the process by which social violence extends from areas of military violence”, the “pollution of the rearguard by the violence exercised by soldiers, peasants, and deserters detached from military discipline”, by the “millions of deserters from the decaying Russian army”, the increasing volatility of the “boundaries between the front and the rear, between the civil and military spheres”. In other words: “the violence of the military zones spread everywhere” and society as a whole not only fell into chaos and anarchy, but ended up falling prey to an “unprecedented brutality”³²⁵.

For this reason, we must start from World War I and the crisis and disintegration of the Russian army. It might be even a good idea to go further back. The exceptional charge of violence hanging over 20th-century Russia can be explained in light of two phenomena: “the great *jacquerie* of Autumn 1917”, whose origins were rooted centuries before and for precisely that reason unleashed a blind and indiscriminate violence against the landlords’ property, homes, and lives, besides a very strong resentment against the city itself. The second process was “the disintegration of the tsarist army, the largest army in history, composed of 95% peasants”³²⁶.

The oppression, exploitation, and humiliation of a boundless mass of peasants at the hands of a small aristocratic elite, who considered their own people foreigners, of a different and inferior race, were harbingers of a catastrophe of unprecedented proportions. The social conflict was intensified further by World War I, in which the noble officers daily exercised literal life-and-death power over the servant-soldiers: they would even resort to artillery at the first signs of

crisis to try to maintain discipline in the front and rear, instead of dealing with it case by case³²⁷. The collapse of the old regime was the time for revenge and retaliation that had been fermented and buried for centuries. Prince G. E. Lvov recognized this self-critically: the “**revenge of the serfs**” was a reckoning with those who had for centuries refused “**to treat the peasants as people rather than dogs**”³²⁸.

Unfortunately, precisely because it was revenge, it assumed forms that were not only brutal but also purely destructive: “**Thousands of drunken workers and soldiers were roaming through the city looting stores, breaking into houses, beating up and robbing people in the streets**”. What happened in the fields was even worse: “**Whole units of deserters took over regions in the rear and lived as bandits.**” The joint agitation of disbanded soldiers and peasants stoked in Russia a devastating fire under the banner of not only the *jacquerie* (burning manors and often murdering their owners) but also Luddism (destroying agricultural machinery which had reduced demand for wage labor in previous years) 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**”³²⁹.

The Russian state saved by advocates of the “withering away of the state”

Overall, the situation created after the February revolution and the collapse of the old regime can be characterized as follows:

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.³³⁰

What an irony of history that a party predicting and advocating the final extinction of the State would itself reintroduce the State! A ruthless impetus was needed to bring order to a world that, dulled by centuries of isolation and oppression, saw a new period of barbarity after the war, the dissolution of the old regime, and anarchy and chaos growing everywhere. But it would be trivially ideological to focus only on the recourse to terroristic violence taken by one of the actors involved. Let's look at how the new emerging power was

the actors involved. Let's look at how the new emerging power was counteracted:

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, 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 centres 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.³³¹

What was the cause of this savage violence? Was it the policies put into place by the Bolsheviks? Only in part: in 1921-1922 there struck "a terrible famine [...] directly caused by a year of drought and heavy frosts"³³². Moreover, the peasant revolt was also a protest against a state "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 labour teams and robbed them of their food"³³³; it was thus a protest against a catastrophe that had begun in 1914.

With regard to the Bolshevik policies it is also necessary to distinguish the measures that beat down the peasants senselessly from those that had a completely different character. Consider the collective farms that had been established in 1920 and were often formed by communist militants from the city, driven not only by their ideals, but also by the hunger that gripped 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." In this case too the hostility of the peasants was second to none, now that they "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"³³⁴. Even more bitter was the experience suffered between the late 19th and early 20th centuries by the populists, determined to "Go to the People" and help them establish

cooperatives, but quickly forced to revise the idealized image they had of the Russian peasant. Here is how one of them, Mikhail Romas, lived:

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

The naive populists barely managed to save themselves by running, he ran away.³³⁵

Once again emerges the prospect of long historical scope that is behind the violence that was unleashed in a Russia in crisis. This also applies to the horrible pogroms against Jews and Bolsheviks, especially the second to the extent that they were suspected of being manipulated by the first. Let us again call on the British historian previously quoted:

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 sabre 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 regard to this, “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”³³⁶.

Stalin and the end of the Second Time of Troubles

The Russian Revolution can now be seen in a new light: “Without a doubt, the victory of the Bolsheviks in the civil war was ultimately due to its extraordinary ability to ‘build the state’, an ability their opponents lacked”³³⁷. Drawing attention to this issue in the Russia of 1918 were some of the Bolsheviks’ enemies. Pavel Miliukov credited the Bolsheviks with knowing “to reestablish the state.” Vassily Maklakov went further: “The new government has begun to restore the state apparatus, to restore order, to fight against chaos. In this field the Bolsheviks have shown energy, or to speak further, an undeniable talent”³³⁸. Three years later, even an ultra-conservative American newspaper read: “Lenin is the only man in Russia who has the power to maintain order. If he was overthrown, only chaos would reign”³³⁹.

The revolutionary dictatorship that emerged from the October Revolution also assumed a national role. Gramsci understood this fully when, in June 1919, he celebrated the Bolsheviks as the protagonists of a great revolution, yes, but also for demonstrating their revolutionary grandeur by forming a leadership group of excellent, capable “statesmen”, saving the whole nation from the catastrophe which had been escalated by the old regime and the old ruling class (see above, p. 77). The year after, Lenin himself would mention it indirectly when, polemicizing against extremism, he stressed that “[revolution is impossible without a nation-wide crisis \(affecting both the exploited and the exploiters\)](#)”; the political force that shows itself capable of solving precisely such a crisis will achieve hegemony and be victorious³⁴⁰. 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](#)”³⁴¹. A few years later, in 1927, Walter Benjamin, describing Moscow, incisively pointed out “the strong national sentiment that Bolshevism has developed in all Russians without distinction”³⁴². Soviet power had managed to give a new identity and a new self-awareness to a nation that had not only been put to a terrible test, but also in a way disoriented and adrift, totally lacking any firm points of reference.

And yet, the “crisis of the entire Russian nation” had not really ended. Having exploded with all its violence in 1914, but with a long incubation period behind it, it has occasionally been defined as a “Second Time of Troubles”, in analogy

to the one that raged in Russia in the 17th century.³⁴³ The struggle between the pretenders to the throne, which had developed alongside the economic crisis and the peasant revolt, as well as the intervention of foreign powers, worsened in the 20th century with the broadening of the conflict to the very principles by which power is legitimated. The traditional power, which adhered to the classic tripartite division of Weber, had been buried with the Tsar's family, though some general may have desperately tried to exhume it; already decomposing after the bitter conflict surrounding the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, the charismatic power did not survive the death of Lenin; finally, the legal power found it extraordinary difficult to assert itself, after a revolution that triumphed waving an ideology completely traversed by the utopia of the withering away of the state, in a country in which the hatred of the peasants for their masters was traditionally expressed in violently anti-state tones.

If a charismatic power was still possible, its most probable realization rested on the figure of Trotsky, the great organizer of the Red Army, brilliant orator and writer who claimed to embody the hopes of victory of the world revolution, from which came the legitimacy of his aspiration to rule the party and the state. Stalin, however, was the embodiment of legal-traditional power that was trying to take hold by effort: unlike Trotsky, a late arrival to Bolshevism, Stalin represented the historical continuity of the party that led the revolution and therefore the bearer of the new law; in addition, affirming the possibility of socialism in one (large) country, Stalin gave a new dignity and identity to the Russian nation, so it surmounted the fearsome crisis—of ideas as well as of the economy—that followed the defeat and chaos of World War I, to finally find a historical continuity. But this was precisely why his opponents proclaimed his wholesale “betrayal”, whereas for Stalin and his followers, the traitors were those who, with the risk entailed in facilitating the intervention of foreign powers, ultimately endangered the survival of the Russian nation, and 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 legitimacy.

For all of these reasons, the Second Time of Troubles ended not with the defeat of the defenders of the old regime supported by foreign powers, as is commonly held, but rather with the end of the third civil war (the one that divided the Bolshevik leadership group) and with the end of the conflict between opposing principles of legitimation; therefore not in 1921 but in 1937. Although the Time of Troubles proper were left behind with the arrival of the Romanov dynasty,

17th-century Russia saw a definitive consolidation with the ascension to the throne of Peter the Great. Having gone through its most acute phase in the years between the outbreak of World War I to the end of the Entente's intervention, the Second Time of Troubles led to the strengthening of Stalin's power and the industrialization and "Westernization" driven by him in preparation for an approaching war.

Exalted utopia and the extended state of emergency

Obviously, the long duration of the Second Time of Troubles is not merely an objective fact. What role did the intellectual and political strata play in its prolongation, as well as the ideology that inspired them? One school of thought, referencing Arendt, is dedicated mainly to finding the ideological original sin that could typify those revolutions which developed more tortuously. A different approach seems more fruitful to me, which takes its impetus from a comparative sociology of the intellectual and political strata. In the movements that led to revolution, in France as in Russia, we see the work of the "[beggars of the pen](#)"—*gueux plumés*, as defined by Burke—or the "Pugachevs of the university", as defined by Maistre. These were unpropertied intellectuals, despised as "abstract" by their adversaries. There is no doubt that propertied intellectuals came to the fall of the old regime already having real political experience, including political practice, behind them. In the United States, slave owners, from whose ranks came the most eminent intellectuals and statesmen (for 32 of the first 36 years of the history of the American Republic, all who occupied the Presidency were slaveowners), did not simply enjoy their wealth as a "peculiar" kind of private property along with the others: over their slaves they wielded a power that was executive, legislative, and judicial, all at the same time. The England of the Glorious Revolution can be considered not much different: landed property (from which often came liberal intellectuals and leaders) was very much represented in the House of Lords and House of Commons, and together with the gentry had direct control over justices of the peace, and held the judiciary as well. This road to power was less intended for unpropertied intellectuals. Its abstract nature contributed to making the process of stabilization following the revolution more problematic and tormented. There is also another side of the coin: it is precisely this "abstraction" and their separation from property that made it possible for the "beggars of the pen" to support abolishing slavery in the colonies, and for the "Pugachevs of the University" to support the process of decolonization, which would later be developed at the global level.

Undoubtedly, ideology also played a role in the long duration of the Second Time of Troubles. It is immediately necessary, however, to add that it was not only the ideology of the Bolsheviks. We have seen the messianic hopes that accompanied the collapse of the tsarist autocracy and we know that the theme of the revolution betrayed reached beyond the borders of Russia and the communist movement. Only a few months or weeks after October 1917, Kautsky points out how the Bolsheviks did not keep or were not able to keep any of the promises they made at the time they took 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 appearance, the dictatorship of the proletariat has only destroyed Russian capital in order to make room for German and American capital.³⁴⁴

The Bolsheviks had taken power promising “the spread, under the impulse of the Russian experience, of revolution in the capitalist countries.” What became of this prospect of “outstanding boldness and fascinating glamour”? It was undermined by a program of “immediate peace, at whatever price”³⁴⁵. Paradoxically, Kautsky’s criticism of Brest-Litovsk in 1918 was not very different from what we have already seen, especially from Bukharin.

Aside from international relations, even more catastrophic to Kautsky was always the internal balance of the October Revolution:

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 [...].³⁴⁶

Again we are led to think of those who, within the Bolshevik Party as well, described the persistence of private property in land and the NEP as an abandonment of the socialist path.

The subsequent collectivization of agriculture did not end with the condemnation

of treason; this, precisely during the mid-1930s, found its organic expression in Trotsky's book dedicated to the "revolution betrayed". It is interesting to note how the fundamental allegations in this indictment were somehow already present in Kautsky's 1918 book. Let's see how the eminent social-democratic theorist argues: if individual private property is also replaced by cooperative ownership, it should not be forgotten that the latter is only "[a new form of capitalism](#)." Likewise, "[nationalization is not yet socialism](#)", and not only owing to the fact that the market and commodity production continue to exist³⁴⁷. There is something else. Liquidation of a certain form of capitalism in no way implies the liquidation of capitalism as such: the new power "[can certainly destroy much capitalist property](#)" but this still does not mean the "[establishment of a Socialist system of production](#)." In reality, a new exploiting class had emerged or was emerging in the Soviet Union: "[In the place of the former capitalists, now become proletarians, will enter proletarians or intellectuals become capitalists](#)"³⁴⁸. Though Trotsky, unlike some of his more radical followers, also preferred to speak of "bureaucracy" rather than a new capitalist class, the analogies between the two discourses compared here remain clear, especially because for the Russian revolutionary as well the "[Soviet bureaucracy](#)" seemed to "[set itself the goal of outdoing \[...\] the Western bourgeoisie](#)."³⁴⁹

To be sure, there was no lack of differences. For Kautsky, the Bolshevik leadership group was one that had abandoned and in a way betrayed the noble ideals of socialism; furthermore, rather than being a choice and a subjective and conscious renunciation, the abandonment was an expression of the "impotence of all revolutionary attempts that do not take the objective social and economic conditions into account"³⁵⁰. Compared with Trotsky, Kautsky's argument seems more convincing, as it does not naively attempt to explain gigantic objective social processes (which were involved in a number of other countries besides Russia) by denouncing the betrayal of a limited political stratum, or even of a unique personality fulfilling the role of *deus ex machina*! There was, however, a time when the German Social Democratic leader also introduced the category of subjective and conscious betrayal. The Bolsheviks had committed this when, willfully ignoring the immaturity of the objective conditions, they abandoned the "[cult of force](#)" that nevertheless "[Marxism condemns strongly](#)"³⁵¹. It was only the initial decision to spark the October Revolution that amounted to a renunciation of the noble ideals of Marx and socialism; in this case, though, the charge of treason implicates Trotsky no less than Lenin and Stalin. It remains to be seen whether Kautsky's condemnation of the Bolsheviks' "cult of force" is

compatible with reproaching them at Brest-Litovsk for wanting “[immediate peace, at whatever price](#)”.

More important than the differences between the two Marxist theorists discussed here are the similarities. In both arguments the messianic vision for society’s future created a vast gap between the beauty of true socialism and communism, on one side, and the irremediable mediocrity of the present and the real, on the other: Trotsky attempted to fill that gap by turning to the category of treason, and Kautsky by the category of the objective immaturity of Russia, which inevitably led to the distortion and betrayal of the original ideals. For 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 goes without saying: “[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](#)”³⁵². Again we see the desires and prognoses of Trotsky.

Indeed, having appeared as early as the February Revolution, the messianic vision of a new society that had yet to be built came to be defended, in different and competing ways, by quite a wide range of people. This was a dialectic that was most clearly visible during the introduction of the NEP. The outrage was not limited to important sectors of the Bolshevik party, and the indignation was not always motivated by concern about faithfulness to Marxist orthodoxy. The Christian Pierre Pascal lamented the arrival of a new “aristocracy” and the formation of a “counterrevolutionary” process, and the great writer Joseph Roth was upset with the “Americanization” occurring in Soviet Russia, losing not only the road to socialism but also its very soul, thus falling into “spiritual emptiness”³⁵³. The cries of resentment for the defrauded and betrayed messianic hopes corresponded with the shouts of triumph from the bourgeois camp due to the fact that, by introducing the NEP, Lenin too—they argued—was forced to turn his back on Marx and socialism³⁵⁴. Here the category of betrayal reappears, but this time with a positive value judgment.

Strangely, the front pushing the Bolsheviks towards a new revolution was quite large and heterogeneous. The horrors of war had led Pascal to prophesize with apocalyptic tones, in August 1917, “[a universal social revolution](#)” of an unprecedented radicality³⁵⁵. On the opposite front, adversaries and enemies of the October Revolution were ready to celebrate their failure every time Russia

attempted to move from the phase of messianic hope to the less fervent but more realistic phase of building a new society. All this could not help but reinforce a trend already quite present in the Bolshevik Party, and thus also in the spiritual climate brought about by the war, towards further radicalizing the utopian themes of Marx's thought. In this sense, the ideology that contributed to the prolongation of the Second Time of Troubles was itself rooted in the concrete objective situation.

From abstract universalism to the charge of treason

Let us now take an overview of the objections surrounding the charge of "betrayal". Formulating the problem in philosophical terms, we could say that despite the significant differences between them, despite being formulated from quite varied ideological and political positions, these objections share a vision of universalism that it would be appropriate to examine now. Prompted by the need to counter and overcome the domestic selfishness of the bourgeois family, which focuses exclusively on its inner circle and ignores the tragedies that unfold outside it, Kollontai called on communists to cultivate a sense of universal responsibility, overcoming the distinction between "yours" and "mine", including with respect to reproduction, and fighting alongside others for what is common to all, for what is "ours". We have seen Trotsky draw attention precisely to the catastrophic consequences that occur when parents ignore the *particular* responsibility they have for their children. That is, by skipping the immediate duty of care towards one's narrower circle of relatives, without first starting from a *particular* and inescapable obligation, universal responsibility is revealed as vacuous and even becomes an instrument of evasion. In this sense, according to Lenin, Kollontai's theory was "unsocial"³⁵⁶.

But though they asserted it in relation to the problem of the family, the Bolshevik leaders tend to forget the unity of the universal and the particular when addressing the national question. At the time of its founding, the Third International began with the premise that it was an international party of the proletariat, called to achieve the universal emancipation of humanity, without being led astray by "so-called 'national' interests"³⁵⁷; similarly, we saw Kollontai theorise a sort of universal family within which "mine" and "yours" are completely dissolved into "ours". Later, the Third International would go through a complicated process of apprenticeship that would lead it, with Dimitrov's *Report* to the Seventh Congress of 1935, to denounce all forms of

“national nihilism” as dangerous³⁵⁸. But wasn’t the rediscovery of the nation a betrayal of internationalism? While, for Kollontai, the permanence of the institution of the family, and the particular attention directed to one’s own children, were synonymous with selfish pettiness 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](#)” meant giving into or indulging “[social-patriotism](#)” and social-chauvinism, which were responsible, among other things, for the bloodshed of World War I. Additionally, “[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](#)”³⁵⁹. These statements were from 1928; ten years later the Fourth International was founded, taking up (and later radicalizing) the abstract universalism of its beginnings and therefore defining itself as a “world party of socialist revolution”.

It would be easy to turn the criticisms Trotsky used against Kollontai back against him. Just as ignoring and avoiding one’s particular responsibilities to one’s own children and closest relatives does not constitute a real overcoming of domestic selfishness, in the same way, losing sight of the fact that the concrete possibilities and tasks of revolutionary transformation take place firstly on a given national terrain is not at all synonymous with internationalism. Distancing oneself from or being indifferent to the country in which one lives may well take on a meaning that is anything but progressive: in Tsarist Russia, Herzen, an author whom Lenin appreciated, stated that the aristocracy was much “[more cosmopolitan than the revolution](#)”; far from having a national basis, its authority rested on denying even the possibility of a national basis, on the “deep division [...] between the civilized classes and the peasants”, between a quite narrow elite, inclined to behave like a superior race, and the immense majority of the population³⁶⁰. To not confront the racialization of the subordinate classes and to deny the ideas of nation and national responsibility is to not be revolutionary.

Stalin took this matter into account, as exemplified by his speech on February 4, 1931. On that occasion he presented himself as a revolutionary and internationalist leader, at the same time a statesman and a Russian national leader, dedicated to solving the nation’s long-standing problems: “[we Bolsheviks, who have made three revolutions, who emerged victorious from the bitter civil war](#)”, must also address the problem of overcoming Russia’s traditional industrial backwardness and military weakness. “[In the past we had](#)

[no fatherland, nor could we have had one](#)³⁶¹; with the collapse of the old regime and the rise of Soviet power, national nihilism was more foolish than ever; the cause of the revolution was at the same time the cause of the nation. The emphasis now seemed to shift from class struggle (with its internationalist dimension) to national economic construction. But to be more exact, in the particular political situation that had been created, the class struggle appeared as the socialist country's task of economic and technological development, which would put it in a position to face the terrible challenges ahead and to make a real contribution to the international cause of emancipation. The class struggle not only assumed a national dimension but also seemed to adopt, in Soviet Russia, the shape of a banal and prosaic task: "[in the period of reconstruction, technique decides everything](#)", and so it was necessary to "[study technique](#)" and "[master science](#)." In reality, this new task was no less difficult and inspiring than capturing the Winter Palace: "[Bolsheviks must master technique](#)" and themselves become "[experts](#)"; certainly, reaching this goal would be anything but easy, but "[there are no fortresses that Bolsheviks cannot capture](#)"³⁶². Politics prior to the Great Patriotic War found their first expression in the years during which Soviet Russia applied all its skill towards a gigantic effort of industrialization and of strengthening its national defense.

We have seen that, on the eve of Nazi aggression, Stalin stressed the need to connect "[national feelings and the notion of a homeland](#)", "[a healthy, properly understood nationalism with proletarian internationalism](#)" (see above, p. 30). In the concrete situation that followed the expansionist offensive of the Third Reich, the march of universality passed through the concrete and particular struggles of peoples who were determined not to be reduced to slaves in the service of Hitler's master race*; what really advanced the cause of internationalism was the resistance of the nations most directly threatened by Nazi imperialism's plans for their enslavement. But three years earlier, confirming the fact that they were in the presence of a learning process favored or imposed by the concrete need to develop national resistance struggles against imperialism, Mao Zedong 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](#)."³⁶³ In similar terms, Gramsci distinguishes between "cosmopolitanism" and "internationalism", which knows and in fact *must* know how to be at the same time "deeply national".

In addition to the rejection of the nuclear family and the theorizing of a kind of collective parenthood and motherhood (“our children”), at the general political level, abstract universalism can be seen clearly in the proposal of a “collective leadership”, which again appears to be the dissolution of personal responsibilities and individual positions. It is no coincidence that for some time Kollontai was part of the Workers’ Opposition, whose slogans at the factory level and in the various jobs in the party, the union, the administration, and the state were: “[power of a collective body](#)”, “[collective will](#)”, “[common thought](#)”, “[collective management](#)”³⁶⁴. In this context can be placed the messianic hope of the complete dissolution of the distinction between “mine” and “yours” in the economic sphere as well, with the subsequent condemnation of more than just a particular system of production and distribution of the social wealth, but of the “money economy” and the market, of private property as such, however limited and narrow it might be. In all these cases, the desired universality is presented in pristine purity, without passing through the mediation and interpenetration of particularity. And it is this cult of abstract universality that finds betrayal every time particularity sees its rights or its strength acknowledged.

The dialectic of revolution and the genesis of abstract universalism

But how can we explain the emergence of a vision and a purism that is, at first sight, so naive and lacking a sense of reality? It would be no less naive and unrealistic to attribute them to one or another unique personality. In fact, there is an objective dialectic at work here. In the wake of the struggle against the inequality, privilege, discrimination, injustice, and oppression of the old regime and against the particularism, exclusivism, pettiness, and selfishness charged of the old ruling class, the most radical revolutions were driven to express a strong, exalted, and grandiloquent vision of the principles of equality and universality. It is a view that, on the one hand, with the momentum and enthusiasm it entailed, facilitated the overthrow of the old social relations and the old political institutions; on the other hand, it made the task of building the new order more complex and problematic.

To what extent would it live up to the promises, ambitions, and hopes that preceded its birth? Did it run the risk of the distortions that were so passionately denounced in the old regime being reproduced in a new form? This step is particularly delicate due to the fact that the most radical revolutions cultivated

ambitious projects of political and social transformation, while precisely because of this strangeness and remoteness from the existing order, experienced the rise to power of a ruling strata without a solid political experience behind them and furthermore needed to build, even to invent, a new order, not only a political one but also a social one. Under these circumstances, the boundary becomes very volatile between ambitious political projects and high-sounding, vacuous phrases, between concrete utopia (a horizon that is remote but that nevertheless guides and stimulates the real process of transformation) and abstract, disorienting utopia (synonymous, in the last instance, with avoiding and escaping reality).

To be victorious in the long term and not just in the short term, a revolution must be able to give concrete and lasting content to the ideas of equality and universality that accompanied the taking of power. And in doing so, the new leadership group is called to refine ideas in the naive form they tend to assume in moments of excitement, and is also called upon to perform such refinement not in an empty and aseptic space, but in a historically rich space where the presence and weight of the economic and political compatibilities, power relations, contradictions, and conflicts that inevitably arise can be felt. It is during this difficult step that the revolutionary front, until then characterized, at least apparently, as acting in chorus, begins to show the first cracks or internal fractures, and disillusion, disenchantment, and accusations of betrayal set in.

It is a process and a dialectic that Hegel analyzes with great lucidity and depth with regard to the French Revolution³⁶⁵. He develops it under the banner of the “[universal subject](#)”, the “[universal will](#)”, the “[universal consciousness](#)”. In this stage, at the time of the destruction of the old regime, he observes 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, with all its intermediate social bodies dissolved, had been completely dismantled into a myriad of individuals rejecting all traditional authorities as no longer legitimate, demanding not only freedom and equality but also participation in public life and in each stage of the decision-making process. In the situation following this enthusiasm and exaltation, in which it is as if authority and power as such were suspended in nothingness, there arises an anarchic messianism, which demands “absolute freedom”, and is prepared to denounce all contamination and restriction, true or presumed, of the universal as treason.

A new order presupposes a redistribution of individuals in “[spiritual spheres](#)”, in social organizations, in intermediary bodies, but constituted and organized in new and different ways reflecting of the principles of the revolution. In any case, from the point of view of anarchic messianism, the new articulation of society, whatever it may be, appears to be a denial of universality. 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 illuminating analysis of the dialectic that developed alongside the French Revolution but also and even more clearly in the October Revolution, when the pathos of the universal was heard even more strongly, both in its most naive and its most mature forms. In the situation of exalted universalism preceding the overthrow of the old regime, any division of labor, articulated as it is, becomes synonymous with exclusivity, with the hijacking of the “universal consciousness” and the “universal will” by the work of a bureaucratic and privileged minority.

This applies to social relations as it does to political institutions. There is no order that can fulfill the claim of universality, of direct realization without mediations, made by anarchic messianism. The way in which the latter acts appears clearly once again in 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 here of how the Workers’ Opposition defined the bureaucracy in Soviet Russia: “someone else decides your destiny.” Against this unacceptable expropriation, the demand is for “direction” that will be “collective” at every stage of the decision-making process, with a consequent condemnation of any representative body. Further, it is subject to criticism and even legal regulation, labeled *a priori* as an attempt to fetter or destroy the universal and, therefore, as an expression of an ancient regime that is difficult to

kill.

To “[pass into a deed](#)”, to achieve reality and effectiveness and become “[actual concrete will](#)”, continues Hegel, the universal must find expression in specific individuals, must “[put an individual consciousness in the forefront](#)”. At this messianism and anarchism despair: “[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, on a larger scale, the October Revolution) is this: if it is not to be reduced to an empty phrase, the pathos of the universal should be given a concrete and specific content, but it is precisely this concrete and specific content that is considered a betrayal. It is actually particularity as such which is labeled an element of contamination and negation of the universal. While this view continues to prevail, the liquidation of the old regime is not followed by the construction of a new and 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 universality and terror in Soviet Russia

In Hegel’s analysis, if terror results not from the objective situation but from ideology, then it should be attributed first to anarchic messianism, to the abstract universalism that, in fleeing from any particular, determinate element, can only express itself as “destructive fury.” In considering the Bolshevik revolution, we should not lose sight of the permanent state of emergency caused by the imperialist intervention and siege. Strictly speaking, the most ideological component of terror refers to the cult of universality and abstract utopianism, which hindered the action of the new leadership group and led to its internal fracture. It is interesting to see how, during the mid-1930s, Trotsky, leaving behind the wise criticisms of Kollontai, mocks Stalin’s 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.³⁶⁶

For its contribution to the maintenance of “a stagnant mode of life” and thus of the ideology and particularism of the old regime, the family was identified as an obstacle which the progress of universality was called to tear or strike down. The denunciation of “parental authority” did not decrease but actually increased violence. The same thing resulted from the condemnation of the Constitution and the law as instruments of bourgeois rule. From these premises it is impossible to even imagine a socialist rule of law. Naturally, there is a contradiction between faithfulness to the ideal of the withering away of the state and resorting to state involvement in family relations, but it is the contradiction that constantly manifests between the libertarian rhetoric of abstract universalism and the violent practices it ends up encouraging.

At this point we are obliged to make a further consideration. The tendency to view an element of disturbance or contamination of the universal in the particular as such manifests itself beyond the Bolshevik leadership group. A case in point is the mistrust or hostility with which Rosa Luxemburg covered indigenous movements, reproaching them for forgetting the international cause of the proletariat. After the October Revolution, the great revolutionary criticized the Bolsheviks on the one hand for their lack of respect for democracy or even their active destruction of it, but on the other hand encouraged them “to nip separatist tendencies in the bud with an iron hand” when they emerged in the “‘nonhistoric’ people”, whose “rotted corpses rise from centuries-old graves”³⁶⁷.

And now let us see how Stalin described 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 new development.³⁶⁸

We arrive here at a paradoxical result, at least from the point of view of the usual historical accounts and ideological stereotypes that are dominant today. In speaking of the peoples who “rise from centuries-old graves”, in the language of Luxemburg, or the “forgotten peoples”, in Stalin’s, it is Rosa Luxemburg who demonstrated the more threatening or repressive attitude. Of course, when it comes to judging the one who actually exercised power, the task is to see if praxis has corresponded to theory, and to what extent. It is clear that it is Luxemburg’s abstract universalism that potentially bears a greater burden of violence, since, in the course of its evolution, it has been inclined to read national demands as a deviation from the main route of internationalism and universalism.

We reach a comparable result if we compare Stalin and Kautsky on the national question. To the theory formulated by the German Social Democratic leader, according to which national differences and particularities would or would tend to be dissolve following the victory of socialism in one country or groups of countries that have already developed a bourgeois-democratic society, Stalin replies: such a view, that superficially ignores the “[stability possessed by nations](#)”, would open the doors wide to “[war against the national culture](#)” of minorities or oppressed peoples, to the “[policy of assimilation](#)” and “[colonization](#)”; to the policy that was preferred, for example, by the “Germanisers” and “Russifiers” of Poland³⁶⁹. Also, in this case, a universality that is incapable of embracing the particular is one that encourages violence and oppression. Within the context of comparing the different theories, this abstract universalism is closer to Kautsky than to Stalin.

Like the German Social Democratic leader, Rosa Luxemburg also harshly criticized the Bolsheviks for their “petty-bourgeois” agrarian reform, which gave land to the peasants. Her view may be contrasted with Bukharin’s, according to which, in the conditions of Russia at that time, with the monopoly of Soviet power firmly held by the Bolsheviks, it was precisely “private interests” and the impetus of enrichment for the peasants and other social strata that would have contributed to the development of the productive forces and, ultimately, to the cause of socialism and communism³⁷⁰. Bukharin had made a significant shift: on the occasion of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk he had demonstrated abstract universalism regarding the national question, but now, in relation to the NEP and the agrarian question, the process of building the universal could also be advanced through the appropriate use of private interests. We are witnessing a process of learning and self-critical reflection of extraordinary relevance, which

helps us understand what happened in countries like China and Vietnam in our day. Bukharin continues:

We had imagined things as follows: we take power, we take almost everything into our hands, we immediately establish a planned economy, and nothing would happen if difficulties arise, we would eliminate some of them, we would overcome others, and things would end happily. Now we see clearly that the matter was not resolved that way.

The attempt “to organize production through orders, through coercion” led to catastrophe. Overcoming this “caricature of socialism”, the Communists were forced by experience to take into account the “enormous importance of individual private incentives” aimed at developing the productive forces, “a development of the productive forces that will lead us to socialism and not to the complete restoration of what is called ‘healthy’ capitalism”³⁷¹. Protesting, however, as Trotsky and the opposition had, the “degeneration” of Soviet Russia because of the persistence of private economy in the countryside and the communists’ “class collaboration” with the peasants (and with the bourgeois strata tolerated under the NEP), would have led to the end of the “civil peace” and to a gigantic “St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre”³⁷².

What brought about Bukharin’s failure? Was it only the need to industrialize the country at the highest speed in anticipation of war, or did unyielding hostility toward all forms of private property and market economy contribute as well? This is a problem which will be discussed later. At this point we can set a reference point: the concentration camps reached their zenith after the forced collectivization of agriculture and the iron fist used against bourgeois and petty-bourgeois tendencies within the peasants, who were otherwise members of the “‘nonhistoric’ people”, 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 fatal role played by a universalism that is incapable of subsuming and respecting the particular.

The pages we have used of Hegel (the author in whom Lenin discovered the “[germs of historical materialism](#)”³⁷³) are an early refutation of the explanation of “Stalinism” contained in the so-called *Secret Speech* given in 1956 to the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. It would certainly be unfair to pretend Khrushchev could measure up to Hegel, but it is curious that the tragedy and horror of Soviet Russia continue to be blamed on a

single person, indeed a single scapegoat, as if it the extraordinary analysis in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* dedicated to “absolute freedom” and “terror” had never existed.

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). From concrete experience and the disastrous consequences of “destructive fury”, individuals understand the need to give a concrete and particular content to the universal, putting an end to the mad pursuit of universality in its immediacy and purity. Renouncing absolute egalitarianism, individuals “submit to negation and distinction once more”, that is, “the organization of the spiritual spheres or ‘masses’ of the substance, to which the plurality of conscious individuals is assigned.” They also “[return to a restricted and apportioned task, but thereby to their substantial reality.](#)” Hence is now understood the inconclusive and disastrous character of the myth of a “universal will”, or rather, using language this time not of Hegel but of more than a few Russian revolutionaries, of direct democracy, a “collective leadership” that without mediations or bureaucratic obstacles is expressed directly and immediately in the factories, in the workplaces, in the political bodies.

As we can see, rather than Jacobinism, the targets of Hegel’s criticisms are anarchic radicalism and messianism. This is confirmed by his considerations regarding another great revolution: the Puritan revolution that exploded in England in the mid-seventeenth century. Ending a period of inconclusive religious and pseudo-revolutionary exaltation, giving an effective political outlet to something that had been gestating for many years, Cromwell showed that he “[knew what it meant to govern](#)”: “he took the reins of government with a firm hand, dismissed a parliament that was lost in prayers, and maintained the throne with great splendor, as Protector”³⁷⁴. Here, knowing how to govern meant being able to give a concrete content to the ideals of universality that had preceded the revolution, for example by clearly distancing himself, during the first English Revolution, from the followers of the “Fifth Monarchy”, the vacuous utopia of a society devoid of legal rules that would be unnecessary because individuals would be enlightened and guided by grace. To the extent that he was able to distance himself from an abstract and inconclusive utopia, Robespierre too showed that he knew, or want to learn, the art of governing.

After a great revolution, especially when its protagonists are ideological and political strata who were deprived of property and of the political experience connected with possessing it, learning to govern means learning to give the universal a concrete content. But this is indeed a learning process. The socialist revolution neither began nor ended with Stalin. In fact, the most serious limitation of this statesman (but also of other statesmen who are still linked to socialism today, though in a different way) is that he left this learning process seriously incomplete.

Take the national question. In Lenin we can read the thesis that the “[inevitable merging of nations](#)” and “[national differences](#)”, including linguistic differences, passes through a “[transition period](#)” where the nations and their different languages, cultures, and identities are on full and free display. At least as regards this “transition period” the consciousness with which the universal should comprehend the particular is clear. A significant learning process has already begun: we are already beyond the abstract universalism of, for example, Luxemburg, for whom national particularities were inherently a denial of internationalism.

And yet, with regard to the national question, Lenin seems to accept the unity of the universal and the particular only in relation to the “transition period”. Stalin is sometimes 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](#)³⁷⁵.

Judging by this quote, not even communism should be characterized by “[a single, all-embracing language](#)”. But it is as if Stalin was afraid to be bold. Instead he prefers to address the “[the merging of nations and the formation of one common language](#)” only at the time when socialism will have triumphed worldwide³⁷⁶. Perhaps only in the last years of his life, when he was an undisputed authority in the international communist movement, could Stalin be more daring. He did not limit himself to arguing forcefully that “[history shows that languages possess great stability and a tremendous power of resistance to forcible assimilation](#)”³⁷⁷. Now the theoretical development 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”³⁷⁸. So why should the national languages disappear? Why should nations as such disappear, if it is true that “a common language is one of the cardinal earmarks of a nation”?³⁷⁹ Nevertheless, orthodoxy would in the end win out despite everything: communism continued to be conceived as the triumph of a “single international language” and, in the final instance, a single nation³⁸⁰. At least with respect to this mythical final stage, the universal could be rethought in its purity, uncontaminated by the particular, as represented by the national languages and identities. This is not an abstractly theoretical problem: attachment to orthodoxy certainly did not contribute to understanding the permanent contradictions between the nations that followed socialism and were committed to building communism. It is these contradictions that have developed a leading role in the process of crisis and dissolution within the “socialist camp”.

In other fields of social life as well we see Stalin engaged in a difficult struggle against abstract utopianism, only to then stop halfway, so as to not compromise the traditional orthodoxy. As late as 1952, shortly before his death, he was forced to criticize those who wanted the abolition of the “market economy” as such. In arguing against them, 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.

“Commodity production without capitalists” may perfectly well exist. And yet here too orthodoxy presents an insurmountable barrier: the dissolution of the commodity economy is tied to the moment in which “all the means of production” will actually be collectivized, with the consequent surmounting of cooperative property³⁸¹.

Finally, the problem may be decisive. We have seen Stalin reflect on a “third function”, beyond repression and the class struggle, domestic and international. A renowned jurist was correct to point out that the report to the Eighteenth Congress of the CPSU faces us with “a radical change in the doctrine developed by Marx and Engels”³⁸². It was a change that also occurred to Stalin, beginning with his experience of government, a concrete learning process that had left

traces in the thought and political action of Lenin but now took a further step forward. Trotsky reasoned quite differently, considering synthesizing the positions of Marx, Engels, and Lenin in this way: “[The generation which conquered the power, the ‘Old Guard’, will begin the work of liquidating the state; the next generation will complete it](#)”³⁸³. If this miracle did not happen, whose fault could it be but Stalin’s treacherous bureaucracy?

It may seem confusing to refer to philosophical categories to explain the history of Soviet Russia, but Lenin himself endorsed this approach, quoting and subscribing to the “excellent formula” of Hegel’s *Logic*, according to which the universal should be such as to accommodate within itself “the wealth of the particular”³⁸⁴. In expressing this, he is above all thinking of the revolutionary situation, which is always concrete and which pushes the weakest link in the chain in a particular country to the breaking point. This “excellent formula,” however, was not used by Lenin and the Bolshevik leadership group to analyze the phase following the conquest of power. Faced with the problem of building a new society, attempts to make the universal embrace “the wealth of the particular” were met with the accusation of treason. And it is well understood that such accusations fell upon Stalin in particular, because he ruled the country of the October Revolution for longer than any other leader, and it was precisely from his experience of government that he became aware of the emptiness of the messianic expectation of the dissolution of the state, of nations, of religion, the market, and money, and directly experienced the paralyzing effect of the view of the universal that is inclined to label paying attention to the particular needs and interests of a State, a nation, a family, or a given individual as contamination.

If it is true that ideology played a significant role in prolonging the Second Time of Troubles, then it must be specified that this points especially at Stalin’s enemies. Stalin, thanks to concrete experience of government, had seriously devoted himself to the learning process which, according to the teachings of Hegel, the leading group of a great revolution is obliged to go through.

The complex and contradictory path of the Stalin era

From the new impetus of “Soviet democracy” to “St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre”

It is necessary in any case to assert—as one of the authors of the *Black Book of Communism* contradictorily recognizes—the need for “integration of Bolshevik political violence first and Stalin’s political violence later, within the ‘long duration’ of Russian history”: it is necessary to not lose sight of “the generative ‘matrix’ of Stalinism represented by the period of World War I, the Revolutions of 1917, and the civil wars *taken altogether*”³⁸⁵. And so, conceived at a time when no one could have foreseen Stalin’s rise to power, and even before the Bolshevik revolution, “Stalinism” was not in the first place the outcome of an individual’s thirst for power or an ideology, but rather the permanent state of emergency that had taken over in Russia since 1914. As we have seen, warning signs of the unprecedented storm looming over the Eurasian country since the early 19th century had not been lost on certain figures, and the storm arrived in all its violence with the outbreak of World War I. It is from here, from the vast scale of the Second Time of Troubles, that the storm had to begin gaining momentum. It is no coincidence that its course was not at all unilinear: we see it weakening in times of relative normalization and manifesting with full force when the state of emergency reached its zenith.

Let us start by asking a preliminary question: when can we start speaking about Soviet Russia being a personal, solitary dictatorship? Respectable historians seem to agree on one essential point: “In the early ‘30s, Stalin was not yet an autocrat. He was not seen as above facing criticism, dissent, and the true opposition within the Communist Party.” The solitary rise to power of a leader crowned by a cult of personality had not yet occurred: the Leninist traditions of “party dictatorship” and oligarchic power remained.³⁸⁶ The historians cited here use both terms indistinctly; at any rate, the second is a poor fit for a regime that encouraged a very strong social promotion of the underclasses and that opened the country’s political and cultural life to social strata and ethnic groups that until then had been totally marginalized. Anyway, it seems clear that from 1937

and the outbreak of the Great Terror on, party dictatorship had given way to autocracy.

Should we distinguish, then, two phases of “Stalinism”? Despite questioning the usual “monolithic” vision, this periodization does not constitute a real step forward in understanding those years: we still have to explain the transition from the first phase to the second and the concrete form of both.

To be aware of the problem, let us see what happened in the mid-1920s, at a time when, the acute crisis of foreign intervention and civil war having been overcome, the NEP has already achieved significant results: not only was there no autocracy, but despite the dictatorship of the communist party continuing, in a way the administration of power tended to become more “liberal”. Bukharin seems to allow himself to demand a rule of law of sorts: “**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**” were necessary, binding on the Communists as well. The State must be involved in “**peaceful organizational work**” and the party, in its relationship with the masses, must “**stand for persuasion and only for persuasion.**” Terror no longer made sense: “**its time has passed**”³⁸⁷. This made room for “mass initiative”: in such a context, it is necessary to give favorable consideration to the flourishing of “associations of people” and “**voluntary organizations**”³⁸⁸.

We are not addressing simply personal opinions. These were the years of the “duumvirate”³⁸⁹: Bukharin administered power together with Stalin, who in 1925 repeatedly stated that “**the survivals of war communism in the countryside must be eliminated**” and condemned the “deviation” that denounced an imaginary “revival of capitalism” that would lead to “fomenting class struggle in the countryside” and “**civil war in our country**”³⁹⁰. It was necessary to instead see that “**we have entered the period of economic construction**”³⁹¹.

The shift of emphasis from the class struggle to economic construction had significant political consequences as well: the first task of communist students was to “**master science**”³⁹². 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**”³⁹³. The

centrality of economic construction and therefore competition made the party's monopoly less rigid: "the Communist must treat the non-Party person as an equal", especially because when "Party members were tested" by "[non-Party people](#)" very positive results could be produced³⁹⁴.

Overall, radical political change was a necessity for Stalin: "[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 organisation, the utmost flexibility in both political and organisational leadership](#)"; it was necessary to understand, with sensitiveness, "[the requirements and needs of the workers and peasants.](#)" Likewise, with regard to the peasants, who were often more backward than the workers, the task of the communists and cadres was to "[learn to convince the peasants, sparing neither time nor effort for this purpose](#)"³⁹⁵.

The task was not only to assimilate a more sophisticated political pedagogy. It was necessary to eliminate elections that were purely formal and manipulated from afar, a bad habit that entailed "unchecked arbitrariness and tyranny". A radical change was required: "[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](#)"³⁹⁶. It was time to pursue "[the line of revitalising the Soviets, the line of transforming the Soviets into genuinely elected bodies, the line of implanting the principles of Soviet democracy in the countryside](#)"³⁹⁷.

Before October the Soviets had begun to transform themselves into "bureaucratic structures", and "[the assemblies began to decline in frequency and attendance](#)"³⁹⁸; but now, restored to their original function, the Soviets were tasked with "[drawing the working people into the daily work of governing the state](#)"³⁹⁹. How did this take place?

[It takes place through organisations 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 organisations, youth league organisations, 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 organisations, around the departments for work among women and all other kinds of organisations, there are whole teeming ant-hills — organisations, 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.⁴⁰⁰.

All these reasons made “identifying the Party with the state” incorrect: what’s more, doing so “is a distortion of Lenin’s idea.” Furthermore, once the position of the new state was consolidated domestically and internationally, it was necessary to “[extend] the Constitution to the *entire* population, including the bourgeoisie”⁴⁰¹.

At this time, taking up some expressions Marx used while celebrating the Paris Commune, Stalin was interested in the ideal of the subjugation and withering away of the state apparatus. The revival of the soviets and of political participation was a step in that direction. The task was “to reconstruct our state apparatus, to link it with the masses of the people, to make it sound and honest, simple and inexpensive”⁴⁰²; 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”⁴⁰³. 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”⁴⁰⁴. Certainly the latter had not been achieved, but a perceptible decline in the “dictatorship of the proletariat” and of the party seemed to be the order of the day.

This line of openness was shared by Bukharin and Stalin, but Zinoviev’s followers described it as “middle-peasant Bolshevism”⁴⁰⁵, and it was followed by the crisis that led to the liquidation of the NEP, the forced collectivization of agriculture, and the forced march of industrialization, with the consequent radical expansion of the concentration camps. What caused the change was not, as is often said, the ideological fury of the leadership group, i.e., a mania for liquidating all forms of private property and the market. At the same time, the pressure coming from below should not be underestimated; nostalgia for the egalitarianism before the introduction of the NEP continued to act in sectors of society that were by no means insignificant. Another element came into play as well.

Almost as if responding to the type of interpretation that is dominant today, on November 19, 1928 Stalin stated that those who led the Soviet Union were “[calm and sober people](#)”, but anguished by the problem of how to defend the “[independence](#)” of a country decidedly more backward than the potential enemies that surrounded it⁴⁰⁶. For that reason, he expressed concern about a international situation that appeared increasingly threatening. In late November 1925 the Treaty of Locarno was stipulated. Bringing France and Germany closer together again, it recomposed the fracture of the Western powers who had fought each other in World War I, and sanctioned the isolation of the USSR: there were also voices calling for “[a European crusade against Communism](#)”⁴⁰⁷. So, in Moscow, key figures like Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Radek dramatically underscored the danger of aggression that was being drawn on the horizon.⁴⁰⁸

A few months later, the coup in Poland intervened by bringing power to Pilsudski, a declared enemy of the Soviet Union: on display in his studio hung the portrait of Napoleon Crossing the Alps; in fact, Pilsudski admired him for his invasion of Russia. The Russians had counted on the participation of the Poles: the new strongman of Warsaw proudly stated his aspiration to wrench Ukraine from the USSR, making it a faithful and subordinate ally⁴⁰⁹. On August 24, 1926, Pilsudski rejected Moscow’s proposal of a non-aggression treaty, and later the Soviet foreign minister denounced Poland plans to “acquire a protectorate in the Baltics”. The next year, the international situation darkened further: Britain broke off trade and diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and Marshal Ferdinand Foch asked France to do the same; the Soviet embassy in Beijing suffered an incursion by Chiang Kai-shek’s troops, encouraged perhaps by London (at least according to Moscow), while the Soviet ambassador in Warsaw was killed by a White Russian emigrant; finally, a Communist Party headquarters in Leningrad was hit by an explosion.

At this point, it was Chief of Staff Tukhachevsky who sounded the alarm and called for the rapid modernization of the army. The NEP no longer seemed capable of solving the problem: true, the economy was showing signs of recovery and in 1926-1927 had returned to pre-war levels, but in terms of industrial production and technology, the gap with the most advanced capitalist countries remained the same. Incisive or drastic measures were imposed⁴¹⁰. And the military pressed for similar measures in agriculture as well, in order to ensure the regularity of supplies to the front. As can be seen, the turn of 1929 was not the result of a random whim of Stalin, who indeed had to, if not contain, at least

direct the pressure coming from the military: rejecting the astonishing goals demanded especially by Tukhachevsky, Stalin, pointing to the arms industry, warned of a “Red militarism” that would risk compromising economic development and so the very modernization of the military apparatus as a whole⁴¹¹. The shift was also not the result of an ideological schism: far beyond the power of the communist party and the social relations prevailing in the USSR, the existence of the nation was at stake, and this was the view of a large part of the Soviet leadership group, obviously beginning with Stalin.

The alarm seems more justified by the fact that the international horizon was darkening both diplomatically and economically (1929 was the year of the Great Depression), on top of which was the “grain crisis” within Russia (an abrupt drop in the quantity of wheat placed on the market by farmers): “food queues sprang up in the cities”, further aggravating the crisis. It was a situation that “could only work against Bukharinist policies”, as one of his biographers observes⁴¹². At this point, the fate of the duumvirate was cast. The break cannot be explained only by the moral scruples of the defeated half of the duumvirate, who foresaw the “Saint Bartholomew’s Day massacre” that the forced collectivization of agriculture would bring (see above, pp. 138-139). There was a different reason for the internal fracture in particular. Bukharin was also seriously concerned about the danger of war, but did not believe a solution could be found on a purely national level: “the FINAL practical victory of socialism in our country is not possible without the help of other countries and the world revolution”⁴¹³. The Bolshevik leader, who had already condemned the peace of Brest-Litovsk as a cowardly, nationalist desertion of the cause of the international struggle of the revolutionary proletariat, remained true to that vision 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.⁴¹⁴

Stalin, however, more realistically started from the premise of the stabilization of the capitalist world: the defense of the USSR was first of all a national responsibility. This meant not only promoting the country’s industrialization at a forced march: as the “grain crisis” showed, the influx of food from the countryside to the city and to the army was not at all guaranteed. A leader like

Stalin was especially sensitive to this problem; from the rich experience accumulated during the civil war, he had argued numerous times that the stability of the rear and the food supply from the countryside would be of paramount importance during a future conflict. Here are the conclusions found in a letter to Lenin and in an interview with *Pravda*, in the summer and fall 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](#)”⁴¹⁵. Up to the Nazi invasion, Stalin paid great attention to agriculture and considered it a central element of national defense⁴¹⁶. It is then understood why at the end of the 1920s, the collectivization of agriculture seems to be the only way to dramatically accelerate the industrialization of the country and ensure the stable supplies that the cities and the military needed: all in anticipation of 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 1940⁴¹⁷.

More modest results were achieved in agriculture, where overcoming the subsistence economy and centralization created conditions that at any rate were more favorable for the normal provisioning of a large army.

From “Socialist democratism” to the Great Terror

After the “Saint Bartholomew’s Day massacre” caused by the forced collectivization of agriculture, with the terrible social and human costs it entailed, the policy of openness we have already seen appeared to reemerge. After the victory over the *kulaks*, observed Kaganovich 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 possible⁴¹⁸. It was even more necessary due the fact that, Stalin asserted, “[there are no longer any antagonistic classes](#)” in the USSR⁴¹⁹. As a result, there was no reason to

delay the introduction of “[universal, direct and equal suffrage with secret ballot](#)”⁴²⁰, of “[universal suffrage without any restrictions](#)”⁴²¹. Therefore, amendments to the new Constitution which proposed “that ministers of religion, former Whiteguards, all the former rich, and persons not engaged in socially useful occupations be disfranchised” should be rejected. And it made no sense to have these groups “be restricted to the right to elect, but not to be elected”, just as the proposal “for the prohibition of religious rites” should be rejected. It was now possible to move towards the “[socialist democratism](#)”⁴²².

This was not simply propaganda, which certainly played an important role here. This was a perspective that sparked an intense controversy with Trotsky, who identified the “[liberalism of Stalin](#)” with the abandonment of the “Soviet system” and a return to “bourgeois democracy”, within which, class differences being eliminated, the subject was the “citizen” in abstraction. He interpreted this turn as follows: “[The first concern of the Soviet aristocracy is to get rid of worker and Red Army soviets](#)”⁴²³.

[The antithesis between the two perspectives is clear. Having handled the danger posed to the country’s independence by its backward countryside, which had been hegemonized by the kulaks and capable of blocking the flow of supplies into the city and the army, and having consolidated the dictatorship exercised by the Communist Party, Stalin had no interest in further intensifying the political and social conflict. The urgency of the forced industrialization was what drove him to request the promotion of “non-Party” elements to leading positions in the factory and in society. It was inadmissible to assume an attitude of rejection towards them: “there is nothing more stupid and reactionary”; “our policy does not by any means lie in converting the Party into an exclusive caste”; it was necessary to make the maximum effort to win specialists, engineers, and technicians of the “old school” to the cause of the country’s industrial and technological development](#)⁴²⁴.

On the other hand, it was not possible to promote industrial and technological development without material incentives for the training of workers and technicians, hence the argument against the “‘Leftist’ practice of wage equalisation”. By simply moving away from a crude retributive equalization, it was possible to introduce a more efficient “organisation of work” leading to flexibility of labor power, especially for the most qualified, as it moved from one factory to another in search of better pay. In addition to ending egalitarianism and the disillusionment of the most skilled and productive workers, policy

incentives should also remedy the lack of collective responsibility and introduce instead the principle of “[personal responsibility](#)”⁴²⁵.

At exactly this time, conditions became ripe for the outbreak of the third civil war, the one that decimated the Bolshevik ranks. Trotsky took a very hard line against what he defined as the “Neo-NEP”. Yes, the CPSU was undergoing an increasingly marked “turn to the right”, favorable to the “top strata in the village” and the counterattack of the *kulaks*: the bureaucracy “is ready to make economic concessions to the peasantry, that is to say, to its petty-bourgeois interests and tendencies.” More generally, there was the “returning to the market”, “monetary calculation”, and the consequent increase in the cost of living; far from advancing towards socialism and overcoming inequalities and class divisions, Soviet society was being increasingly characterized by “[new processes of class stratification](#)”⁴²⁶. This internal regression corresponded, with regard to international politics, to the rejection of the revolutionary and internationalist perspective by the “[Soviet bureaucracy \[that had\] become a purely national and conservative force](#)”⁴²⁷.

Now “the sole, guiding principle is—the preservation of the status quo!”, as confirmed by “[the entry of the Soviet Union into the League of Nations](#)”⁴²⁸.

Obviously, the increasing severity of the international situation escaped neither Stalin nor Trotsky, but the answers they supplied to the problem were different and conflicting. Stalin’s focused on Russia’s economic and technological development, mending as far as possible the fractures caused by the October Revolution and the collectivization of the countryside, and presenting the Communist Party as the guide of the nation in its entirety. The condition of stability and balance thus achieved domestically could at the same time promote a policy of international alliances that could ensure the USSR’s safety. For Trotsky, however, because of how impetuous the industrial development of Soviet Russia could be, it could only defeat the aggression of the advanced imperialist countries by relying on the help of the proletariat in the aggressor countries⁴²⁹. Therefore, accommodation of the national and international bourgeoisie not only constituted a betrayal but also prevented the land of October from winning the support of the international revolutionary proletariat, which alone could save it. The clash between these two perspectives was inevitable. Kirov was assassinated on 1 December 1934, and the Franco-Soviet pact was signed on 2 May 1935; in between these two dates, Trotsky’s detailed

intervention cited above (*Where is the Stalin bureaucracy leading the USSR?*) was published on 30 January 1935, a firm indictment against the domestic and international “Neo-NEP”.

From “socialism without the dictatorship of the proletariat” to the turn of the screw of the Cold War

The Great Terror and the terrible purges that came with it were followed by the Great Patriotic War. After the defeat of the Third Reich, Stalin, who “foresaw a great future for the Grand Alliance” against fascism and was trying to prevent the outbreak of the Cold War⁴³⁰, repeatedly declared, including during confidential meetings with Communist leaders in Eastern Europe, that it was not a matter of introducing the Soviet political model: “It is possible that if in the Soviet Union we had had no war the dictatorship of the proletariat would have taken on a different character”. The situation created in Eastern Europe after 1945 was clearly more favorable: “In Poland there is no dictatorship of the proletariat and you don’t need it there”; “must Poland go along the path of the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat? No it must not. It is not necessary.” And to the Bulgarian communist leaders: it was possible to “achieve Socialism in a different way – without the dictatorship of the proletariat”; “the situation has changed radically in comparison with our revolution, it is necessary to apply different methods and forms ... You should not be afraid of accusations of opportunism. This is not opportunism but the application of Marxism to the present situation.” And to Tito: “today 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 who cited these statements comments in turn: “As these remarks show, Stalin was actively rethinking the universal validity of the Soviet model of revolution and socialism”⁴³¹. Perhaps we can go one step further and say that this rethinking also had to do with the general relationship between socialism and democracy, with reference to the Soviet Union itself: hypothesizing socialism under an English king in a way meant putting into question, if not the monopolistic concentration of power in the communist party, at least the terrorist dictatorship and autocracy. The policy maintained in the Soviet zone of occupation in Germany was representative: “The Russians actively promoted not just socialist theatre, ballet, opera and cinema; they promoted bourgeois arts as well”, and this was in keeping with the program formulated in Moscow, “that the Soviet system was wrong for Germany, and that it needed to be reorganised on broad, anti-

fascist, democratic principles instead.” Since “for the first three years after the war, there was no real cultural divisions in the capital, and the Soviet Zone continued to take the lead in cultural matters”⁴³².

The outbreak of the Cold War abruptly ended this experience and reflection: the central problem was now the creation of a buffer zone around a country hit hard by Nazi aggression and occupation, in order to prevent a repeat of the tragedies of the past. Additionally, if “the problem of decommissioning the Gulag, at least partially, is raised in the USSR even before the death of Stalin”⁴³³, a total thaw was impossible. After Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Soviet Union had to strive for a new “forced march” to follow the new “Western technological revolution”. It had been liberated from the “Western German occupation”, but it could not “catch a break”: a new and terrible threat had emerged⁴³⁴. Above all it was because one year later, on November 1, 1952, the explosion of the first hydrogen bomb took place, a thousand times more powerful than those dropped on the Japanese cities:

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 Union⁴³⁵.

This concern was not at all unfounded, if one considers that in January 1952, to break the stalemate in the military operations in Korea, Truman entertained a radical idea that he even recorded in his diary: he could issue an ultimatum to the USSR and China, stating in advance that failure to obey “means that Moscow, St. Petersburg, Mukden, Vladivostok, Peking, Shanghai, Port Arthur, Dairen, Odessa, Stalingrad and every manufacturing plant in China and the Soviet Union will be eliminated”⁴³⁶.

In the three decades of the history of Soviet Russia under Stalin, the principal aspect was not the transition from the dictatorship of the party to autocracy, but rather the repeated attempts to turn the state of emergency into a condition of relative normality, attempts that failed for reasons both internal (abstract utopianism and messianism that impeded the recognition of the results that were

achieved) and external (the permanent threat looming over the land of October), or a combination of the two. If that messianism was, on the one hand, an expression of tendencies intrinsic to Marxism, on the other hand it was a reaction to the horror of World War I, which even in circles and figures far from Marxism raised the aspiration for a completely new world, with no relation to a reality susceptible to producing or reproducing such horror. With the germination of the third civil war (within the Bolshevik ranks) and the simultaneous approach of World War I (in Asia before Europe), this series of failures led to the coming of autocracy, exercised by a leader who was the object of authentic worship.

Bureaucratism or “furious faith”?

What can we make of the leadership group that achieved victory in the third civil war, and that tried to end the Second Time of Troubles at the exact same time new and huge storms were looming on the horizon? We have seen that while Khrushchev, by circuitous allusions, made Kirov the victim of a plot orchestrated by the Kremlin, Trotsky described him as an accomplice of the tyrant and a foremost exponent of the hated, usurping, parasitic bureaucracy, which was destined to crush the desired new revolution once and for all. But was the man who died by Nikolaev’s gun really a bureaucrat? Let us return to the Russian historian cited above, critical of the myth that Stalin inspired the murder, to see how she describes the victim. Just who was Kirov? He was a loyal and discreet leader who was devoted to the cause. Furthermore, his personality was characterized by attention to the most insignificant problems of the everyday life of his collaborators, a great modesty, “tolerance of differing opinions, respect for the culture and traditions of other peoples”⁴³⁷.

This flattering judgment casts a favorable light on all of the circles Kirov frequented, and ultimately on Stalin himself, to whom Kirov was a close and trustworthy partner. We are not at all dealing with a stratum of bureaucrats devoid of ideals and interested solely 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 committed communist, he also sang the praises of Stalin in the name of strengthening the party and the Soviet Union, the development and power of the country. This furious faith was perhaps the tragedy of a whole generation⁴³⁸.

In any case, the leadership group as a whole showed signs of hard work and sacrifice. We already know the “enormous workload” which the Soviet leader dealt with.

[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 travelled 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 Nineteenth Party Congress in October⁴³⁹.

Similar observations can be made about a close associate of Stalin, Lazar M. Kaganovich, who displayed a “frantic determination” to direct the construction of the Moscow subway: “he descended directly into the tunnels, even at night, to check the status of workers and get an idea of the situation”⁴⁴⁰. In short, we are dealing with a leadership group that, especially in the years of war, displayed an “almost superhuman dedication”⁴⁴¹.

They were driven by a “furious faith”, which was not limited to the scope of this limited group, or to only members of the Communist Party. “Ordinary men and women” were also examples of this “missionary zeal”; altogether “it was a time of genuine enthusiasm, feverish exertion, and willing sacrifice”⁴⁴². It was a spiritual climate that is easily understandable considering that the country was leapfrogging through the stages of industrial development and was offering vast layers of its large population prospects for social promotion, just as the capitalist world was being immersed in a devastating crisis. In the words of a historian, who interestingly is also speaking autobiographically:

The years 1928–1931 were a period of enormous upward mobility for the working class. The initiators of socialist competition and the shock workers not only replaced those cadres deemed “unfit” but also staffed the rapidly expanding bureaucracies and educational institutes en masse. They were not passive promotees but active seekers of promotion (*samovydvizhentsy*). They had a “definite and clear goal for the present and for the future” and “sought to acquire as much knowledge and practical experience as possible in order to be as useful to the new society as possible.”

The shock movement and socialist competition played a crucial role in the

process of industrialization: they helped the political leadership accelerate the pace of the process, promote industrial modernization, reorganize the factory troika according to a model of one-man management, and promote young, ambitious, competent, and politically trustworthy workers. The emergence of these workers as the new sages had a snowball effect on party, industry, and union leaders⁴⁴³.

The situation outlined here is confirmed and further enriched by a particularly authoritative witness. In 1932, George Kennan, a young American diplomat who would later become famous for the theory of anti-Soviet containment, sent a dispatch to Washington from Riga containing a very interesting analysis. He first pointed out that “in the Soviet Union life continues to be managed in the interest of a doctrine”, that is, communism. This worldview had a broad consensus; the “industrial proletariat” enjoyed social recognition that was so high as to greatly compensate for “material disadvantages” connected to the planned acceleration of economic development. In particular, young people or a “certain part of the youth” was “extremely enthusiastic and happy, as can only happen in human beings completely dedicated to tasks that have no relationship with personal life”, that is, people who were fully involved in the hopeful project of building a new society. In this sense he can speak of the “unlimited self-confidence, mental health, and happiness of the young Russian generation.” But here he includes a warning that, in light of subsequent historical experience, can be considered prescient: “Being the most morally united country in the world, Russia could at any moment fall into the worst moral chaos”⁴⁴⁴. As a condition of such strong moral tension, it could hardly have resisted the passing of time and the inevitable difficulties and failures of the project of building a new society: this could easily be turned into its opposite. The fact is clear that in 1932 and in the eve of Kirov’s murder, Soviet Russia was presented, for the future theory of containment, as “the most morally united country in the world.”

To be sure, in expressing this Kennan seems to take the reality of the cities (where, despite the contradictions, the change had indeed aroused the enthusiasm of a large segment of young, intellectual and industrial workers⁴⁴⁵) more into account than that of the countryside. There, the forced collectivization of agriculture had led, following Bukharin’s farsighted warning, to “a ‘Saint Bartholomew’s Day massacre’ for the rich peasants” and more generally for “a great number of peasants”, very often of national minorities. A civil war had broken out, waged ruthlessly and horribly by both sides, so ruthless and terrible as to push a senior representative of the Soviet military to suicide, disturbed by

an inspection during which he would shout several times that it was not communism but “horror”⁴⁴⁶. It is probably this “horror” which provoked Bukharin’s moral crisis, indignant at the large scale of the Saint Bartholomew’s Day massacre against which he had warned in vain, horrified by the gigantic experiment in social engineering that proceeded without “pity”, without distinguishing “between a person and a piece of wood”⁴⁴⁷. Even after the conclusion of the process of collectivization, it is not convincing to speak of the countryside as “morally united”, as if even the memory of the civil war that had broken and bloodied it had completely vanished.

Nevertheless, despite these necessary clarifications, Kennan’s insistence on adherence to the “doctrine” and enthusiasm make us think of the “furious faith” and the “missionary zeal” previously mentioned. Until the Great Terror was unleashed in 1937, the picture did not change radically, at least if we keep to the convergent analyses of an American historian and a Russian historian. The first, while insisting on the manipulation of public opinion from above, notes however that Stalin enjoyed great popularity in 1935: any attempt to overthrow him would have faced widespread resistance⁴⁴⁸. On the following year, the second historian (a militant anti-Stalinist) notes 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” spread⁴⁴⁹.

It was not only the increase in living standards that motivated this “enthusiasm”. There was much more: the “real development” of nations that had been marginalized until that moment; the winning of women’s “legal equality with men, accompanied by an improvement in their social status”; the emergence of “a strong system of social protection” that included “pensions, health care, protection of pregnant women, family pensions”; “the considerable development of education and of the intellectual sphere as a whole”, with the extension “of the network of libraries and reading rooms” and the spreading “taste for the arts, poetry”; it was the tumultuous and jubilant arrival of modernity (urbanization, the nuclear family, social mobility)⁴⁵⁰. These were processes that characterized the history of Soviet Russia as a whole, but began to take off precisely during the Stalin years.

The masses of people traditionally condemned to illiteracy burst into schools and universities en masse; they thus formed “a new generation of skilled workers, technicians, and technically prepared administrators”, quickly called upon to

develop a leadership role. “New towns were inaugurated, and old towns were rebuilt”; the emergence of new, gigantic industrial complexes was accompanied by the “ascent of working and ambitious citizens of working-class or peasant origin to the highest ranks of the social ladder”⁴⁵¹. In this sense it was called “a mixture of brutal coercions, memorable heroism, disastrous madness, and spectacular results”⁴⁵².

But perhaps it was not these accomplishments and the subsequent economic improvements that constituted the principal aspect for identifying the radical transformation that the workplace and production underwent in the transition from the old to the new regime.

[In Tsarist Russia] employees asked the boss for more respectful treatment, insisting on the use of the formal “you” instead of the informal “you”, in which they saw a remnant of the old system of serfdom. They wanted to be treated “as citizens”. And often it was precisely the issue of respect for human dignity, rather than wage demands, which fed the labor agitations and demonstrations.⁴⁵³

After having desired and sought it for so long in vain, the serfs received recognition (in the Hegelian sense) with the arrival of Soviet power. And this was true not only for workers but also, as we shall see, for the national minorities. It was this interweaving of “spectacular results” in terms of economic development on the one hand, and the collapse of the hierarchies of the old regime (confirmed by the unprecedented possibility of mobility and social advancement) on the other, which created an exultant feeling amongst the population: to the recognition already achieved by the workers would be added the recognition of the united Soviet people, which was about to catch up to the most advanced countries, getting rid of the tradition and image of backwardness. This explained the euphoric sensation of being a participant in the building of a new society and a new civilization, which advanced in spite of the mistakes, sacrifices, and terror.

By comparison, it is interesting to reread the primary accusation made by Trotsky against the Soviet bureaucratic leadership, on the eve of the Great Terror. It was as if the indictment was suddenly opened to concessions so great and recognitions so important that it was turned into its opposite:

[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 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.⁴⁵⁴.

Along with economic development, there was cultural access not only for the 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 tzar'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 strata⁴⁵⁵.

At least with regard to the relationship established with “the backward nationalities”, the hated bureaucracy nevertheless carried out “a certain part of the progressive work”: “laying down a bridge for them to the elementary benefits of bourgeois, and in part even pre-bourgeois, culture”⁴⁵⁶. How Trotsky thought the anti-bureaucratic revolution could have been lurking below the surface of this overall picture is a mystery. But this is not our current point of interest. The acknowledgements that the leader of the opposition let slip out were an indication of the prestige and the consensus that the Soviet leadership still enjoyed. There was no other way of explaining the spread of the “newest kind of Soviet patriotism,” an “undoubtedly very deep, sincere and dynamic” sentiment⁴⁵⁷.

The years 1937 and 1938 were the biennium of the Great Terror. Not even in “its

worst phase” did Stalin’s regime see the disappearance of its social base of consensus and its “enthusiastic supporters”, who continued to be motivated as much by ideology as by the possibilities of social advancement: it is a “mistake” to read the continuing consensus as “**merely an artifice of state censorship and repression**”⁴⁵⁸. An ironic and tragic entanglement took place: as a result of the strong economic and cultural development on the one hand and the fearsome vacancies opened by the repression on the other, “**tens of thousands of Stakhanovite workers became factory directors**”, and the armed forces saw a similar and very rapid vertical mobility⁴⁵⁹. In August 1939, during the negotiations for the non-aggression pact, the chief interpreter of the German foreign ministry visited Moscow and described the spectacle on display at Red Square and Lenin’s mausoleum:

A long line of Russian peasants waited patiently in front of the mausoleum to see Stalin’s mummified predecessor in his crystal tomb. By their attitudes and facial expressions, the Russians gave me the impression of devout pilgrims. “Anyone who has been to Moscow and has not seen Lenin”, a member of the Russian embassy told me, “is worth nothing to the Russian rural population”⁴⁶⁰.

The widespread veneration for “Stalin’s predecessor” was also a reflection of the broad-based consensus the current leader continued to enjoy. In any case, the deep rifts caused by the Great Terror were at least in part sidelined by the patriotic unity that set in during the resistance to the Nazi war of annihilation and enslavement. It is true—now once again quoting a historian who can be little suspected of being tolerant of Communism and “Stalinism”—“the victory raised to an unprecedented height not only the international prestige of the Soviet Union but the authority of the regime inside the country as well”, such that “**the popularity of Stalin reached its height in the postwar years**”⁴⁶¹. This “popularity” remained intact until his death, and was also observed outside the Soviet Union and even, to a certain extent, beyond the borders of the international communist movement.

The contradictory world of the concentration camps

Like the Terror, the world of concentration camps produced by it did not present a rectilinear motion and a homogeneous landscape: far from being a “static” system, it “kept turning” and at any rate “**went through cycles of relative cruelty**”

and relative humanity”⁴⁶². These are the remarks of an American historian, who not only describes the history beginning in October 1917 in the darkest way possible, but also mocks the “Western statesmen” who allowed themselves to be taken in by a “mass murderer” as cunning as Stalin and came to feel respect towards him⁴⁶³. There is a similar argument in a book by a Russian historian also devoted to demonstrating the equivalence of the Stalinist USSR and the Third Reich. However, the two monographs, to which I will primarily refer to analyze the concentration camps in Soviet Russia, tell stories that are quite different in the intentions of its authors. In fact, the scene outlined by the American historian could at times be confused with a product of Soviet propaganda, if not for the fact that it comes from a fiercely anti-communist author! Let us begin examining it. In 1921, as the civil war was intensifying, this was how the Muscovite prison of Butyrka operated:

The prisoners were allowed free run of the prison. They organized morning gymnastic sessions, founded an orchestra and a chorus, created a “club” supplied with foreign journals and a good library. According to tradition—dating back to pre-revolutionary days—every prisoner left behind his books after he was freed. A prisoners’ council assigned everyone cells, some of which were beautifully supplied with carpets, on the floors and the walls. Another prisoner remembered that “we strolled along the corridors as if they were boulevards.” To Babina [a member of the Social Revolutionaries], prison life seemed unreal: “Can’t they even lock us up seriously?”

Another SR, arrested in 1924 and sent to Savvatyevo, was pleasantly surprised to find herself in a place “nothing like a prison.” Not only could the political prisoners receive from their contacts food supplies and clothing in abundance, but they also converted their cell into the women’s section of the SRs. A year later, we see how the prisoners on the archipelago of Solovetsky, many of whom were scientists from St. Petersburg, had a theater, a library of 30,000 books, and a botanical garden, “also organized a museum of local flora, fauna, art, and history”, and “produced monthly magazines and newspapers featuring satirical cartoons, extremely homesick poetry, and surprisingly frank fiction”⁴⁶⁴. To be sure, the portrait of the prison system that arose in this same period was not homogeneous. And yet, the aforementioned were not isolated cases. Besides, even if it were a happy and fleeting oasis, its existence in itself is still significant.

Of course, there was no shortage of protests, but it is interesting to read the

(partially satisfied) demands expressed by a hunger strike of political prisoners (mostly Trotskyist):

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.⁴⁶⁵.

This was in June 1931, and the date is significant. While it entailed a massive expansion of the concentration camps, on the other hand Stalin's rise to power and the campaign he launched for the "liquidation of the *kulaks* as a class" did not radically change the situation within the camps. This was not only true for political prisoners: "in the early 1930s [...] prisoners were relatively well-off and free". The Gulag leadership displayed "a certain religious tolerance" and accommodated the request of members of certain "religious sects" for a vegetarian diet⁴⁶⁶. Here is an outline 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 semiliterate, 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 nurseries⁴⁶⁷.

Though “strange” it may have seemed, “the Gulag was slowly bringing ‘civilization’—if that is what it can be called—to the remote wilderness”⁴⁶⁸.

Between the leaders and the administrators, there was no lack of people showing proof of 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.⁴⁶⁹

On the other hand, provoked by famine, the need to increase the prisoners’ productivity, disorganization, and often the incompetence or rapacity of local leaders, “tragedies were plentiful”⁴⁷⁰. Especially appalling was the one that in 1933 struck deportees who were supposed to be settling the island of Nazino in western Siberia. It was a mission that immediately proved hopeless: without tools, with their medicine and food markedly depleted by the journey, on an island that was “virgin land”, “without any buildings” and “food”, the deportees tried to survive by feeding on corpses or performing acts of true cannibalism. These details were taken from a letter sent by a local communist leader to Stalin, and then transmitted to all members of the Politburo, who were in some respects upset by it: “the Nazino tragedy received broad publicity and became a subject of investigation by many commissions”⁴⁷¹. Clearly, the cause of the horror was not homicidal intent: what we witnessed was “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 caused by disorganization⁴⁷². What characterized the Soviet concentration camps was primarily the obsession with development, and that obsession, if on one hand it caused the ignominy of Nazino, on the other had quite different consequences. As in society as a whole, “socialist competitions” were also held among the prisoners: those who distinguished themselves could enjoy “bigger rations” as well as “more intangible prizes.” And that was 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.⁴⁷³

There was a pedagogical obsession on top of the productive one, as shown by the presence in the camps of the “Cultural-Educational Department” (KVCh), an institution which “the Gulag bosses in Moscow [...] believed in very much”. Precisely because of this, they “took the wall newspapers very seriously.” Indeed, if we read them, we see that the biographies of rehabilitated prisoners were 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”⁴⁷⁴. They attempted to “re-educate” the prisoners, transforming them into Stakhanovites ready to participate at the frontline of the country’s development, and with patriotic enthusiasm. Let us once again call on 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-workers, for their alleged ability to triple and quadruple the norms”⁴⁷⁵. It is no coincidence that, until 1937, the guards addressed the prisoners as “comrade”⁴⁷⁶. Imprisonment in the concentration camp did not exclude the possibility of social advancement: “Many exiles also wound up working as guards or administrators in the camps”⁴⁷⁷; in particular, as we have seen, many learned professions that they could practice after their release.

Of course, a brutal turn occurred in 1937. As the third civil war worsened and increasingly dense storm clouds gathered on the international horizon, the fifth column, real or perceived, became the object of an increasingly obsessive hunt. In such circumstances the prisoner was no longer a potential “companion”: it was forbidden to address him this way; he was prescribed the classification of “citizen”, but a citizen who was a potential enemy of the people. Was the Soviet concentration camp driven by homicidal intent from this moment on?⁴⁷⁸ The

American historian treats it this way, although once again she is belied by her own story: “By the 1940s, every camp theoretically had at least one KVCh instructor, as well as a small library and a KVCh ‘club,’ where theatrical performances and concerts were put on, political lectures were given, and political discussions were held⁴⁷⁹. There is more. While the Nazi war of annihilation intensified and the whole country found itself in an absolutely tragic situation, “real time and real money” were heavily invested into strengthening “the propaganda, the posters, and the political indoctrination sessions” of the prisoners:

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 participated⁴⁸⁰.

Around the same time, the chief of a camp with 13,000 prisoners outlined a significant account of its activity:

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 KVCh 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 groups⁴⁸¹.

Of course, after the Nazi invasion the detainees noticed the dramatic effects of shortages, but this had nothing to do with the appearance of homicidal intent:

High mortality rates in the camps in certain years are also, in part, a reflection of events taking place throughout the country [...]. In the winter of 1941–42, when a quarter of the Gulag’s population died of starvation, as many as a million citizens of the city of Leningrad may have starved to death too, trapped behind a German blockade.

Shortages and malnutrition struck a large part of the Soviet Union⁴⁸². And yet, despite the desperate situation, in January 1943 “the Soviet government created a special food ‘fund’ to the Gulag”, although “the food situation did improve as the tide of the war turned in the Soviet Union’s favor”⁴⁸³.

This was so far from an application of homicidal intent that the climate of national unity brought about by the Great Patriotic War also made itself heard in the Gulag. Meanwhile, the camps saw a massive depopulation by a series of amnesties; we see the ex-prisoners fighting bravely, expressing satisfaction and pride in using technologically advanced weapons that were produced “thanks to the industrialization of our country” (which had entailed the first and most consistent expansion of the concentration camps), pursuing careers in the Red Army, being admitted to the communist party, getting honors and medals for military valor⁴⁸⁴.

With phases where the prisoners were relatively “well-off” or “free” alternating with phases of clear deterioration in their economic and legal conditions, the history of the Gulag reflects the history of Soviet society. Attempts to achieve “Soviet democracy”, “socialist democratism”, and even “socialism without the dictatorship of the proletariat” in the country as a whole corresponded with attempts to restore “socialist legality” or “revolutionary legality” in the Gulag. That is why harsh denunciations of the Soviet concentration camps were heard from within the camps and from its leaders. In 1930, Yagoda asked to intervene in “the whole prison system, which is withered to the roots.” In February 1938 it was Vysinsky, Procurator of the USSR, who denounced the “prisoners’ conditions” as “unsatisfactory and, in some cases, absolutely intolerable”, which reduced men to “wild beasts”. A few months later Laurentii Beria, head of the secret police, supported a policy that “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”⁴⁸⁵. These were not ritual denunciations: when discovered, those responsible for “abuses” were severely punished, including with death; many others were dismissed; there were also conflicts between the judiciary and the repressive apparatus, which complained about the introduction of “rules” which came as “an unpleasant surprise”⁴⁸⁶. In order to strengthen control, the prisoners were encouraged to file complaints and petitions. Other times there were attempts to improve the situation by resorting to amnesties and clearing the camps⁴⁸⁷. In the interval between one denunciation and another, real improvement could be

witnessed: these were the phases of “liberalism”, which were often overwhelmed by the eruption of new crises. Because of the coexistence of objective circumstances and subjective responsibilities, as with society as a whole, the Gulag too failed to overcome the state of emergency.

Tsarist Siberia, the “Siberia” of liberal England, and the Soviet Gulag

Should we place the Soviet Gulag next to or even assimilate it into the Nazi *Konzentrationslager*? This question can be responded to with another: why limit the comparison only to these two realities? In Tsarist Russia, Conquest decides (following Solzhenitsyn), the concentration camps were less crowded and were less ruthless than during the time of Lenin and especially Stalin⁴⁸⁸. 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 versts 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 interesting⁴⁸⁹.

In the course of their age-old life, the tsarist concentration camps (which, at least beginning with Peter the Great, also attempted, like the Gulag, to procure the workforce needed for the development of the most desolate and less developed regions) often displayed extreme cruelty. A *via dolorosa* led the condemned to exile, i.e., 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 which furthermore were not always successful.⁴⁹⁰

From all this can be seen the frailness of the attempt to relativize the tsarist Siberia, with the aim of isolating the Soviet Gulag and assimilating it into the Nazi *Konzentrationslager*. But more important is further consideration: a comparison that equates a condition of normalcy with an acute state of emergency is methodologically incorrect! Read with more critical awareness, Conquest's comparison may have the opposite result from what he intended: only in pre-revolutionary Russia was arrest and deportation by administrative

proceedings considered a normal practice, even in the absence of conflict and specific danger. In Soviet Russia, however, the state of emergency powerfully influenced the genesis and configuration of the concentration camps, which became more brutal the more conditions moved away from normalcy.

It is now necessary to take a step further. Beyond Russia (tsarist and Soviet) and Germany, other countries must be brought in for comparison. The concentration camps of liberal England had a dual function. It has been observed that “Australia was the official Siberia for Irish dissidents at the turn of the century”, which at least until 1868 engulfed “representatives of nearly every English protest movement”⁴⁹¹. This is with respect to the repression. But we must not lose sight of the economic role of the liberal English “Siberia”. Immediately after the Glorious Revolution, the number of sentences that sanction the death penalty increased massively. This applied to those who stole of a shilling or a handkerchief just as it did to those who cut down an ornamental hedge, and not even eleven-year-old boys could avoid the punishment. This terrorist legislation, which with some adjustments persisted into the 19th century, anticipated an alternative: those shown mercy were subjected to penal servitude, having to work for a number of years in colonies still little exploited and explored, especially in North America and later in Australia. In other words, Australia constituted liberal England’s “Siberia” in the economic sense as well: its functions decreased with the introduction of labor first by black slaves and afterwards by Indian and Chinese coolies, as well as other colonial peoples⁴⁹².

The English “Siberia” was no less cruel than the tsarist one. In this “totalitarian society” which developed in Australia while it simultaneously perpetuated the extermination of the Aborigines, a portrait emerged based on the available autobiographical literature as well, one that is particularly frightening:

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 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.

Indeed suicide was not only common, but 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.” This way, for the few days of the journey and the trial (which took place in Sydney, some distance from “Siberia” itself), before going to the gallows, the murderer could enjoy the status of a normal prisoner (his was actually an indirect and deferred suicide). And this break gave the witness a chance to breathe, before returning to hell and eventually proceeding with a new draw⁴⁹³.

The concentration camps in Soviet Russia and the Third Reich

In turn, during World War II the concentration camp arose explicitly in the liberal West as well. Beyond the Atlantic, Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered the internment in concentration camps of American citizens of Japanese origin, including women and children, even though the United States was in a clearly more favorable geopolitical situation than the Soviet Union. In any case, after the Battle of Midway there could have been no more talk of military security problems. And yet Japanese Americans remain locked in concentration camps: access to freedom began gradually and only reached completion in mid-1946, almost a year after the end of the war. Even slower was the return of Latin American citizens of Japanese origin, deported by the US from three Latin American countries: it was not until 1948 that the last prisoners left the “internment camp”, that is, the concentration camp, in Crystal City, Texas.⁴⁹⁴ All the same, it would not be imprudent to explain this matter not from the context of war and the state of emergency, but rather from the ideology of a president accused of “totalitarianism” by his opponents, mainly because of economic interventionism applied by his administration during the Great Depression, but also by the constitutional ease with which he dragged such a reluctant country into war (see above, p. 51).

Thus we discover another aspect that the usual historical comparison leaves hidden: the concentration camps which in the 20th century also developed in the

liberal West, and assuming horrible forms. German exiles who were locked up in French concentration camps after the outbreak of war had the impression that they were there “*pour crever*”⁴⁹⁵. The mistreatment of German prisoners by the US after the war had already finished was clearly objectionable, as documented at the time by Canadian historian James Bacque and as defenders of General Dwight D. Eisenhower, with great difficulty and with reservations, have come to recognize. More recent studies have revealed other details. I will limit myself to citing one: an American committee at the time confirmed that of 139 prisoners examined, 137 had “had their testicles permanently destroyed by kicks”⁴⁹⁶. We also see the horror of the concentration camps in which, with the outbreak of the Cold War, the English locked up those suspected of being communists. Finally, we must remember the Gulag in Yugoslavia where communists faithful to Stalin were imprisoned beginning in 1948 and after the break with the USSR⁴⁹⁷. At least in this case, the “Stalinists” were not the creators but rather the victims of the concentration camp, installed by a country that was communist but at the time was a Western ally.

Even based on the assumption that the Soviet Gulag was especially extensive and severe, the main problem remains in any case open: it is necessary to distinguish the role of ideology from the role of objective conditions (the exceptional gravity of the danger and the widespread shortages that characterized the USSR). Relative to such a complex analysis, the deductivism that reduces everything to ideology and the assimilation of the two “totalitarian” ideologies’ concentration camps are much easier.

But let us focus anyway on Soviet Russia and the Third Reich. In the case of the former, the concentration camps arose as the Second Time of Troubles continued to rage. As late as the 1930s, the government did not exercise total 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”⁴⁹⁸. The situation was decidedly more serious in the regions of the Far East:

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 physical violence”—was virtually absent.⁴⁹⁹

From the assassination of the German ambassador in Moscow, carried out in July 1918 “during the session of the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets” by a member of a party in the government (the Socialist Revolutionaries), up to the murder of Kirov at the door of his office at the hands of a young communist, the Soviet government had to confront terrorism (a phenomenon with a long history in Russia) and feared infiltration at all levels of the state apparatus by an opposition determined to overthrow the “usurpers” and “traitors” from power. The government only achieved full control of its territory and the state apparatus with the arrival of autocracy, and the terror was a response to a crisis as acute and long-lasting as ever.

Subsequently, the situation would continue to be characterized by a mixture of contradictions (the intensification of the international war, the underlying civil war internally, the industrialization at forced march which was considered necessary for the salvation of the country but at the same time caused new conflicts and new tensions), which extended the state of emergency under new forms. Precisely for this reason, as pointed out by a recent study, “the terror cannot be construed solely as a series of orders issued by Stalin” and his accomplices. In fact, “popular elements” acted in it as well and there was no shortage of initiatives “from below”; workers, animated by the “furious faith” we have already mentioned, were often the ones who demanded the death penalty for the “traitors” and even the renunciation of the legal “subtleties” of long and expensive judicial proceedings.⁵⁰⁰ And all this happened during 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 replacement of open voting by the secret ballot, and with the ability to select from multiple candidates for union and factory leaders. And the newly elected were often personally involved in improving working conditions and reducing occupational accidents.⁵⁰¹ Indeed, “there was no contradiction between repression and democracy in the political psychology of Stalin and his followers”, and in this sense we can even speak of a “democratization of repression”⁵⁰².

But it was precisely that democratization which stimulated an expansion of the repression. Taking up the new possibility of exposing corrupt and inefficient

officials, in the factory and in letters to the press, this tumultuous movement from below tended to describe the accused as enemies of the people and to identify constant workplace accidents as a form of sabotage of the new society they were committed to building⁵⁰³. The growing threat of war and the obsessive hunt for a fifth column that was widespread but well-hidden, the growing fear and hysteria, transformed factory, union, and party meetings into a “free-for-all”. Occasionally, Stalin and his closest collaborators were forced to intervene to contain and channel this fury, warning against the tendency to look for traitors and saboteurs everywhere and in doing so destroy party and union organizations⁵⁰⁴. We are now led to recall the Great Terror that dominated France in 1789 in the weeks and months immediately following the storming of the Bastille, when, exaggerating a danger that was still not imaginary, “peasant imagination and rumour saw [destructive brigands] as the mercenaries of the enemies of the people and of that aristocratic conspiracy with another face: foreign invasion”⁵⁰⁵. In the USSR in the second half of the 1930s, the danger was real and extremely serious, but no less real was the hysteria.

To sum up, the terror emerged in the USSR in the period beginning with World War I, which opened the Second Time of Troubles, and World War II, which threatened to inflict on the country and the nation as a whole an even more colossal catastrophe: the extermination and enslavement clearly put forward in *Mein Kampf*. And terror arose in the course of an industrialization at forced march that was aimed at saving the country, during which the horror of fierce repression on a large scale was intertwined with real processes of emancipation (the mass dissemination of education and culture, the prodigious social mobility, the emergence of the welfare state, and the overwhelming and contradictory role of classes that until that time had been condemned to total subordination).

The differences are clear with the Third Reich, which since its arrival had full control of the territory and the state apparatus, and with the traditional efficiency of an extensive, capillary bureaucratic network. If in Russia ideology played a minor role in creating the state of emergency (having existed prior to October 1917 and if anything extended by the revolutionary messianism, partially combatted by Stalin), in Germany the state of emergency and its counterpart, the concentration camps, were from the beginning the result of a clearly established political project and a clear 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 produced over the course of World War I, he was determined to use the most ruthless terror. The expansionism of Nazi Germany also aimed to

reaffirm white and Aryan supremacy on a global scale, and to resume and radicalize the colonial tradition, applying it also to Eastern Europe: from the beginning, the *Konzentrationslager* had as its objectives those who potentially opposed the war and the colonial and racial empire that Hitler would attempt to conquer and build. A prerequisite for the success of this program was neutralizing the Judeo-Bolshevik virus which sowed subversion and undermined the foundations of civilization, putting the natural hierarchy of peoples and races into question: it was therefore necessary to liquidate the Jews, the communist “commissars” and political cadres in the territories to be conquered, as was done in Germany. The road would thus be paved to treat the inferior races of Eastern Europe as the Indians had been treated, who needed to be exterminated to make room for German settlers, besides continuing enslavement in service of the white Aryan master race.

The Gulag, the *Konzentrationslager*, and the “absent third”

After the invasion of first Poland and then the USSR, the Nazi concentration camps seemed to resume and then exceed the most tragic chapters in the history of colonial slavery. When the availability of slaves was almost unlimited due to the slave trade, slaveowners had no economic interest in their preservation; they were capable of condemning their slaves to death from overwork so as to replace them with others and extract the maximum advantage from each one. In this way, observes a 19th-century economist cited by Marx, the flourishing agriculture of the West Indies “[has engulfed millions of the African race](#)”; “[negro life is most recklessly sacrificed](#)”⁵⁰⁶. The war unleashed by Hitler in Eastern Europe represented a new and even more brutal form of the slave trade. Captured and exterminated en masse, the Slavic *Untermenschen* (survivors of the Germanization of the territory) were forced to work to death, in order to make the master race’s civilization possible and to feed their war machine; they suffered a condition similar to that of the blacks (of the Caribbean), and were explicitly compared as such by the Führer.

The prison system reproduces the relations of the society that expresses it. In the USSR, inside and outside the Gulag, we see in operation a developmentalist dictatorship that seeks to mobilize and “reeducate” all forces in order to overcome an age-old backwardness, a task made even more urgent by the approach of a war that, as explicit stated in *Mein Kampf*, will be one of enslavement and annihilation: in this framework, the terror merged with the emancipation of oppressed nationalities, in addition to a strong social mobility

and access to education, culture, and even to positions of responsibility and leadership for social strata that until that time had been completely marginalized. The productivist and pedagogical stimulation and the consequent mobility were felt, for better or for worse, within the Gulag as well. The Nazi concentration camp reflected, meanwhile, a racial hierarchy that characterizes the racial state that already existed and the racial empire to be built: in this case, the prisoners' concrete behavior played an irrelevant or almost marginal role, and therefore the pedagogical concern was meaningless. In short, the Gulag prisoner was a "comrade" forced to participate, under particularly hard conditions, in the productive effort of the whole country, and after 1937 was at any rate a potential "citizen", despite the now subtle line of demarcation between that and enemy of the people or member of the fifth column, compelled to resist the total war that was approaching or had already begun; the Nazi concentration camp prisoner was first and foremost an Untermensch, marked forever by their nationality or racial degeneration.

In seeking an analogy for the *Konzentrationslager*, it is necessary to invoke the concentration camps that were deeply embedded in the colonial tradition (in which Hitler explicitly wants to place himself) and that were directed at colonial peoples. Here we have the central omission of the comparison! In this sense we can talk about the absent third of the comparison popularized today. Two distinguished historians have respectively defined the "militarized labor camps" of colonial India in 1877 and the concentration camps where Libyans were jailed by liberal Italy as "[extermination camps](#)"⁵⁰⁷. Although this definition might be considered exaggerated, the racial logic and hierarchy of the Third Reich bring us back to the concentration camps, the two being present in both the Italian colonial empire and the Western ones, as in the concentration camps that were built by them.

We are also impelled to think of Nazism when we read about the modalities in which the "[Canadian Holocaust](#)" or the "[final solution of our Indian Problem](#)" were perpetrated. The "[Truth Commission into Genocide in Canada](#)" speaks of "[death camps](#)", of "[men, women and children](#)" being "[deliberately killed](#)", of "[a system whose aim was to destroy most native people by disease, relocation and outright murder](#)". To achieve this result, the champions of white supremacy did not hesitate to deal with "[innocent children](#)", who were put to death "[by beatings and torture, and after being deliberately exposed to tuberculosis and other diseases](#)"; others suffered from forced sterilization. A small "[collaborating minority](#)" was allowed to survive, but only after giving up its native language

and its identity, placing itself in the service of the murderers⁵⁰⁸. In this case as well it might be presumed that righteous indignation contributed to an exaggeration of the events; it remains clear that these practices were identical or similar to those that existed in the Third Reich, and were motivated by an ideology similar, once again, to the one that supported the construction of the Nazi racial state.

Let us move now to the southern United States: in the decades following the Civil War, black prisoners (the overwhelming majority of the prison population), often hired out to private farms, were herded into “great rolling cages that followed construction camps and railroad building”. In the same reports, officials state:

[...] “that convicts were excessively and sometimes cruelly punished; that they were poorly clothed and fed; that the sick were neglected, insomuch as no 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 trot⁵⁰⁹.

This was a system that used “shackles, dogs, whips, and guns” and “created a living hell for the prisoners.” The mortality rate is highly significant. Between 1877 and 1880, during construction of the Greenwood and Augusta railway lines, “almost 45 percent” of the forced laborers used there died, “and these were young black men in the prime of their lives”⁵¹⁰. Or another statistic on the same period can be cited: “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”⁵¹¹.

Regarding the mortality rate, it would be interesting to make a systematic statistical comparison of the concentration camps in the USSR and the Third Reich. In the Gulag, it has been estimated that in the early 1930s, before the turn of the screw brought on by the murder of Kirov and the intensification of the dangers of war, the annual death rate “was about 4.8 percent of the total prisoner population”. This statistic does not include the camps used to exploit gold deposits in the Kolyma River area; it is also necessary to take into account “the [sanitary departments’] general tendency to underreport deaths”; however, although the official figures may be augmented substantially, it seems unlikely that they could have reached the mortality rate decimating the African-American prisoners mentioned above. Moreover, the reasons for the “underreporting” are significant. The fact is that “high mortality and escape rates could lead to harsh penalties”; [sanitary departments [...] feared accusations of negligence and late hospitalization”; “camps could be inspected at any time”⁵¹².

Judging by the mortality rate of hired semi-slaves, it does not appear that any similar penalties hung over the American businessmen who enriched themselves through the construction of the Greenwood and Augusta railway lines or through other enterprises. In any case, one essential question should be clear. In the southern United States, black prisoners suffered from horrible living and working conditions and died en masse during a period of peace: the state of emergency played no role, and the productivist concern was also marginal or almost nonexistent. The concentration camps of the southern United States reproduced the racial hierarchy and racial state that characterized the society as a whole: the black prisoner was neither a potential “comrade” or a potential “citizen”; he was a *Untermensch*. The treatment inflicted on them by whites was considered normal treatment in relation to races that were not a part of real civilization. Again we come across the ideology of the Third Reich.

Conversely, there are eminent American historians who compare this prison system with “the prison camps of Nazi Germany”⁵¹³. And it is no coincidence that the medical experiments carried out on *Untermenschen* in Nazi Germany had been conducted in the US, using blacks as guinea pigs⁵¹⁴. Across the ocean, in the years of Wilhelm II, colonial and imperialist Germany has carried out medical experiments in Africa and using Africans: in this activity two doctors stand out who later become teachers of Joseph Mengele⁵¹⁵, who in Nazi

Germany brought the perversion of medicine and science outlined during the colonial tradition (European and American) to completion. Not only can the Third Reich not be separated from the history of the West's relation to colonial peoples, but it must be added that this tradition has continued to show signs of vitality well past the downfall of Hitler. In 1997, President Clinton felt compelled to apologize to the African-American community: "In the '60s more than 400 Alabama men of color were used as human guinea pigs by the government. Suffering from syphilis, they were not cured because the authorities wanted to study the effects of the disease on a 'sample of the population'"⁵¹⁶.

National awakening in Eastern Europe and in the colonies: two antithetical answers

To compare the concentration camps on the concealment of treatment of the "inferior races", also by the liberal West, as well as on the separation of domestic and foreign policy, between the repressive practices and ideologies on which they were built, is evidently absurd. Considering these often ignored elements and links, the usual assimilation of the two totalitarian dictators is transformed into its opposite. It has been observed that "Stalin was particularly impressed" by the awakening of oppressed or marginalized nationalities in the former Habsburg Empire. This is in line with his remarks in 1921, during the Tenth Congress of the Russian Communist Party⁵¹⁷: "[About fifty years ago all Hungarian towns bore a German character; now they have become Magyarised](#)"; there was also an "[awakening](#)" of the "[Czechs](#)". This was a phenomenon that involved all of Europe: from the "[German city](#)" that it had been, Riga became a "[Lettish city](#)"; similarly, the cities of Ukraine "[will inevitably be Ukrainianised](#)", making the previously predominant Russian element secondary⁵¹⁸.

Through awareness of this process, which was considered progressive and irreversible, the Bolshevik Party as a whole and Stalin in person became involved 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 Soviet 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 before⁵¹⁹.

The innovation of this policy stands out even more when compared with the obsession with assimilation that still spanned the US and Canada in the 20th century: forced to sever ties with their community of origin and even their family, Native American children were also required to give up their dances and “strange” clothes, to cut their hair short, and above all to avoid use of their tribal language like the plague; violation of the rule forcing them to express themselves only in English led to punishment and, in Canada, even electroshock therapy⁵²⁰.

With regard to the USSR, there is an essential point confirmed by the consensus:

The republics thus received, some earlier than others, a flag, an anthem, a language, a national academy, and in some cases even a Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, and retained the right, later invoked in 1991, to declare independence from the federation, although the process was left unspecified.⁵²¹

In his *Mein Kampf*, Hitler too was responding to the Slavicization and “annihilation of the German element” (*Entdeutschung*) that was taking place in Eastern Europe. However, according to him, that process was neither progressive nor irreversible, but only sufficiently radical measures could stop and reverse it. This did not mean a policy of assimilation and “Germanizing the Austrian Slavs”; no, “Germanization can be carried out only as regards human beings”. It would be ridiculous to think that “a Nigger or a Chinaman will

become a German because he has learned the German language and is willing to speak German for the future, and even to cast his vote for a German political party”: “such a process of Germanization is in reality de-Germanization”, and would “produce a process of bastardization” and therefore “the annihilation of the German element”; “precisely those qualities would be destroyed which had enabled the conquering race [*Eroberervolk*] to achieve victory over an inferior people”⁵²². Germanizing the land without Germanizing the people would be possible only by following a very precise model: across the Atlantic, the white race expanded westward while Americanizing the land, but certainly not Americanizing the redskins: in this way the United States remained “a Nordic-Germanic state” without degrading into an “international mishmash of peoples”⁵²³. This was the model that Germany needed to follow in Eastern Europe.

If the Bolsheviks and Stalin worried about promoting national elites and the largest possible indigenous political class in the Soviet republics, Hitler’s program for the conquest of the East was the exact opposite: “all representatives of the Polish intelligentsia must be annihilated”; it is necessary to “prevent” by all means “the formation of a new intellectual class”. Only then could the colonial objectives be achieved: the people destined to work as slaves in the service of the master race should not lose sight that “there can be only one master, the German”⁵²⁴.

In his 1921 speech at the Tenth Congress of the Russian Communist Party, Stalin drew attention to another element of the radical change that was taking place in world history: “during the imperialist war the imperialist groups of belligerent powers themselves were obliged to appeal to the colonies from which they obtained man-power for their armies”, and this “could not fail to rouse these races and nationalities for the struggle for liberation”. The national awakening in Eastern Europe joined with the one being produced in the colonial world: “[The development of the national question into the general colonial question was not a historical accident](#)”⁵²⁵. If Europe was destined to end a policy of discrimination, denationalization, and oppression of minorities, the colonies and their national awakening were destined to radically put into question the concentration camps built by the conquerors for the races they considered inferior.

The novelty of the use of colored troops would not escape Hitler, who did not hesitate to denounce this betrayal of the white race. Primarily culpable was France, where a process of “bastardization” and “becoming more negroid”

(*Vernegerung*) was developing quickly and disastrously, and which was in fact assisting in “the creation of an African State on European soil”⁵²⁶. We are not dealing with simply “prejudice” here: this was a precise political program, that looked with horror at the use of colored troops and at racial mixing in sexual and marital relationships as well, as these practices, dissolving the barrier between the master race and the slave race, provoked a crisis in the control the former was meant to exercise over the second, in the best interests of Civilization. In the Nazi leader’s view, the national awakening in Eastern Europe and the use of colored troops in internal conflicts of the West (with the consequent awareness of colonial peoples) constituted a terrible threat to both civilization and to the white race. And a response to that threat was the building of the racial state and empire, and the outbreak of war in the east, placing in the Nazi concentration camps an interminable mass of slaves recruited from the “inferior races” and destined to work and die in the service of the master race.

The Nazi concentration camps were meant to devour the millions and millions of slaves or superfluous beings that would inevitably be generated by a program of constant Germanization of the land, which rejected *a priori* the Germanization of its indigenous inhabitants. And such a project would have devoured an even greater number of victims if it had not been defeated by an opposing project, based on the recognition of not only the existential but also the cultural and national rights of indigenous peoples. Due to a number of both objective and subjective circumstances, which should not be neglected in any way, this second project also produced concentration camps. But despite the horror it entailed, it cannot in any way be assimilated to the first, which explicitly called for the continuation of the genocidal practices already taking place in the colonial world, and for their even more brutal extension to the new colonies that would be constructed in Eastern Europe.

Totalitarianism or developmentalist dictatorship?

We can now understand the inadequate or misleading nature of the category of totalitarianism, which is usually invoked to consecrate the assimilation of Stalin’s USSR and Hitler’s Germany. A growing number of historians are questioning or rejecting it. To explain the history of the Soviet Union, some of them start from Peter the Great and, continuing further back, from “**Muscovy encircled**” with its rather fragile geopolitical placement, as demonstrated by the invasion of Genghis Khan. Stalin thus felt the need to promote economic development as quickly as possible in order to save both the nation and the new

political and social order that it had given rise to⁵²⁷ This was how a developmentalist dictatorship emerged and was imposed.

All this was in the context of a society which, on the one hand, had presumably not completely forgotten the warning made by Lenin in 1905 (“[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](#)”)⁵²⁸, and on the other hand, was dragged from one state of emergency to another, from one civil war to another, because of objective circumstances as much as intrinsic ideological weaknesses. Therefore, we are looking at a society characterized not by a homogeneity and a totalitarian alignment, but rather by the permanence and omnipresence of civil war, which manifested itself even within families, fractured by opposing attitudes toward the process of collectivization in 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.](#)” Even the relationship between parents and children was stained by similar bloody crimes⁵²⁹. Here the conflict assumed the ferocity of a religious war. And this applied not only to those who explicitly drew their motives from Christianity, but also to the fervent supporters of the new society, themselves moved by the “furious faith”.

An analysis of the relations of production is especially illuminating. Let us picture ourselves in a Soviet factory or one of the many shipyards that sprouted during the massive modernization program promoted by Stalin. While its location, far from being uniformly determined from above, was decided at the end of a complex decision-making process full of passionate and often contentious discussions, “unlike the narrow centralization of the tsarist era, the Soviet Union’s anti-colonial rhetoric gave the regional lobbies a power that was unthinkable during the former regime”. Especially strong was the power of the regions that, precisely because of their backwardness, demanded that the regime keep its promises to end the inequalities and “injustices of czarist imperialism”, so as to promote industrialization and modernization on a national scale⁵³⁰.

Once we enter the place of production and work, we do not at all get the impression of rigid discipline and blind obedience: on the contrary, there was no shortage of disorder and conflict. Meanwhile, our attention is called to the strong fluctuation of labor power. Stalin had to fight tenaciously against the phenomenon, but even in 1936 “[more than 87 percent of industrial workers left](#)

their jobs”. Also encouraged by the policy of full employment and by concrete possibilities for social advancement, this fluctuation was in any case a counterweight to the power exercised by the authorities, in the factory or at the shipyard.

But that is not all. Overall we are witnessing a sort of three-way tug of war: the party and union leaders, dedicated to increasing labor productivity; the workers, often primarily concerned with increasing their wages; and the managers caught between them, indecisive about what to do. These were mainly those workers who achieved more, and often also the managers who disregarded “orders from Moscow”⁵³¹.

It should be added that this very working class would end up divided. While it prompted enthusiasm in some, the desired increase in productivity and the complete dedication to socialist competition, aimed at developing the productive forces and achieving or surpassing the most advanced Western countries, yielded irritation, deaf resistance, or open hostility from others. If the former were labeled by the latter as “detachments of Antichrists”, the former reserved for the latter “a holy hatred for the enemies of a new socialist life”⁵³², using language that brings us back to the “furious faith” that inspired a whole generation.

The conflict between supporters and opponents of the new order was certainly not the only one. We also see a confrontation between technical staff on one side and the masses of workers on the other. The former had often fought against the Bolsheviks and on the side of the Whites: they appealed to their own education, but at the same time tried to subdue the latter with all kinds of controls. But the newly minted technicians and specialists, as well as those who, despite having been trained under the old regime, collaborated loyally with Soviet power and out of patriotism as well, had to meet a challenge coming from a new social stratum, the “shock workers”. And this challenge was all the more formidable in a society where “workers are encouraged to judge their leaders”; it is then understandable that often the “engineers strongly resisted worker control”⁵³³. But this resistance was anything but comfortable: workers could make their voices heard by hanging posters in the workplace and by writing to the press and to party leaders; often those who felt intimidated were the technicians and production managers in the factory or other workplaces⁵³⁴.

Stalin also makes reference to these conflicts when discussing the Stakhanovite movement, which “began somehow, of itself, almost spontaneously, from below,

without any pressure whatsoever from the administrators of our enterprises” and “[even in opposition to them](#)”; indeed, at least in the beginning, the Stakhanovites were forced to perform their experiments “in secret from the administration, in secret from the inspectors”; a worker trying to introduce “new-fangled ideas” even risked “losing his job”, only blocked by the “[intervention of the shop superintendent](#)”⁵³⁵. In competition and often conflict with each other, we see in action a plurality of industrial, technical, administrative, political, and union authorities (also marking a distinction between “party and union”)⁵³⁶.

In conclusion, visiting a factory or a Soviet shipyard (including during the Stalin years) certainly does not give the impression of entering a “totalitarian” workplace. “Totalitarianism” was more prevalent in the factories of Tsarist Russia, where an unequivocal principle was in effect: “[The factory owner is an absolute sovereign and legislator whom no laws constrain](#)”; in fact, he had recourse to the whip in case of infractions of a certain severity⁵³⁷. Or take the example of a country like the US Let us quote here the treatment reserved for prisoners (mostly African Americans) who were hired out, as we know, to private companies. Those companies received “absolute control” in exchange for money paid:

[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.](#)⁵³⁸.

Certainly, these were prisoners, but note that in the South the charge of “vagrancy” was enough for African Americans to be arrested, convicted, and hired out to entrepreneurs determined to get rich. Sometimes blacks were simply captured by landowners and forced into labor. It is no coincidence that, in the very title and subtitle of his book, the author quoted here speaks of “slavery by another name”, of “[the re-enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II](#)”⁵³⁹. While slaves or semi-slaves obviously constituted a small percentage of the total workforce, we are in any case made to think about the prolonged presence of slave or semi-slave work relations in the production sites of American capitalist society.

Beyond this, a more general consideration should be made: in the Soviet factory we observe dynamics and relationships that would be considered intolerably

undisciplined in a capitalist factory in any of the democratic countries. This point is made clear by a well-known thesis of Marx (*The Poverty of Philosophy*):

While inside the modern workshop the division of labour is meticulously regulated by the authority of the employer, modern society has no other rule, no other authority for the distribution of labour than free competition [...]. It can even be laid down as a general rule that the less authority presides over the division of labour inside society, the more the division of labour 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 the division of labour, are in *inverse ratio* to each other⁵⁴⁰.

It can be said that in Soviet society an inversion of the dialectic of capitalist society described by Marx has occurred at intervals: the absence of a rigid discipline inside the factory (with the more or less pronounced decline of traditional employer despotism) corresponded to the terror exercised by the state in civil society. But in this respect we should also remain vigilant against simplifications: we are facing “a state that is more confused and less organized” than one might think; “the center rarely spoke with one voice”; the “ideological uniformity” itself was often just a “façade”⁵⁴¹.

The routine analyses of totalitarianism reduce production sites and workplaces to total abstraction, and for that reason are left one-sided and superficial. If we arrive at this total and unjust abstraction, the category of totalitarianism appears to us in all its inadequacy: it does not in any way help us to understand a society that in its last stages, after the disappearance of the “furious faith” that could not have lasted forever (as Kennan lucidly predicted), was undermined by a real anarchy in its workplaces which were barely staffed by workers, who even when they were present seemed to be on a sort of white strike, which was moreover well-tolerated: this was the impression recorded by worker and union delegations, with puzzlement and fascination, when they visited the USSR in its final years*. In a China that was starting to leave Maoism behind, customs remained in force in the public sector that have been well-described by a Western reporter: “to the very last worker [...] if he wants to, he can decide to do nothing, to stay at home for one or two years and continue to receive his salary at the end of the month.” The “culture of laziness” also continued to dominate the private sector of the economy, which was then emerging: “Those formerly dependent on the state [...] arrive late, then read the newspaper, go to the

cafeteria half an hour early, leave the office an hour early” and were often absent for family reasons, for example “because the wife is sick”. And the leaders and managers who tried to introduce discipline and efficiency in the workplace had to confront not only the resistance and moral indignation of their subordinates (to fine a worker for taking leave to help his wife is a disgrace!), but at times threats and even violence⁵⁴². It is quite difficult to describe these relationships on the basis of “totalitarianism”; we will be guided better by adhering to the previously quoted fragment of Marx: *The Poverty of Philosophy* can help us understand a phenomenon that is absolutely inexplicable from the point of view of the classic theory of totalitarianism: in the USSR, in the countries of Eastern Europe, and in China, the more or less radical dismantling of the “totalitarian” system was accompanied by a drastic reinforcement of workplace discipline; for example, it was not until 1993 that Chinese law permitted dismissal for absenteeism approved⁵⁴³.

There is no doubt that, particularly in situations of acute crisis, production sites and workplaces in the USSR and Maoist China were not excluded from the terror, and yet under normal conditions they were regimes that were far from totalitarianism. In summary, it can be said that the use of that term is only convincing given a double, arbitrary abstraction. Ignoring the relations that existed in production sites and workplaces allows communist dictatorship and Nazi dictatorship to be brought closer together; silence on the terror and the concentration camps used against colonies and semi-colonies, in addition to how people of colonial origin (such as Native Americans and African Americans) were treated within the colonizing countries, allows an abyss to be opened between the liberal West and the “totalitarian” states.

Relative to the Soviet Union of Brezhnev and his followers, that of Stalin had different characteristics, but the central element of differentiation constitutes the exceptional ideological and political mobilization, which for a long period of time, before deflating and losing all credibility, succeeded in providing an essential contribution to the functioning of the productive and economic apparatus. These were the decades in which a developmentalist dictatorship unfolded: its course was at the same time tumultuous and ruthless, and it was characterized by a “furious faith” that drove the social and ethnic groups that paved the way for a great ascent and that received the recognition that until that moment had been denied. It makes little sense to assimilate this tragic and contradictory experience with the Nazi dictatorship, which was explicitly established in terms of war, of colonial conquest, and of the reassertion of racial

hierarchies, which from the beginning had a state and bureaucratic apparatus of consolidated efficiency and could impose itself uniformly in all aspects of social life. And yet, this assimilation is now commonplace. It is necessary to investigate its origin.

The forgetting of history and the construction of a mythology. Stalin and Hitler as twin monsters

The Cold War and the new enemy's *reductio ad Hitlerum*

With the outbreak of the Cold War, each of the two antagonists was committed to labeling the other as heir to the Third Reich, shortly before it was defeated by both. “Nobody today,” observed Lukács in 1954, “will presume to claim that either the ideology or the procedures of Hitlerism belong entirely to past history”⁵⁴⁴. Indeed, on this the two sides seemed to agree without difficulty. But while the communist philosopher, using the category of imperialism, aligned Truman and Hitler⁵⁴⁵, the opposite side would resort to the category of totalitarianism, in order to subsume under it Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union.

Both categories were brandished as weapons of war. The attempt to assimilate the new enemy to the old was not limited to denouncing imperialism, or totalitarianism. Having described the ideological path that led to the triumph of the Third Reich as a process of the “destruction of reason”, Lukács felt the need to subsume the “ideology” of the “free world” led by the US under the category of irrationalism as well. This operation was not without difficulty, and in fact the Hungarian philosopher denounced the “new form of irrationalism disguised as a rationalism”. Indeed, in the “new situation” that was created, “it is perfectly natural for the Machist-pragmatist rather than the German type of irrationalism to reign in philosophy”, and its exponents would include, among others, Wittgenstein, Carnap, and Dewey⁵⁴⁶.

The effort to assimilate the new enemy to the old was also seen on the opposite side. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, long after having insisted on the fateful role of imperialism and citing for this purpose Lord Cromer in particular, whom Churchill considered one of the heroes of the British Empire post-World War II⁵⁴⁷, Arendt completed the comparison and equalization of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union as, in addition to totalitarianism, another category as well, that of “pan-movements”, so that another analogy emerges: the Pan-Germanism of

the first country corresponded with the Pan-Slavism of the second. This conclusion is the end of a *tour de force* even more blatant than that seen in Lukács: we see Churchill comparing the communist movement with a “church” characterized by an expansionist universalism “[whose missionaries are in every country](#)” and in every people; in any case the alleged Stalinist an-Slavism called on colonial peoples to get rid of the domination of the master race, which was however considered natural and beneficial by the theorists of Pan-Germanism.

But in this moment, on the two opposing sides, the main concern was the construction of analogies and symmetries. We have to smile when we read in Arendt that what characterizes the “pan-movements” (and therefore Nazism and communism) is “[absolute claims to chosenness](#)”: the celebration of the United States as God’s chosen people is deeply rooted in the American political tradition and continues to resonate in the speeches of American presidents today! The demands of the Cold War clearly took priority over all other considerations, as confirmed by the remarks of a leading American historian in 1950. At the time he had opposed Franklin D. Roosevelt and his policy of allying with the USSR; since the outbreak of the Cold War he had felt driven to defend the thesis of the political and moral equivalence of Hitler and Stalin. He was so intensely devoted to assimilating the two dictators that not the slightest gap appeared between them. Hitler had insisted on the “Teutonic racial destiny”: the ordinary reader might be reminded of the “manifest destiny” and providence that, following a long tradition, presided over the relentless expansion of the US; however, arguing and obscuring in a manner not unlike Arendt, the historian here quoted mapped the Nazi motif of the “Teutonic racial destiny” onto “Stalin’s and Lenin’s faith in the messianic role of the proletariat and the international revolutionary Communist movement”. Again. Celebration of the “master race” is central to Nazi ideology: the search for analogies and historical precedents should point to the regime of white supremacy long in force in the southern US, which had repeatedly referred to Nazism and that continued to exist in a particular way in 1950, the year the book discussed here was published. Regardless, the American historian discovers that the theory of the “master race” that applied to Hitler’s Germany similarly applied to Stalin’s Soviet Union, where “almost every important discovery” was attributed to “[some unknown or little-known Russian](#)”!⁵⁴⁸

The *reductio ad Hitler* of the former ally also carried the accusation of genocide. The first to move in this direction is 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 dedicated to the fight against McCarthyism on the one hand and the regime of white supremacy on the other), published a book that drew the UN's attention to the tragedy that hung over African Americans: in the US (particularly in the South), the regime of discrimination, humiliation, racial oppression, and social marginalization continued to operate; rapes, lynchings, and legal and extra-legal executions did not cease, and police violence intensified (as late as 1963 Martin Luther King spoke of "[the unspeakable horrors of police brutality](#)"). Recounting this long list of injustices and torments, referring to the convention adopted by the UN in December 1948 against the crime of genocide, and noting the fact that according to that convention genocide did not necessarily entail the systematic annihilation of an entire ethnic group, the book had a decidedly provocative title: *We Charge Genocide*. Possibly buoyed by the strong opposition the convention had met in the American political world, the denunciation was translated into many languages: in the USSR it appeared with an introduction by the Jewish intellectual Ilia Ehrenburg, who compared the Third Reich and the US to the extent that both were affected by genocidal or potentially genocidal racist delirium. The reactions to the book in the US were furious, and they responded by throwing the accusation back. A member of the committee that had approved the UN convention declared: "in communist countries the official policy is to expel entire groups on the basis of their racial and national origin"⁵⁴⁹.

If the Cold War began with each of the two antagonists describing the other as a new version of Nazism and its genocidal madness, the coming of the triumph of the West meant that the game of analogies would develop ever more exclusively in the direction desired by the victors. In particular, it has become an obsession for the dominant ideology to assimilate Stalin and Hitler as completely as possible, to the point of presenting them as twin monsters.

The negative cult of heroes

How did this come about? While most of the attention focused exclusively on the Soviet Union and the Third Reich, we see Gandhi equating Nazi imperialism and British imperialism in his denunciation of colonial England and Nazi Germany. Investigators who cannot at all be suspected of anti-Westernism have repeatedly compared the treatment given to colonial peoples, not only practiced but also theorized by the liberal West, to the genocidal practices of the Third Reich. This comparison has been made with respect to: the deportation of the Cherokees ordered by Andrew Jackson (the President of the United States who

was visited and celebrated by Tocqueville); the attitude of Theodore Roosevelt towards the “inferior races” (which must be confronted with a “war of extermination” in case they rebelled against the “superior race”); and England’s treatment of the Irish people by (in a manner similar to the redskins, condemned to die by mass starvation as late as the mid-19th century).

There is more. Today the keywords used to describe the horror of the 20th century come from studies of the liberal world of the 19th century: with special reference to the “development of industrial capitalism” in England, it has been said that “the Gulag was not an invention of the 20th century”; “totalitarian society” has been used to describe Australia as it engulfed deportees from England (often wretched convicts of petty theft, to which they had been forced by hunger); finally, regarding the tragedy of the Native Americans, of Aboriginal Australians, or others in the British colonies in general, reputable researchers have spoken of the “American Holocaust” (or the “final solution” to the question of Amerindians), the “Australian Holocaust”, and the “late Victorian holocausts”, not to mention the “Black Holocaust” (the abduction of Africans and the enslavement of those who survived it, one out of every three or four), to which African Americans have tried to call attention, and, as we have seen, the “Canadian Holocaust”.

Even with respect to the events currently unfolding before our eyes, in authoritative information sources we can read that in Afghanistan, a country under American protectorate, captured Taliban are crammed into a place that “resembles the Nazi concentration camp at Auschwitz”, and that at Guantanamo, according to Amnesty International, operates “the gulag of our times”. Finally, it is worth noting that the most unbiased American historiography has not hesitated to make a comparison between the Anglo-American annihilation of entire cities from the air (Dresden, Hiroshima, Nagasaki), on the one hand, and the Jewish genocide on the other⁵⁵⁰. But all this pales as if by magic to the dominant ideology and historiography, which overshadow the reality of the concentration camps that appeared during the Second Thirty Years’ War even in countries with more consolidated liberal traditions and that continued to be maintained even after the defeat of the Third Reich, with an anti-Soviet and anti-communist function, and that in any case only served to imitate and expand the colonial and semicolonial world.

And yet, though colossal, this concealment is not sufficient to construct the myth of the twin monsters. This is how it proceeds further. From the comparison between the USCP and the Third Reich is drawn the comparison between Stalin

between the USSR and the Third Reich is drawn the comparison between Stalin and Hitler, one or the other described so as to abstract away the respective historical and political contexts. Once the explosive contradictions that characterized both the Second Time of Troubles and the Second Thirty Years' War have been dissolved, Stalin's terror appears as an expression of gratuitous violence motivated solely by the totalitarian ideology or even the bloodroot paranoia of a single person.

Similarly the background that preceded Hitler is hidden. He was born in the late 19th century. It was still the “most painful” century in human history, the “century of colonies” and above all the “century of races”, which had the merit of having disproved once and for all the naive “ideas of the eighteenth century with regard to the brotherhood of nations” and the myth of the common origin and unity of the human race, the ideological frameworks that “Socialists” pathetically clung to despite the refutations of history and science⁵⁵¹. These were the sentiments expressed in 1898 by Anglo-German author Houston S. Chamberlain, who would later be especially appreciated by Hitler, but at this time was acclaimed throughout the West. To understand Nazism, it is first necessary to investigate the political project at its base, and this political project not only did not refer to a single criminal or insane personality, but was linked in various ways to other countries and political movements beyond Germany and Nazism. In this sense, whatever its artistic merits, Bertolt Brecht's *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* is not convincing. To illustrate Hitler's personality he makes use of a literary genre (crime fiction) that cannot be very enlightening. In this way a moral judgment is presupposed, when in reality it is constructed *a posteriori*. Nazism was rooted in a historical period when the “evidence” in its favor was constituted by the racial hierarchy and colonial expansionism behind which were often hidden genocidal practices.

Of course, inheriting this tradition at a time when it was beginning to be vehemently contested, and radicalizing it to the point of wanting to set it into action in Eastern Europe, was a dreadful leap forward, but it was a development and not a creation from scratch. Widespread in 19th-century culture was the idea of “extermination” which, says Disraeli, is the expression of an “[irresistible law of Nature](#)”. At the end of the century, Spencer lamented that “we have entered upon an era of social cannibalism in which the strong nations are devouring the weaker”. In the US, between the 19th and 20th centuries, there was no lack of calls for the “final solution” of the Indian question and the “final and comprehensive solution” of the Negro question⁵⁵². During the same period of

time, a prominent figure in the Canadian administration invoked the “[final solution of our Indian Problem](#)”⁵⁵³. There remained the horror and ignominy of Germany’s escalation of violence, although this might be deduced from the failure of its attempt to build an overseas colonial empire, which had been quickly prevented by Britain’s superior navy at the beginning of World War I, when it imposed a devastating naval blockade on Germany that was also detrimental to civilians. So, would Germany continue to leave itself exposed to this terrible danger, or would it build a continental empire at any price, by means of massacres and genocidal practices, but to the detriment of inferior races and in any case following the classic and consolidated model of Western colonial expansionism?

In the dominant ideology, where all political projects dissolve away, the ignominies of the Third Reich were also a manifestation of the disease, of mysterious origin but nevertheless frightening, by the name of “totalitarianism”. Thus the road is paved for the assimilation of Stalin and Hitler. The analogy between “Pan-Slavism” and “Pan-Germanism”, upon which Arendt insists, even becomes superfluous (and perhaps embarrassing), although today it does not seem to enjoy particular favor. Everything revolves around two personalities (sick and criminal), of which even parallel biographies are sometimes drawn⁵⁵⁴.

What is striking in these texts is the absence of historical and, in a sense, even political context: colonialism, imperialism, the world wars, national liberation struggles, and the various and conflicting political projects all disappear. They do not even bring up the liberal West’s relations with fascism and Nazism on the one hand (considered champions of the most authentic and honorable West) and with the old Russian regime on the other, whose contradictions had for centuries tended towards terrible catastrophe. All this is completely overshadowed by the absolute centrality granted to two creative, or rather evilly creative, personalities.

The theorem of elective affinities between Stalin and Hitler

These two personalities, it is said in the manner of a fable, were not only equivalent politically and morally, but they turned out to be linked together by a sort of mutual attraction. As an example of this, reference is made to the German-Soviet non-aggression pact and the delimitation of their respective spheres of influence. Actually, this pact resulted in the *Diktat* of Brest-Litovsk on the one hand; on the other, it was only one stage of a contradictory process of delimiting the areas of influence by the great powers, which began in Munich

(provisionally) and ended at Yalta⁵⁵⁵. A few months after the end of World War II, in 1946, Ernest Bevin, a leading figure in the Labor Party and the English foreign minister, would see the world tendentiously divided “into spheres of influence or what can be described as the three great Monroes”, respectively claimed and validated by the US, the USSR, and Great Britain⁵⁵⁶. The British Monroe quickly cracked, but still in 1961, during a colloquium in Vienna, John F. Kennedy, survivor of the inglorious adventure of the Bay of Pigs, protested to Khrushchev about the successes and dynamism of the Cuban Revolution: the US could not tolerate a regime that sought to disturb its hegemony in the “western hemisphere”, in one of its “areas of vital interest”, just as the USSR could not tolerate a challenge to its hegemony in its buffer area, Eastern Europe⁵⁵⁷.

The delimitation of spheres of influence can be considered particularly odious based on the secret protocols of the German-Soviet pact, and the cynicism of the move that allowed Stalin to win time and space may be pointed out; all the same, it is rather difficult to reconcile those condemnations with the thesis of the mutual attraction between the two dictators according to the theorem of elective affinities. Indeed, immediately after Nazi Germany declared war, Churchill greeted the entry of Soviet troops in eastern Poland with fervor. Shortly afterwards, addressing the leaders of Latvia, Stalin explained the reasons for the policy he was conducting in the Baltics with extreme clarity: “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, paid for it”. It was out of the need to avoid the Third Reich’s maneuvers in the region that the military protectorate, with which Moscow initially seemed content, was gradually transformed into true and proper annexation⁵⁵⁸: this put the amputations suffered by the USSR in the period of its maximum weakness back into radical discussion, while at the same time accentuating the tendency of the new leadership group to assume, without undue constraints, the legacy of tsarist Russia’s international policy.

In the usual assessment of the German-Soviet pact, the preliminary questions that appear to be necessary for its understanding are completely absent: what agreements had previously been signed with the Third Reich? How can the outbreak of war between Germany and the Soviet Union less than two years later be explained, and what did the Nazi regime’s number-two man (Rudolf Hess), who made a hasty arrival in England just before Operation Barbarossa, have planned?

In the competition to reach a compromise or alliance with the new Berlin regime, Stalin definitely comes in last. The Concordat between Germany and the Holy See dates from July 20, 1933, and guaranteed the loyalty of German Catholics to the new “[government established according to the constitution](#)” (*verfassungsmäßig gebildete Regierung*): a recognition that occurred not long after the adoption of the emergency laws, with the 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 party had been dissolved, and its militants had committed to providing a “positive collaboration” to the “national front led by the Chancellor of the Reich”⁵⁵⁹. Regarding the Protestant world, we must not forget that Christen Deutsche aligned in favor of Hitler immediately after his coming to power, and assumed a position adapting Christianity to the demands of the Third Reich, rereading the Protestant Reformation with a nationalist and even racist interpretation, in order to theorize a Church merged with the German “popular community” and based on “recognition of the diversity of peoples and races as an arrangement willed by God”⁵⁶⁰.

The Zionist movement demonstrated an analogous disposition when it was seeking the favor of the new rulers. Its press organ, the “Jüdische Rundschau”, was substantially immune to the wave of prohibitions and persecutions that struck the German press after the Reichstag fire, and a few weeks later, on April 7, 1933, called on Zionists and Nazis to be “honest partners”. This led in 1935 to the agreement to “transfer” 20,000 Jews to Palestine, authorized to carry almost 30 million dollars with them, with a strong impetus to colonization and to the process that would later lead to the formation of the State of Israel⁵⁶¹. Later, reacting to the “transfer” agreement, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem tried to ingratiate himself with Hitler as well. Let us now turn to the political parties of the opposition. The speech given by the Social Democratic deputy Otto Wels during the Reichstag session that granted extraordinary powers to Hitler has been described as “[decidedly weak](#)”⁵⁶². The ones who were put on guard and organized resistance against the barbarism in power were primarily the “Stalinist” Communist Party.

The year 1935 was when the naval agreement between Britain and the Third Reich was signed; after the start of a feverish rearmament and the reintroduction of compulsory military service in Germany, the agreement fed Hitler’s hopes of

reaching a strategic alliance, with recognition of Britain's naval preeminence and mutual respect between the two great "Germanic" empires, the British empire overseas, and the German continental empire, to be built through the colonization of Eastern Europe and the subjugation of the Slavs. The "cynical attitude" of the government in London has been spoken of in precisely this respect, giving the impression that it endorsed the despicable program that had already been announced clearly in *Mein Kampf*⁵⁶³. Unsurprising were the growing concerns of Moscow, the strong irritation from Paris⁵⁶⁴, and the uncontrollable joy of Hitler, who could now celebrate what he called his "happiest day"⁵⁶⁵.

Even more disturbing was the role of Poland. As has been observed, it became "totally subordinate to German policy" after the signing of the ten-year non-aggression pact with Germany on 26 January 1934. The following year, Foreign Minister Beck declares to his deputy: "there are two political formations that are undoubtedly doomed to disappear, Austria and Czechoslovakia"⁵⁶⁶. The harmony with Hitler's program was clear, and not merely in words: "the Polish ultimatum to Czechoslovakia demanding the return of Tešín finally decided 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 really aspired to reach the Ukraine, he must go through Poland; in the autumn of 1938, this seemed by no means a political fantasy"⁵⁶⁷. Even Warsaw's consent seemed to be a given. In January of the following year, in a conversation with Hitler, Beck declared: Poland "does not attribute any significance to the so-called security system"⁵⁶⁸.

Stalin had every reason to be worried or distressed. Before the Munich Conference, the American ambassador to France, William C. Bullitt, had observed that it was important to isolate "Asian despotism", saving "European civilization" from a fratricidal war. After Hitler's victory, an English diplomat noted in his diary: "Czechoslovakia, from having been a dagger pointed to the heart of Germany, is now rapidly being organised as a dagger into Russian vitals"⁵⁶⁹. On the occasion of the crisis leading to the Munich Conference, the USSR was the only country to challenge the Third Reich and confirm its support for the Prague government, putting over seventy divisions on alert. Later, after the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia by the Third Reich had been completed

in March 1939, Moscow sent a stern letter of protest to Berlin⁵⁷⁰. Much more “circumspect” was the reaction of the other capitals. So the Nazi fascist aggressors successively “devoured” Ethiopia, Spain, Czechoslovakia, Albania, and, in Asia, China, through the direct complicity or inaction of the Western powers, who were inclined to direct the further ambitions and expansionist objectives of the Third Reich towards the land of the October Revolution; to the east, the Soviet Union felt the pressure exerted by Japan on its eastern borders. Thus the danger of invasion and war on two fronts was shaping up: only having arrived at this point did Moscow begin to move toward the non-aggression pact with Germany, taking note of the failure of the policy of popular fronts.

Carried out by Stalin with conviction and determination, the policy of popular fronts took great effort. It had reinforced the Trotskyist opposition and agitation, particularly in the colonies: what credibility could an anticolonialism have if it ignored the main colonial powers of the time—so the accusation went—in order to concentrate their fire on one country, Germany, which at Versailles had lost even the few remaining colonies it had? For the colonial peoples themselves it was difficult to accept the change in course. England had been widely discredited; in the spring of 1919 it was not only responsible for the Amritsar massacre, which had cost the lives of hundreds of unarmed Indians, but had also made use of “public flagellations”, dehumanizing collective punishment, and terrible national and racial humiliation, forcing on the inhabitants of the city “**the humiliation of crawling on all fours to and from one’s home**”⁵⁷¹. Later, while fighting in World War II, the imperial government suppressed independence demonstrations by machine-gunning them from airplanes. These were the years in which Gandhi said: “In India we have Hitlerian rule however disguised it may be in softer terms”; “**Hitler was ‘Great Britain’s sin’. Hitler is only an answer to British imperialism**”⁵⁷². Moreover, after the war ended, Gandhi would even pay homage to Subhas Chandra Bose, who had fought on the side of the Axis for independence: “**Subhas was a great patriot. He laid down his life for the country.**”⁵⁷³.

All in all, it was not easy for the USSR to convince everyone that, despite appearances, the main danger for the peoples of the colonies too was the Nazi-Fascist coalition, the Germany-Japan-Italy Axis, and the Third Reich in particular, committed to restoring and radicalizing the colonial tradition, and also made use to extreme means. For countries like England and France the policy of popular fronts incurred considerably lower costs, but was nevertheless

sabotaged. At this point, the USSR had no choice but an alliance with Germany, a move that has been defined as “a dramatic, last-minute improvisation”, to which Moscow resorted in the absence of other alternatives, “[on the very eve of a new European war](#)”⁵⁷⁴.

This resulted in a radical change of direction, which is generally assessed with a view to Europe exclusively. But there is no reason to ignore the repercussions in Asia. Mao Zedong expressed satisfaction: “it deals a blow to Japan and helps China” because it “enables the Soviet Union to give greater help” when supporting “[China in her resistance to Japan](#)”⁵⁷⁵. The Japanese government considered Berlin’s actions “[treacherous and unpardonable](#)” for precisely this reason⁵⁷⁶. Indeed, the flow of Russian arms and munitions to China was quite consistent. The attitude of the West, however, differed significantly:

[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 Tokio, and, what was worse, almost right up to the day of Pearl Harbour the Americans were sending oil and motor fuel to Japan](#)⁵⁷⁷.

Let us now leave aside Asia to concentrate on Europe. The mutual distrust between the Soviet Union and the Third Reich, and the preparation of both for a head-on clash, did not dissipate even during the months of the non-aggression pact. Before the signing, while speaking to the High Commissioner of the League of Nations for Danzig, Hitler explained:

[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 my collected strength.](#)⁵⁷⁸

Judging by these words, the constant aim of the Führer was the construction of a Western alliance, led by the Germans, to defeat the Soviet Union; if this alliance could not be achieved by prior agreement, then there was nothing left to do but to impose it on the allies after they had been defeated; the temporary alliance with Moscow was solely a means to secure victory and to make it necessary for the Western alliance to come to a final reckoning with Bolshevism. The non-aggression pact was an instrument for achieving the main and permanent objective of the Third Reich, which launched Operation Barbarossa presenting it

as a crusade for Europe to which the countries and peoples of Europe would be called to contribute, and indeed they would contribute effectively.

Did Stalin count on the pact lasting indefinitely or for considerably long? In fact, he was aware of the inevitability of the clash with Nazi Germany from the beginning: war “**would pass us by a little longer**”⁵⁷⁹. He took advantage of the time saved to consolidate the position of his country. In November 1939, Hitler saw the country ruled by the communists as committed to strengthening its military and willing to respect the pact only according to circumstance and convenience⁵⁸⁰. The Führer would defend this point two months later: Stalin was cautious, was well aware of the balance of power, but was clearly awaiting “**difficult situations for Germany**”; he did not lose sight of even the weather, and appeared more “**impudent**” than usual in the winter months, when he felt more protected from the Third Reich’s formidable war machine⁵⁸¹.

The Führer’s concerns were anything but imaginary. Let’s see what Moscow’s attitude was late in the summer of 1940, a moment when, having triumphantly completed the occupation of France, the Third Reich seemed poised to force the capitulation of England as well:

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 newspapers of Moscow, 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.⁵⁸²

A meeting that took place in Moscow on 25 November 1940 between two close associates of Stalin is revealing:

D[imitrov]: We are following a course of demoralizing the German occupation troops in the various countries, and without shouting about it, we mean to intensify those operations still 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

quietly⁵⁸³.

Stalin also agreed with this course⁵⁸⁴, clearly committed to resistance against Third Reich expansionism. Of course, this was a collision course, and Stalin was well aware of it, as is clear from his remarks and actions. November 7, 1940: it is necessary for the military to be at the level “of our enemies (and those enemies are all the capitalist states, and those which deck themselves out to look like our friends!)”⁵⁸⁵. November 25 of the same year: “Our relations with Germany are polite on the surface, but there is serious friction between us”⁵⁸⁶.

In the first months of 1941 the masks began to come off: “Every sign of opposition to Hitler was now encouraged” by Moscow. This was especially true with regard to the Balkans, where the conflict of interests between the two signatories to the non-aggression pact was becoming more acute. Stalin received the Yugoslav ambassador to Moscow at the Kremlin and discussed and defined with him the course with which to oppose the Third Reich’s policies. Pleasantly surprised by the audacity of those who aspired to be masters of the world, the representative from Belgrade asked a question: “And if the Germans, displeased, turn against you?”. The reply was quick: “Let them come!”⁵⁸⁷. On April 4, 1941, a pact of friendship between the USSR and Yugoslavia was signed and was immediately followed by the invasion of the latter by the Nazi army. A few days later, relating 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”; on this “there are no reservations”⁵⁸⁸. The clash with the Third Reich was taking shape on the horizon more and more clearly. 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”⁵⁸⁹.

If the rapprochement between the Third Reich and the Soviet Union had caused considerable discomfort among the Nazi ranks, especially in Rosenberg (“I have the feeling that this Moscow Pact will at some time or other exact vengeance upon National Socialism”), Operation Barbarossa brought a sense of relief: the “stain on our honor” had been removed, noted Goebbels in his diary⁵⁹⁰. The Führer himself wrote to Mussolini: “I again feel spiritually free”; the “agonies” and the sensation of “a break with my whole origin, my concepts, and my former obligations”, the feelings that had accompanied the non-aggression pact had

dissipated. Hitler, a contemporary historian comments, had finally reached the “war which had been a central element in his thinking for almost two decades” and even his “psyche”. The much longed-for annihilation of Eastern and Asiatic Bolshevism would allow—under conditions set by Berlin—the restoration of the unity of the West and of the white race, and in particular a permanent agreement with the “British Empire”, which for the Führer remained the “[model for domination and exploitation](#)”⁵⁹¹. Arendt’s assertion that “Hitler never intended to defend ‘the West’ against Bolshevism”, but instead “[remained ready to join ‘the Reds’ for the destruction of the West](#)”, is nothing more than tribute to Cold War ideology⁵⁹².

In reality, the leaders of the Third Reich were not wrong to feel encouraged by the fact that with Operation Barbarossa they could finally confront and liquidate (so they hoped) the real antagonist, the eternal enemy. Even before the Nazis had come to power, on January 12, 1931, Stalin had described anti-Semitism as a form of “[cannibalism](#)”. To the arrival of the Third Reich, he responded, on 26 January 1934, with a firm stance against fascism and against the “fascism of the German type” in particular: “Once again, as in 1914, the parties of bellicose imperialism, the parties of war and revanchism are coming to the foreground.” The “new war” that loomed on the horizon would be particularly barbaric: the war would be “[organised by a ‘superior race,’ say, the German ‘race,’ against an ‘inferior race,’ primarily against the Slavs](#)”⁵⁹³. Stalin later defended this concept on 25 November 1936 at the presentation of the new Soviet Constitution, when he contrasted its “profoundly internationalistic” character with the “bourgeois constitutions [that] tacitly proceed from the premise that nations and races cannot have equal rights”. It is true that here the speech was of a general character, as the references to the “colonies” and discrimination based on “difference in colour” demonstrate, but it is clear that the principal target consisted of Nazi Germany, which had extolled racial ideology as state doctrine. It is no coincidence that Stalin insisted on the principle of equality among nations, “[irrespective of their strength or weakness](#)”⁵⁹⁴: at this time the Third Reich was the international champion of social Darwinism. Only a few months before the outbreak of war in Europe, on March 10, 1939, while warning the Western powers that their “big and dangerous political game” of directing the Third Reich’s expansionist push “farther east, against the Soviet Union” could end with a “serious fiasco” (i.e., a non-aggression pact between Moscow and Berlin), Stalin called for ending the policy of appeasement, of “[making concession after concession to the aggressors](#)”, asking instead for a common

front against the provocateurs of war⁵⁹⁵.

Completely ignoring the historical context briefly outlined here, Arendt puts forward the theorem of the elective affinities between Stalin and Hitler: the only man the first trusted was the second, and the only man the second admired was the first. After what we have seen, to speak of trust between the two sounds unintentionally humorous, while Arendt's thesis of "[Stalin's deliberate pro-Hitler policy](#)" is a simple concession to the ideology of the Cold War⁵⁹⁶. In 1937 Moscow, observes Feuchtwanger, "everyone reckons with the imminent war as with a hundred percent certainty" and saw in the "German Fascist" 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](#)"⁵⁹⁷. Here was an accurate prediction of the war of annihilation that the Third Reich would later unleash; far from slowing down, its preparations were further accelerated to a frenzy during the months of the non-aggression pact.

Nevertheless, it is true that from Operation Barbarossa Hitler occasionally highlighted the political and military capabilities of his great opponent: was this confirmation of the theorem of elective affinities? During the Tehran Conference, arguing amiably with Franklin D. Roosevelt (who was inclined to read Hitler in psychopathological terms), Stalin stressed that their common enemy was "[very able](#)", and that this was the only way to explain the extraordinary successes he had achieved⁵⁹⁸: was this a new confirmation of the thesis, already commonplace today? In truth, the Soviet leader was right, not the American president! It would take a rather primitive view of the conflict to think that to be genuine it required ignorance of the enemy's capabilities. Historians today agree on the Führer's error in underestimating the USSR, and yet Arendt departs from her belated and partial bias to develop the theorem of elective affinities.

For his part, Hitler is also cited in a one-sided way. It is quite understandable that he would attempt to explain the unexpected failures or partial successes on the eastern front, which uncomfortably belied the myth of the Third Reich and the Wehrmacht's invincibility, by adducing the exceptional characteristics of the new enemy. But these characteristics were not always defined in at all flattering terms. On July 14, 1941, commenting on the fierce resistance met by Operation Barbarossa, the Führer declared: "our enemies are not human beings any more, they are beasts." And echoing the views of her chief, one of his secretaries wrote

to a friend: “it can be said to be a fight against wild animals”⁵⁹⁹. Among these “beasts” and “wild animals” was Stalin, who on another occasion was described by Hitler as being from “the underworld” (*Unterwelt*), as proof of the “satanic” nature of Bolshevism⁶⁰⁰. On the opposite side we shall see that, both before and during the war, Stalin labelled Hitler as the champion of anti-Semitic “cannibalism”, or ascribed to him a “cannibal policy” based on “racial hatred”.

It should be added that those who passed positive judgment on the Soviet leader were also leading political figures in the liberal West, including Churchill, who expressed a feeling of friendliness on the human side as well (see above, pp. 15). Franklin D. Roosevelt himself, when he spoke of “the wonderful progress made by the Russian people”, was paying indirect homage to the person who led them⁶⁰¹. Finally, leading historians of our day point out the extraordinary military and political capabilities of Stalin, without also disparaging those of Hitler. Should all of these very different figures be included in the theorem of elective affinities? In reality, when they enunciate this theorem, Arendt and her followers abandon the field of historical and philosophical investigation for that of *belles-lettres*.

The Ukrainian Holocaust made equal to the Jewish Holocaust

The two criminal personalities, mutually linked by elective affinities, produced two very similar concentration-camp worlds: so goes the construction of the political mythology that is omnipresent today. Actually, despite inaugurating this tradition, Arendt developed a more complex discourse. On the one hand, she mentions, though rather summarily, the “totalitarian methods” of the concentration camps of liberal England, where Boers were incarcerated, or the “totalitarian” elements present in the concentration camps installed by the French Third Republic “after the Spanish Civil War.” On the other hand, in drawing the comparison between Stalin’s USSR and Nazi Germany, Arendt notes some important distinctions: only in the case of the second were there “extermination camps.” There is more: “in the Soviet Union apparently the supervisors are not, like the SS, a special elite trained to commit crimes”. This is confirmed by the analysis of a witness who lived through the tragic experience of both concentration-camp worlds: “The Russians never ... evinced the sadistic streak of the Nazis.... Our Russian guards were decent men and not sadists, but they faithfully fulfilled the requirements of the inhuman system”⁶⁰². Nowadays, though, with the disappearance of the reference to the liberal West and the

mention of the various forms of concentration camp in which she was caught, the whole discourse revolves around the assimilation of Gulag and Konzentrationslager.

For this assimilation to be convincing, the figures of the Stalinist terror must first be expanded. An American historian recently calculated that the number of executions that actually took place totaled “one-tenth” of the usual estimates⁶⁰³. Obviously, the horror of this large-scale repression remains clear. But the carelessness of certain historians and ideologists is significant. They were not only limited to inflating the numbers; inside of a historical and political vacuum, the construction of the myth of the twin monsters can take another step forward, since the Holocaust carried out by Nazi Germany against the Jews, which above all began with the quagmire of the war in the east, can be corresponded with the previous holocaust (in the early 1930s) committed by Stalin’s USSR against the Ukrainians (the so-called *Holodomor*); the latter case was a “terror-famine” that was planned to eventually become “one vast Belsen”, that is to say, in an immense extermination camp⁶⁰⁴.

Robert Conquest has been particularly distinguished in putting forward this thesis. His critics accuse him of having worked as a disinformation agent for the British intelligence services, and of having studied the Ukrainian case through the prism of his profession⁶⁰⁵. His advocates are also cognizant of a not insignificant point: Conquest was “a Cold War veteran” and had written his book in the context of a “political-cultural operation”, which was ultimately directed by American President Ronald Reagan and achieved “numerous results: on the one hand, it had a major impact on the international debate on the value and limits of Gorbachev’s reforms, and on the other, through the United States Congress, it strongly influenced the independentist radicalization of Ukraine”⁶⁰⁶. In other words, the book was published in the context of a “political-cultural operation” designed to be the final nail in the coffin of the Soviet Union, discrediting it as responsible for ignominies completely similar to those committed by the Third Reich, and encouraging its disintegration by making people aware of a people who were the victims of another “holocaust”, unable to cohabit with their own murderers. We should keep in mind the fact that in the same period of time, besides his book on Ukraine, Conquest published another book (in collaboration with a J. M. White), which advises citizens how to survive a possible (or even imminent) invasion by the Soviet Union (*What to Do When the Russians Come: a Survivor’s Handbook*)⁶⁰⁷.

That said, regardless of the underlying political motivations, a thesis must be analyzed based on its arguments. And a “terror-famine” planned by Stalin to exterminate the Ukrainian people is certainly more likely than the claim that Reagan’s United States could be invaded... by Gorbachev’s USSR! Therefore we will concentrate our attention on Ukraine in the early 1930s. In 1934, having returned from a trip to the Soviet Union which had also taken him to Ukraine, French Prime Minister Edouard Herriot denied, in addition to the planned character, the extent of the famine as well⁶⁰⁸. Spoken by the leader of a country that would establish a treaty with the USSR the following year, these declarations are generally considered unreliable. However, the testimony contained in the reports of diplomats from fascist Italy can hardly be suspected. Even in the period when the suppression of “counterrevolutionaries” was the most ruthless, this was intertwined with initiatives that went in a different and opposite direction: we see soldiers “sent to the countryside to help with rural work” or “workers who went to repair agricultural machines”; next to the “destruction of any Ukrainian separatist whims” we witness a “policy of recovery of Ukrainian national character”, which tries to attract “the Ukrainians of Poland to a possible and hoped-for union with those of the USSR”; and this objective worked to encourage the free expression of Ukrainian language, culture, and customs⁶⁰⁹. Did Stalin intend to attract “the Ukrainians in Poland” towards the Soviet Ukrainians by exterminating the latter through starvation? The Soviet troops who, immediately after the outbreak of World War II, burst into Ukrainian territory that until that time had been occupied by Poland, seemed to have been favorably greeted by the local population⁶¹⁰.

Now let us look at the picture that emerges from the statements of Stalin’s other enemies, this time positioned within the communist movement. Trotsky, who we know was born in Ukraine and in the last years of his life had repeated dealings with his country of birth, was in favor of the independence movement: he condemned the ferocity of the repression but, despite not holding back in accusing Stalin (who he repeatedly compared to Hitler), made no mention of the so-called “holocaust of hunger” planned by Moscow⁶¹¹. Trotsky states that “the real will of the Ukrainian masses is irreconcilably hostile to the Soviet bureaucracy”, but identifies the reason for that hostility as the “suppression of Ukrainian independence”. According to the thesis popular today, the *Holodomor* took place in the early 1930s, but according to Trotsky, “[the Ukrainian problem became aggravated early this year](#)”, that is, 1939⁶¹². Like Stalin, the leader of the anti-Stalinist opposition would also unite all Ukrainians, although this time not

within the USSR, but rather in an independent state: even so, would it have been wise to formulate this project while completely silencing the genocide that had been carried out? For Trotsky, the perfidy of the Soviet bureaucracy was this: it erected monuments to a great Ukrainian national poet (Taras Shevchenko), only to force the Ukrainian people to use his language to honor the Muscovite oppressors⁶¹³. As we can see, he speaks of neither genocide nor ethnocide; no matter how harshly he condemns the Stalinist regime, he does not charge it with the physical or cultural destruction of the Ukrainian people. Whether they are inside or outside the communist movement, Stalin's enemies end up coinciding in this recognition.

We start to see clearly how fragile and manipulative the correspondence established between the *Holodomor* and the "final solution" is. Hitler and the other Nazi leaders proclaimed the necessity of annihilating of the Jews explicitly and repeatedly, comparing them to a bacteria, a virus, a pathogen, whose extermination would allow society to regain its health. It would be useless to seek similar statements from the Soviet leaders regarding the Ukrainian (or Jewish) people. It may be interesting to directly compare the policies of Stalin's USSR and Hitler's Germany towards Ukraine. Hitler proclaimed on numerous occasions that the Ukrainians, like all "subject races", should be kept away from culture and education; it was also necessary to destroy their historical memory, it was important that they not even know how to "read and write"⁶¹⁴. And that was not all: 80–90 percent of the local population could be "dispensed with"⁶¹⁵. Above all, the intellectual strata could and should be dispensed with, entirely. Their liquidation was the necessary condition for transforming the subject race into a hereditary caste of slaves or semi-slaves, destined to work and to die working in the service of the master race. The Nazi program was detailed further by Himmler: they would immediately eliminate the Jews (whose presence was relevant in the intellectual classes) and reduce to a "minimum" the total Ukrainian population in order to pave the way for "future German colonization". In this way, comments the historian previously quoted, "Nazi empire-building" would go hand in hand with the "Holocaust" in Ukraine as well; contributing to this were the same Ukrainian nationalists who constituted the main sources for Conquest's book and would later be his principal propagandists⁶¹⁶.

Compared to the Third Reich, the Soviet government was moving in exactly the opposite direction. We are familiar with the policy of affirmative action promoted by the Soviet government towards national minorities and Ukrainian

“[brothers and comrades](#)”, to quote the words used by Stalin immediately after the October Revolution⁶¹⁷. Indeed, the person who most decisively promoted affirmative action for the Ukrainian people was precisely the person who is today considered responsible for the *Holodomor*. In 1921, he rejected the view of those for whom “[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](#)”⁶¹⁸. From these premises developed the “Ukrainization” of culture, the schools, the press, the publishing world, party cadres, and the state apparatus. The realization of this policy was given special impetus by Lazar Kaganovich, a confidant of Stalin who became secretary of the party in Ukraine in March 1925⁶¹⁹. The results were not slow to follow: in 1931, publication of books in Ukrainian “reached its peak with 6,218 titles of 8,086, almost 77%”, while “the percentage of Russians in the party, about 72% in 1922, had fallen to 52%”. It is also necessary to bear in mind the development of the Ukrainian industrial apparatus, the need for which was insisted on by, once again, Stalin⁶²⁰.

One can try to minimize all of this by referring to the continuing monopoly of power exercised in Moscow by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. However, this policy of “Ukrainization” had such a strong impact that it met resistance from Russians:

The latter were in any case disappointed by the solution given to the national question in the USSR. They were stung by the equality of Russia with the other federal republics, irritated by the rights granted to minorities within the Russian Republic, resentful of the regime’s anti-Russian rhetoric [...] and upset by the fact that the Russians were the only nationality in the federation that had neither a party nor an academy of sciences of its own⁶²¹.

Not only does it not make sense to compare the Soviet policy with the Nazi policy, but in fact the first was also clearly superior to the policy of the Whites (supported by the liberal West). Reluctantly, Conquest ends up recognizing just the same. In continuity with the tsarist autocracy, Denikin “[refused to admit the existence of the Ukrainians](#)”. Exactly opposite was the attitude of Stalin, who saluted the “[Ukrainianization of the Ukraine’s cities](#)”. Following the success of this policy a new, particularly positive page was turned:

[A policy of ‘Ukrainianization’ was formalized in April 1923, at the Twelfth 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 scale⁶²².

We have seen that this policy was in force and even in full development in Ukraine in the early 1930s. Of course, a terrible war and scarcity then came on the scene, but how a radical affirmative action in favor of Ukrainians could move to planning their extermination in such a short time is a mystery. It is important not to forget that in the preparation and dissemination of the thesis of the *Holodomor* an important role was played by Ukrainian nationalist circles who, after having launched “many other pogroms” against Jews in the years of the civil war⁶²³, often collaborated with the Nazi invaders, immersed in the carrying out of the “final solution”. After being used as an instrument of the demonization of the enemy and, at the same time, of comfortable self-absolution, the thesis of the *Holodomor* was then converted into a formidable ideological weapon during the final period of the Cold War and in the political dismemberment of the Soviet Union.

One final consideration. During the 20th century, accusations of “genocides” and denunciations of “holocausts” have been dissipated in very different ways. We have already seen several examples. Another should be added. On 20 October 1941, the “Chicago Tribune” reported Herbert Hoover’s impassioned call for an end to Britain’s blockade of Germany. It had been a few months since the Third Reich unleashed its war of extermination against the Soviet Union, but the former US president did not say a single word about that. He focused on the terrible conditions of the civilian population of the occupied countries (in Warsaw “the death rate among children was ten times the birth rate”) and called for an end to “**this holocaust**”, which was moreover useless, since it would not stop the march of the Wehrmacht⁶²⁴. It is clear that Hoover was concerned with discrediting the country or countries on whose side F. D. Roosevelt was volunteering to intervene, and it should be mentioned that the alleged “holocaust” attributed by the champion of isolationism to London and in part to Washington has been lost from all memory.

Terror-famine in the history of the liberal West

Furthermore, even more than the turning of history, it is the silences that invalidate the argument of the “Cold War veteran” en bloc. We can start 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” being committed in India following the independence granted by the Labour government and the dismantlement of the British Empire. Then, a Labour member of parliament interrupted the speaker: “What about the Indian famine?”. The former prime minister tried to dodge the question, but his interlocutor insisted: “[What about the Indian famine for which the Tory Governments of the past were responsible?](#)”⁶²⁵. The reference is to the famine—obstinately denied by Churchill—that in 1943-1944 caused three million deaths in Bengal. Regardless, neither of the two parties recalled the famine that was produced some decades earlier, also in colonial India: in this case, those who lost their lives were twenty or thirty million Indians, who were often forced into “hard labor” with a diet inferior to that guaranteed to prisoners of the “infamous Buchenwald concentration camp”. That time, the racist component had been explicit and declared. British bureaucrats considered it “a mistake to spend so much money to save a lot of black fellows”. Conversely, according to the viceroy, Sir Richard Temple, those who died were mostly beggars without any real intention to work: “[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](#)”⁶²⁶.

After World War II, Sir Victor Gollancz, a Jew who arrived in England after fleeing anti-Semitic persecution in Germany, published *The Ethics of Starvation* in 1946 and *In Darkest Germany* in the following year. The author denounced the policy of widespread famine that, after the defeat of the Third Reich, befell the prisoners and the German people, continually at risk of starvation: infant mortality 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 at “Belsen”⁶²⁷.

In the two cases just cited, the comparison with Nazi concentration camps had nothing to do with Soviet Ukraine but rather with labor camps in India colonized by England, and the regime of occupation imposed on the defeated by the liberal West. At least the latter charge seems to be more convincing, as confirmed by

the most recent and comprehensive book published on the subject: “Germans were better fed in the Soviet Zone.” The most generous country was one that had suffered the genocidal policy of the Third Reich and that continued to suffer shortages because of that policy. Indeed, what pushed the West to starve the defeated to death was not the lack of resources but rather ideology: “Politicians and soldiers – like Sir Bernard Montgomery – insisted that no food be sent from Britain. Starvation was punishment. Montgomery said that three-quarters of all Germans were still Nazis.” “Fraternising” was prohibited for precisely this reason: not a word, much less a smile, could be directed to the members of a totally and irredeemably evil people. American soldiers were warned: “in heart, body and spirit every German is a Hitler”. A girl could be deadly too: “Don’t play Samson to her Delilah – She’d like to cut your hair off – at the neck”. This campaign of hate had as an explicit objective the removal of all sense of compassion, and thus ensuring the success of the “ethics of starvation”. The American soldiers were ordered to remain unmoved even in front of hungry children: in “a yellow-haired German child... there lurked the Nazi”⁶²⁸.

If the tragedies of Bengal and Ukraine are explained by the scale of priorities dictated by the approach or intensification of World War II, which imposed the concentration of scarce resources towards the fight against a deadly enemy⁶²⁹, then we could perfectly well speak of planned and terrorist famine against Germany immediately after the defeat of the Third Reich, where scarcity of resources played no role, but there was considerable influence from the racialization of a people whom F. D. Roosevelt himself was tempted for some time to eliminate from the face of the earth by “castration” (see above, p. 48). We could say that what saved the Germans (and the Japanese), or at least shortened their suffering, was the outbreak of the Cold War: in the fight against the new enemy, they could prove to be useful and valuable as cannon fodder and experimental subjects in the hands of their former enemy.

But it is useless to look for references to the famine in British colonial India or to the West’s Belsen in Germany in the books of a “Cold War veteran” dedicated to enforcing a scheme constructed *a priori* by historical revisionism: all the Nazi ignominies are simply replicas of communist ignominies, and thus Hitler’s Belsen retroactively reproduces the Belsen for which Stalin is responsible.

In full consistency with that scheme, Conquest completely ignores the fact that recourse to threats of hunger and starvation are a constant in the relationship established by the West with barbarians and with enemies, who are also

assimilated into barbarians. After the Black Revolution of Santo Domingo, fearing a contagion effect from the first country in the Americas to abolish slavery, Jefferson declared that he was ready to “reduce Toussaint to starvation.” In the mid-19th century, Tocqueville ordered the crops and silos of the Arabs who dared to resist the French conquest of Algeria to be burned and emptied. Five decades later, by condemning an entire people to hunger using this same tactic of war, the United States crushed the resistance in the Philippines. Even when not intentionally planned, shortages can at any rate present an opportunity that is not to be wasted. In the same period in which Tocqueville had the territory surrounding the Arab rebels turned into desert, a devastating blight destroyed Ireland’s potato crop and decimated a population already ravaged by the looting and oppression of the English settlers. The new tragedy was, for Sir Charles Edward Trevelyan (assigned by the London government to investigate and handle the situation), an example of the “**all-wise and all-merciful Providence**” that was solving the problem of overpopulation (as well as the endemic rebellion of a barbarous population). In this regard, the British politician has occasionally been described as a “proto-Eichmann”, the perpetrator of a tragedy that can be considered a model for the genocides of the 20th century⁶³⁰.

Let us focus on the 20th century. The methods traditionally implemented to the detriment of colonial peoples could also be useful in the course of the struggle for hegemony between the great powers. With the outbreak of World War I, England subjected Germany to a criminal naval blockade, whose significance Churchill explains in these terms: “The British blockade treated the whole of Germany as if it were a beleaguered fortress, and avowedly sought to starve the whole population—men, women, and children, old and young, wounded and sound—into submission”. The blockade continued even for months after the armistice, and once again Churchill would explain the need for the prolonged use of a “**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’ conditions of peace to the very last⁶³¹.

But with the menacing rise of Soviet Russia, the enemy had become another. If Jefferson feared the spread of the Black Revolution, Wilson worried about containing the Bolshevik Revolution. The methods remained the same. To prevent it from following the example of Soviet Russia, Austria was confronted, in the words of Gramsci, with a “criminal order”: “Either the bourgeois order or hunger!”⁶³². Indeed, some time later, Herbert Hoover, another exponent of the

Wilson administration and future US president, would warn the Austrian authorities that “any disturbance of public order will render food shipments impossible and bring Vienna face to face with absolute famine”. Later he would sum up the achievement with explicit boastfulness: “**fear of starvation held the Austrian people from revolution**”⁶³³. As we can see, it is above all Jefferson and Hoover who explicitly theorize the “terror-famine” for which Conquest criticizes Stalin.

We are examining a policy that continues to prevail today. In June 1996, an article by the director of the Center for Economic and Social Rights highlighted the terrible consequences of the “collective punishment” inflicted by the embargo on the Iraqi people: “more than 500,000 Iraqi children” had “died from hunger and disease”. Many others were close to suffering the same fate. An unofficial State Department journal, *Foreign Affairs*, proceeds to a consideration of a more general nature: after the collapse of “real socialism”, in a world unified under the hegemony of the US, the embargo is the weapon of mass destruction par excellence; officially imposed to prevent Saddam Hussein’s access to weapons of mass destruction, the embargo on Iraq, “in the years after the Cold War, has caused more deaths than all the weapons of mass destruction in history” put together. Hence, it is as if the Arab country had simultaneously suffered the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the poison gas attacks of Kaiser Wilhelm and Benito Mussolini’s armies, and more.⁶³⁴ In conclusion: the policy of “terror-famine” attributed to Stalin is deeply rooted throughout the history of the West, it was practiced in the 20th century primarily against the land of the October Revolution, and it saw its triumph after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Perfect symmetries and self-absolutions: Stalin’s anti-Semitism?

However sophisticated the game of analogies may be, the construction of the myth of the twin monsters does not seem to be complete yet. Despite attempts to match the Ukrainian *Holodomor* with the Holocaust, in the consciousness of our time the name of Auschwitz raises a special horror. Perhaps the assimilation of Stalin to Hitler could only be considered definitely complete if the first proved to have also been affected by the madness that led the second to carry out the Jewish genocide.

Khrushchev recalled that Stalin, in the last moments of his life, suspected that the doctors responsible for the care of leaders of the country could actually be

participants in an imperialist plot to decapitate the Soviet Union. The *Secret Speech* does not say this, but among the suspected doctors not a few were Jews⁶³⁵. From here, then, the portrait of the Soviet monster can be enriched with a new and decisive detail: “the anti-Semitic feelings of Stalin and his retinue,” says Medvedev, “were no secret to the party apparatus.” “Official Soviet anti-Semitism”, Hobsbawm states, “has undoubtedly been observable since the foundation of the state of Israel in 1948”. The previously quoted American historian of ethnic cleansing and racial hatred goes further back in the story: “By the end of the war, Stalin shared many aspects of Hitler’s anti-Semitism”. Furet proceeds to increase the dose even more: “after the advent of Nazism, Stalin had never shown the least compassion for the Jews”⁶³⁶. The most radical of all is of course Conquest: anti-Semitism “had always been latent in Stalin’s mind”, beginning to manifest in him strongly “in 1942-3” to become “all-pervasive” by 1948⁶³⁷. 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 should be noted that it simultaneously serves to dodge the grave responsibilities of the West in the tragedy the Jews suffered in the 20th century. It is a tragedy in three acts and a prologue. The English translation of Chamberlain’s book (*The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*) appeared in 1911, entirely dedicated to reading world history through a racial (Aryan and anti-Semitic) lens. We can then understand the essential role played by the Anglo-German author as the *maître à penser* of Nazism. Goebbels’ tone was especially exalted; seeing him bedridden and sick, he expressed himself in almost religious terms: “Greetings, father of our spirit. Path-breaker, pioneer!”⁶³⁸ In terms no less inspired, Chamberlain for his part saw in Hitler a sort of savior, and not only of Germany⁶³⁹. After seizing power, and while feverishly absorbed in the task of directing the war that had begun, the Führer remembered with gratitude the words of encouragement that Chamberlain had passed on during the period when he was in prison.⁶⁴⁰

So, how was this key text of the very worldview and racial ideology of Nazism welcomed in the West? The press’s reaction was enthusiastic in England, starting with the *Times*, which never tired of applauding the masterpiece, saluting “one of the books that really mattered”. Across the Atlantic, the judgment of a leading statesman as Theodore Roosevelt was largely positive⁶⁴¹. On the opposite front, in 1914, Kautsky expressed all his contempt for Chamberlain and “race theorists” of all kinds, being a German who at that time

(before the outbreak of the war) was revered as a master by the labor movement and socialist movement as a whole, including Stalin. The latter, in particular, described the German author in 1907 as “[an outstanding theoretician of Social-Democracy](#)”, also because of his contribution to the analysis and denunciation of anti-Semitism and the “[Anti-Jewish Pogroms](#)” in tsarist Russia⁶⁴².

Now let us begin the first act of the tragedy. It takes place in pre-revolutionary Russia, close ally of the Entente during World War I. Discriminated against and oppressed, the Jews were suspected of sympathizing with the German enemy and invader. The General Staff warned against their espionage. Some were held hostage and threatened with death in the event that the “Jewish population” showed signs of little patriotic loyalty; alleged spies were executed⁶⁴³. That was not all; in early 1915, in the areas occupied during the advance of Wilhelm’s army, a mass deportation was decided on. A Duma deputy described the details of the operation as follows: in Radom, at 11:00 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.

Half a million Jews were subject to deportation; one hundred thousand did not survive⁶⁴⁴.

In the climate of the struggle against the war and the horrors it brought, the October Revolution broke out. It was inspired by Marx, and by Engels, who had written in the mid-19th century: “[The times of that superstition which attributed revolutions to the ill-will of a few agitators have long passed away](#)”⁶⁴⁵.

Unfortunately, this was a catastrophically inaccurate prediction. The rise to power in Russia of a movement that referred to “the Jew Marx” and had a strong Jewish presence in the leadership group inaugurated the period in which the conspiracy theory celebrated its triumph. In the Russia that emerged from the civil war, pogroms and massacres against Jews, described as puppeteers who manipulated Bolshevism, were the order of the day. The new Soviet government was thoroughly devoted to stopping this horror: it promulgated very severe laws, and Lenin demanded the end of “hatred towards the Jews” and “[hatred towards other nations](#)” in a speech that would be recorded on records in order to reach

the millions of illiterates⁶⁴⁶. England, France, and the United States aligned with the Whites and even actively and directly participated in the bloody anti-Semitic turmoil. In the summer of 1918, British forces landed in northern Russia and undertook a massive distribution of anti-Semitic leaflets, dropping them from airplanes⁶⁴⁷. A few months later, pogroms of terrible proportions took place, which killed about sixty thousand Jews: “the Allies, then engaged in their invasion of Russia, were said to have secretly supported the pogroms”⁶⁴⁸. This was a “prelude”, eminent historians have observed, of the “Nazi crimes”, of the “mass murder of Jews during the Second World War”⁶⁴⁹, and it was a prelude heralded by the active participation of Great Britain, at that time the leader of the anti-Bolshevik crusade.

Thus we reach the third act. Defeated by the Bolsheviks despite Western assistance, the Whites emigrated to the West, bringing with them the denunciation of the October Revolution as a Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy and *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which irrefutably confirms such a reading.

All this would continue to have consequences. In England, “His Majesty’s Printers” published the English edition of the *Protocols*, which was cited in a short space of time by the *Times* as proof or evidence of the menacing secret plot that beset the West⁶⁵⁰. Thus developed a campaign, to which Winston Churchill was not oblivious, dedicated to denouncing the role of Judaism not only in Russia but throughout the cycle of subversion that had expanded West since the 18th 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), Bela 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 hair of their heads and have become practically the undisputed masters of that enormous empire⁶⁵¹.

As late as 1937, while voicing a positive opinion of Hitler, Churchill would insistently stress the Jewish origins of a foreground leader of the Bolshevik Revolution, that is, “Leon Trotsky, Alias Bronstein”. “He was still a Jew. Nothing could get over that”⁶⁵².

Across the Atlantic, the man who promoted the dissemination of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in the United States was Henry Ford, who declared: “The Russian revolution is racial, not political” and, while using humanitarian and socialist slogans, it actually expressed a “racial aspiration to world domination”⁶⁵³. Apart from the American automobile magnate, those who distinguished themselves by exposing the hidden Jewish leadership of the revolutionary movement that after overthrowing the Tsarist regime was now shaking the foundations of the West, were two champions of the white supremacist regime. Madison Grant warned against the “Semitic leadership” of “Bolshevism”, while Lothrop Stoddard described the “Bolshevik regime of Soviet Russia” as “largely Judaic”⁶⁵⁴; the latter would become the author of reference of two American presidents.

In this climate, voices rose in the American Republic invoking radical measures to confront the “Jewish imperialism, with its ultimate goal of establishing a Jewish global domination”. A hard fate—thundered other, even more menacing voices—awaited the people responsible for this infamous project: they foresaw “massacres of Jews [...] as to be considered hitherto impossible”, and therefore “on a scale unprecedented in modern times”⁶⁵⁵.

Reading these recurring motifs in Churchill, Ford, and the other American authors mentioned above, we are reminded of the anti-Semitic agitation carried out by the Nazis. They not only drew their ideas from the anti-Bolshevik émigrés, but also financial support, not to mention a not insignificant number of militants and cadres⁶⁵⁶. Suffice it to mention Rosenberg, one of the major advocates of the idea that the October Revolution was a Jewish plot.

As can be seen, the tragedy of the 20th century for the Jewish people had from the beginning the active participation of the liberal West on one hand and pre-revolutionary and counter-revolutionary Russia on the other. All this is erased at a stroke by the accusation of anti-Semitism directed to the longest-lasting leader of the country that emerged from the October Revolution, labelled too a “Judeo-Bolshevik plot.”

Anti-Semitism and colonial racism: the Churchill-Stalin controversy

The black legend we are analyzing here could also be used to obscure the colonial racism that continued to dominate the West throughout the entire 20th century. In this respect, the epochal significance of the break represented by Leninism is summarized by Stalin in these terms:

Formerly, the national question was usually confined to a narrow circle of questions, concerning, primarily, “civilised” 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, “civilised” and “uncivilised” on the same plane [...]. Leninism laid bare this crying incongruity, broke down the wall between whites and blacks, between European and Asiatics, between the “civilised” and “uncivilised” slaves of imperialism, and thus linked the national question with the question of the colonies⁶⁵⁷.

The year was 1924. In these years, the American author Stoddard enjoyed great fortune on either side of the Atlantic, denouncing the mortal danger to the West and to the white race represented by the growing agitation of colonial peoples (promoted or inspired by the Bolsheviks) or “**the rising tide of color**”⁶⁵⁸. This tendency to praise white supremacy remained quite alive in the following decades.

If Stalin condemned the processes of racialization performed by the West against Asians, it is interesting to analyze the ideology that manifested itself in the US on the occasion of the war against Japan. The press and an omnipresent propaganda machine warned against the “racial menace”: this was “a holy war, a racial war”, a “**perpetual war between Oriental ideals and Occidental**”. A recurring theme was dehumanization of the enemy, reduced to sub-human or even animal. And this ideology was not foreign to the ruling circles of the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration either⁶⁵⁹.

Furthermore, colonial racism continued to manifest itself in the Western capitals even after the collapse of the Empire of the Rising Sun and of the Third Reich. In Fulton, in March 1946, Churchill launched the propaganda of the Cold War, condemning not only the “iron curtain” and the “totalitarian control” imposed on Eastern Europe by the Soviet Union, but also celebrated, in opposition to them, the champions of freedom and “Christian civilisation” and the leaders of the world, “the English-speaking peoples” and the “[English-speaking world](#)”⁶⁶⁰. Stalin’s angry response is then understandable: he accused the English statesman of having formulated a “race theory” not very different from the one used by Hitler; “[only English-speaking nations are superior nations, who are called upon to decide the destinies of the entire world](#)”⁶⁶¹. In this answer the simplifications of the Cold War are obvious. However, there was no lack of analogies between celebration of the English-speaking peoples and the Aryan mythology: from a linguistic commonality was inferred the racial unity that underlay it, and as testimony to that race’s excellence, the cultural products of the Aryan or English languages was offered. In his correspondence with Eisenhower, Churchill’s language is even more disturbing: the “English-Speaking world” was synonymous with “white English-speaking people”. Its “unity” was absolutely necessary⁶⁶²: “[the quarrels of the strong parent races in Europe](#)” which had caused the two World Wars had to be resolved once and for all⁶⁶³; only then could the threat from the colonial and non-Western world be faced. This is made even clearer by the call Churchill makes to the United States in 1953: it needed to support Britain in its conflict with Egypt “[in order to prevent a massacre of white people](#)”⁶⁶⁴.

It was not only the Arabs who were considered alien by the West and the white race. The communist world, which supported the colonial peoples’ revolt against the white man, was an expression of “aggressive, *semi-Asiatic* totalitarianism”⁶⁶⁵. Clearly, the Cold War tended to be interpreted as a clash between, on a West side, “Christian civilization” and the white race, guided by the “English-speaking world” or “white English-speaking people”, and on the other the barbarity of the colonial and communist world. In this context the celebration of both the “British Empire” and the “British race” is well-placed⁶⁶⁶. And just as there is 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 “strong parent races in Europe”, not a word is said about the persistent oppression suffered by African Americans in the United States of white supremacy.

Eisenhower's celebration of the "Western world" and of "Western morale"⁶⁶⁷ also tended to assume even racial connotations: speaking with Hoover and Dulles in July 1956, he notes that, with the nationalization of the Suez Canal, Nasser aimed to "unseat the white men"⁶⁶⁸. Memories were still fresh of the Korean War, conducted by Washington—as the American historiography recognizes—with an attitude of "contempt" towards "an inferior nation" (the Chinese)⁶⁶⁹.

Trotsky and the accusation of Stalin's anti-Semitism

But let us return to the accusation of anti-Semitism directed at Stalin. Endorsed by not a few historians, it seems to be irrefutable. However, despite their indisputable tone, the various verdicts are difficult to reconcile, as they arrive at different and conflicting reconstructions of the crime, whose beginnings are established earlier and earlier each time: in 1948, 1945, 1933, or the years before the October Revolution.

To try to orient ourselves, we propose a different question, one that is in a way preliminary: when was Stalin suspected or accused of anti-Semitism for the first time? In this case, rather than Khrushchev, we must go back to Trotsky, who in 1937, along with the "betrayal" of the revolution, denounced the possible resurgence in the Soviet Union itself of the barbarism of anti-Semitism: "[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](#)"⁶⁷⁰. Rather than an empirical investigation, this was a syllogism constructed *a priori*: the reaction, whose necessary product was anti-Semitism, had unfortunately triumphed in the country dominated by Stalin, and therefore... destroying the victories of the Bolsheviks, Thermidor had reopened the door to the horrors of the old regime: along with religious superstition and the fetishistic cult of private property, inheritance, and the family, hostility between nations could not help but reappear, especially anti-Jewish hatred. It is no coincidence that the condemnation is contained in an essay which already in its title indissolubly connects *Thermidor and Anti-Semitism* :

[The October Revolution abolished the outlawed status of the Jews. That, however, does not at all mean that with one blow it swept out anti-Semitism. A long and persistent struggle against religion has failed to prevent suppliants even today from crowding thousands and thousands of](#)

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 Czarism. 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.⁶⁷¹

With this argument, Trotsky shifts attention from the state to civil society, from the subjective plane to the objective, from the one-off nature of political action to the long duration of historical processes: by definition, the weight of a centuries-old tradition could not miraculously vanish from the strata of the population where modern and revolutionary culture had not yet fully arrived. But then what was the point of throwing the accusation at a regime and leadership group that had not in any way changed the “model legislation” enacted by the Bolsheviks and that, undertaking a colossal process of industrialization, literacy campaigns, and dissemination of culture, restricted it to a steady pace in the geographic and social areas in which “national and chauvinist prejudices, particularly anti-Semitism”, were more deeply rooted? Wasn’t Trotsky the one who spoke of the unprecedented speed with which the USSR developed its economy, industry, urbanization, and culture, and who affirmed the emergence of “the newest kind of Soviet patriotism,” a feeling that was “undoubtedly very deep, sincere and dynamic”, shared by the different nationalities who were formerly oppressed or who rose up against each other? (see above, pp. 164).

The same year that Trotsky published his essay on *Thermidor and Anti-Semitism*, a “travel diary” appeared in Moscow, written by a German author who fled the Third Reich because he was Jewish. The portrait it paints is itself eloquent: finally “the ancient, vexatious, and apparently insoluble Jewish question” had been resolved; “I was moved by the unanimity with which the Jews I came across emphasized how completely they felt in harmony with the new state.” And additionally: “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 theatres enjoy the highest prestige”⁶⁷².

Even more significant is the reaction of the American Jewish community. One of its distinguished representatives said in reply to Trotsky: “If his other charges are as unsubstantiated as his complaint on the score of anti-Semitism, then he has no case at all.” Another leader declared: “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”⁶⁷³.

Evident in this reaction are the disappointment and displeasure at what was perceived as a crude attempt to appeal to the international Jewish community in the power struggle within the CPSU. While in Germany the denunciation of the “Judeo-Bolshevik” barbarism that ruled the Soviet Union resounded more madly than ever, and the process that would lead to the “final solution” was advancing with giant strides, a strange campaign of innuendo was launched at that time against the country which, as we shall see, more boldly than any other, described the anti-Semitism of the Nazis as “cannibalistic”; against the country that was a frequent inspiration to those resisting the wave of anti-Jewish hatred on German soil. Viktor Klemperer described in moving terms the insults and humiliations that wearing the Star of David brought. And yet:

A removal man who is friendly towards me following two moves [...] is suddenly standing in front of me in the Freiburger Straße, takes my hand in both of his paws and whispers in a tone which must be audible on the other side of the road: ‘Well, herr Professor, don’t let it get you down! These wretched brothers of ours will soon have reached rock bottom!’

The Jewish philologist commented with affectionate irony that the man who defied the regime in that way was “good people with more than a whiff of the KPD [the German Communist Party]”!⁶⁷⁴ These were members or supporters of a party that had an essential international reference point in Stalin.

On the other hand, if we move from Germany to the United States, we see that in the south of the country, communists are sometimes described (and persecuted both by state authorities and by civil society) as Jews who took advantage of the ignorance of blacks to raise them against the white supremacist regime, slandering the idea of racial hierarchy and purity and promoting the diseases of racial equality and racial mixing⁶⁷⁵. Thus in the American Republic as well, anti-communism intermingled with anti-Semitism (and colonial racism too), the connection being much closer because of the very strong Jewish presence in the

Communist (and pro-“Stalinist”) Party of the US.⁶⁷⁶

But, beyond the disappointment and annoyance, there was also an element of deep concern in the reaction of the American Jewish community. To understand this, let us see how Trotsky’s argument unfolds:

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 the 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, the antagonism between the population and the bureaucracy has grown monstrously during the past ten to twelve years.⁶⁷⁷

As we can see, he encourages the struggle against the bureaucracy and at the same time points out that Jews were strongly represented, that they were often characterized by arrogance towards the language and culture of the people they administered. Of course, the analysis and the denunciation always take place on the political and social level; it is clear that they, at least from the point of view of the Jewish community, risk evoking and reviving the specter of anti-Semitism that they seek to exorcise.

Stalin and the condemnation of tsarist and Nazi anti-Semitism

The accusation of anti-Semitism directed at Stalin is made even more exceptional by the fact that it appears devoted to denouncing this scourge along virtually his entire arc of evolution. We see this as early as 1901, when he still a young Georgian revolutionary of twenty years and in one of his early writings

listed among the Social-Democratic Party's most important tasks the struggle against the oppression that fell on "oppressed nations and religious communities in Russia". Especially suffering were "[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](#)"⁶⁷⁸. A few years later, the 1905 revolution broke out: the Tsarist regime reacted by encouraging or launching pogroms. Stalin did not take long to call for struggle against the policies intended to build autocracy "[with the blood and the corpses of citizens](#)". His conclusion was clear: "[The only way to eradicate pogroms is to abolish the tsarist autocracy](#)"⁶⁷⁹. As can be seen, anti-Jewish persecution was one of the most important allegations in the indictment he pronounced against the old regime, which the revolution was called to overthrow.

This theme would be developed further in subsequent years. On the eve of World War I, Tsarist Russia's character as a "[semi-Asiatic country](#)" was demonstrated in the particularly odious persecution unleashed against the Jews; unfortunately, the use of pogroms was favored by "[the general swing of the philistine towards anti-Semitism](#)"⁶⁸⁰. The collapse of the power of the tsar and the old "landed gentry", observed Stalin between February and October 1917, finally allowed the ending of a policy of "[national oppression \[...\] not infrequently taking the form of pogroms \[...\] and massacres](#)"⁶⁸¹.

Defeated in Russia, anti-Semitism became an increasingly distressing threat in Germany. Stalin did not wait for Hitler's rise to power to sound the alarm: in a statement broadcast on January 12, 1931, to the American "Jewish News Agency", he described "racial chauvinism" and anti-Semitism as a form of "cannibalism" and a return to the "jungle"; this position was republished in Russian, in *Pravda*, on November 30, 1936, at a time during which governments and public opinion should have been alerted to the terrible threat lurking in Europe and the world⁶⁸².

In this context can be placed the position taken by Kirov (whose wife was Jewish) shortly after Hitler came to power: he denounced "[German fascism, with its pogrom ideology, its anti-Semitism, its views on higher and lower races](#)", as heir to the Russian Black Hundreds⁶⁸³. This last observation is particularly significant. War was in the air, and its approach increasingly pushed the Soviet leaders to appeal to patriotism and to therefore emphasize the element of

continuity in the history of the Russian people and their struggle against aggressors and invaders. This trend was obviously reinforced with the beginning of Operation Barbarossa. And yet, on November 6, 1941, Stalin not only pointed out the “[reactionary, Black-Hundred essence](#)” of Nazi Germany, but also characterized the enemy at the gates of Moscow as such:

[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 the workers, the rights of the intellectuals and the rights of nations as readily as the tsarist regime suppressed them, and that they organize mediæval Jewish 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 Black-Hundred pogroms](#)⁶⁸⁴.

So despite making a passionate call for national unity in the Great Patriotic War against the invaders, Stalin, like Kirov, also described the Nazi regime as a continuation, in some essential aspects, of the tsarism overthrown by the October Revolution. This attitude is even more interesting when compared with the position taken by the US president and his associates, who “[were hesitant to criticize publicly Hitler’s anti-Semitic policies](#)”⁶⁸⁵. Moreover, in 1922, the same F.D. Roosevelt was in favor of a reduction of the Jewish presence at Harvard and in American universities in general⁶⁸⁶.

A public condemnation of the Third Reich’s persecutions of Jews is even less likely coming from a statesman like Churchill, who, as we have seen, highlighted in 1937 the nefarious role of Judaism in the Bolshevik agitation. The same year, the English statesman wrote an article (unpublished afterwards) which considered the Jews at least partly responsible for the hostility that was beating down on them⁶⁸⁷. Stalin behaved in exactly the opposite way: he continued to describe the Nazis as “pogrom-mongers” in his November 6, 1943 speech⁶⁸⁸. But most significant of all was the speech he delivered a year later, again on the anniversary of the October Revolution. In this case the customary denunciation of the “[fascist pogrom-mongers](#)”, from whose barbarity the “civilization of Europe” was saved by the Soviet people, was inserted in a broader context that emphasizes the centrality of the “race theory” and “[racial hatred](#)” in the doctrine and practice of Nazism, which in any case directed a

“[cannibalistic policy](#)”⁶⁸⁹. This late-1944 speech, on the eve of the fall of the Third Reich, again took up the theme already present in the interview published in the “Jewish Telegraph Agency” two years before Hitler came to power.

Beginning with the invasion of the Soviet Union, not only was the argument of the struggle against the Judeo-Bolshevik menace taken up more obsessively than ever, but it seemed to be responding directly to Moscow’s public denunciation of the Third Reich’s “reactionary, Black-Hundred essence”. This was Stalin’s speech, with which we are familiar, of November 6, 1941, the anniversary of the October Revolution. Two days later, in Munich, on a solemn occasion for the Nazi regime (the commemoration of the attempted coup of 1923), Hitler proceeded with a 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 Kaganovitsch and all those Jews who in their tens of thousands rule this powerful land⁶⁹⁰.

He would repeat this thesis some time later during a dinner conversation: “Behind Stalin are the Jews”⁶⁹¹. We are here faced with a recurring motif in Nazi propaganda: as early as 1938, Goebbels praised a book (*Juden hinter Stalin*, Jews behind Stalin) that sought to reveal the ignominies of “Judaism” in the USSR⁶⁹². From these assumptions, the war for the enslavement of the Soviet Union was at the same time the war for the annihilation of the Jews. The infamous *Kommissarbefehl*, which ordered the immediate execution of the political commissars of the Red Army and cadres of the communist party and regime regime, had to have targeted with particular ruthlessness the ethnic group accused of providing the bulk of the cadres and commissars. In his speech of November 8, 1941, Hitler spoke of the government of the Soviet Union as “[an enormous organization of Jewish commissars](#)”⁶⁹³. And this was also the conviction of the German soldiers who from the eastern front reported “Jewish and Bolshevik cruelty” and constantly equated the “damned Jews” and “cursed Bolsheviks”. Yes, the “struggle against Bolshevism” was simultaneously the “struggle against Judaism”; it would destroy once and for all “the Jewish regime in Russia”, “the headquarters of the Judeo-Bolshevik agitators bent on making the world ‘happy’”. This was a country where “the entire leadership of every institution” was in the hands of Jews and where the people were “subjected to the whip of Judaism.” The so-called “Soviet paradise” was actually “a haven for

Jews”, a “Jewish system”, “the most satanic and criminal system of all time”, to be exact⁶⁹⁴. It is understandable that the ethnic group specifically persecuted by the genocidal fury of the Third Reich distinguished itself in the fight against its murderers: “During the war, relative to their population, the Jews won more medals than any other Soviet nationality”⁶⁹⁵. But was this solemn official recognition reconcilable with the thesis of Stalin’s anti-Semitism?

We have seen the American Jewish community taking a clear position against this legend as early as 1937. Five years later, Arendt went further: she attributed to the Soviet Union the merit of having “simply liquidated anti-Semitism” through “an entirely new and [...] an entirely just way to deal with nationality or minorities”⁶⁹⁶. Such a positive judgment is even more significant due to the fact that it was precisely the exemplary resolution of the Jewish and national question that occurred in the country ruled by Stalin that was invoked by Arendt to refute the thesis of Jewish circles who tended to shake the specter of an eternal anti-Semitism. Three years later, the eminent Jewish thinker defended the merit of the Soviet Union in “organizing different peoples [including Jewish] on the basis on national equality”(see above, p. 14-15).

At least until 1945, there seemed to be no traces of anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union, in a country that appeared to Hitler to be, especially after Operation Barbarossa, “Jewry’s greatest servant”⁶⁹⁷.

Stalin and support for the establishment and consolidation of Israel

If Furet’s peremptory statement, according to which Stalin had demonstrated indifference to the Jewish tragedy, or authentic anti-Semitism from at least 1933, is manifestly unfounded, does the dating proposed by the American historian previously cited, who saw this madness arise in Stalin post-World War II, become more convincing? We already know the reaction of displeasure of the American Jewish community to the accusation of anti-Semitism launched by Trotsky against Stalin in 1937. Eight years later, the situation had not changed. In any case, there were prominent circles and figures within the hierarchies of the US military who raise concerns. Take the example of General George S. Patton. This was his dream of an 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 intact and the damn Russians can have their hindends kicked back into Russia”

in three months? We can do it ourselves easily with the help of the German troops we have, if we just arm them and take them with us; they hate the bastards”⁶⁹⁸. Unfortunately, according to the American general, the Jews hindered these projects. Full of resentment towards Germany, they harbored sympathies for the USSR: the “very apparent Semitic influence in the press” tried “to implement communism.” A clear line of continuity arose with the Nazi reading of communism as Judeo-Bolshevik subversion and conspiracy: the enemies continued to be the communists, Soviets, and Jews who “are lower than animals”. After some particularly imprudent statements, General Patton ended up being discredited, but his was not the vision of an isolated character⁶⁹⁹.

Also charged with its link with Judaism, the Soviet Union in fact followed a policy that was deeply akin to the interests of a people who had survived horrible persecution. In reconstructing this chapter of history, I will primarily rely on a book that actually aims to denounce the “anti-Semitism” of the socialist camp led by the Soviet Union. Let us begin with Hungary. Those who constituted the backbone of the communist regime formed after the passing of the Red Army were “cadres who had lived in Moscow, almost all Jews.” The fact is that “Stalin had no choice, since he only trusted” them. “When the first elections of the Central Committee were held, one third of the members were Jews.” The top leaders would be of the same ethnicity, starting with Rakosi, “the first Jewish king of Hungary.” The author of this approving definition was one of Stalin’s closest collaborators, Beria (he was probably Jewish as well)⁷⁰⁰. The situation in the rest of the socialist camp was not much different. We will limit ourselves to another few examples. Relevant in Poland was “the Jewish presence in the Communist ranks and, above all, at the highest levels of the regime”. That was not all. “The sector with heightened identification between Jews and communist power is notable: the security apparatus’⁷⁰¹. In Czechoslovakia these were not only Jews as such, but the very Zionists who were “favored by the postwar government” and encouraged to be present inside it⁷⁰².

A similar view can be made of Germany: “Jews tended to be given the pick of the jobs in the Russian Zone.” On the other side, the person who would direct cultural activity in the Soviet zone was a brilliant art historian, Colonel Alexandr Dymshitz, himself of Jewish origin. And the presence of the Gotha of the German-Jewish intelligentsia was felt especially in the cultural renaissance that began to be glimpsed between the mourning and the ruins⁷⁰³. The situation did not change, of course, with the founding of the German Democratic Republic:

In communist Germany, officially born on October 7, 1949, Jews initially enjoyed favorable treatment, if not privileged. As the formerly persecuted they were entitled to special pensions for the elderly and for the young, sick, or disabled, and the Constitution guaranteed religious freedom. Peter Kirchner says: “Pensions for us Jews were much higher than for others. They varied between 1,400 and 1,700 marks, when normally they did not exceed 350” [...]. The Jews therefore felt protected by the policy of the new communist Germany towards them, even more because they were well-represented in institutions. In the 1950 elections, fifteen Jews were elected to parliament on the lists of almost all the parties, besides the Communist. Additionally, Minister of Propaganda and Information Gerhart Eisler, director of the state radio information services Leo Bauer, director of the communist newspaper “Neues Deutschland” Rudolf Herrstadt, and the leader of a section of the Minister of Health Leo Mandel, were all Jews⁷⁰⁴.

This was also why the Soviet Union had such great sympathy “among the Zionists throughout the world”. It reached the point where they were “**ready to admire everything Russian**”: this was stated by Arendt, who as late as May 1948 expressed disappointment at the “anti-Western and pro-Soviet orientation” of the Zionist movement, which was inclined to condemn Great Britain as “antisemitic” or the United States as “**imperialist**”⁷⁰⁵.

The attitude she deplores here is quite understandable. In Nuremberg the Soviet representatives of the prosecution had been the first to call attention to the horror of Judeocide, and in highlighting it not without rhetorical emphasis, formulating a fiercely deliberate thesis: “**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**” (actually, the “final solution” only began to be outlined beginning with the entrenchment of Operation Barbarossa). One of the most dramatic moments of the process was the testimony given by the Soviet representatives of the prosecution: four Jews, including a woman who expressed: “**In the name of all the women of Europe who became mothers in concentration camps, I would like to ask the German mothers, ‘Where are our children now?’**”⁷⁰⁶.

In particular, these were the years in which the Soviet Union strongly supported Zionism and the creation of Israel. Stalin played a leading and even decisive role: without him, “a Jewish state in Palestine would have hardly seen the light of day”, said even a Russian historian, using recently declassified documents in

Russia⁷⁰⁷. In any case, as noted by another author (this time western), the speech given at the UN in May 1948 by the Soviet Foreign Minister, Andrei A. Gromiko, appeared to be “almost textbook Zionist propaganda”: the establishment of Israel is necessary due to the fact that “the Jews in the territories where the Hitlerites held sway were subjected to almost complete physical annihilation”, while “no Western European State has been able to ensure the defense of the elementary rights of the Jewish people and to safeguard it against the violence of the fascist executioners”⁷⁰⁸.

Moreover, by supporting Zionism Stalin came into conflict with Great Britain. The latter used the military corps of the former Republic of Salò and Decima Flottiglia MAS’s “Pigs” to detonate “a boat (although perhaps there were two) that, having finished its military operations, transported from Yugoslavia to Palestine weapons for the Jews”⁷⁰⁹. At this time it was the London government which was perceived as “the principal enemy of the Jews”⁷¹⁰; there were no suspicions or accusations of anti-Semitism about the Soviet Union, which was committed to giving military as well as diplomatic support to the foundation of the State of Israel, but it was Britain, who in an attempt to hinder those plans did not hesitate to use political and military circles who in the Republic of Salò had notably contributed to the “final solution”!

But a more general consideration can be made. After the war Stalin continued to follow “a fundamentally pro-Jewish Palestinian politics.” Political and geopolitical calculations certainly contributed to driving this: the desire to undo Britain’s position in the Middle East (a goal also pursued by Truman, whose support for the founding of the State of Israel is not coincidental) and to gain the support or at least the sympathy of the American and European Jewish communities during the cold War, with the hope that the new state, founded with the decisive contribution of immigrants from Eastern Europe and not infrequently of leftist orientation, would assume a pro-Soviet attitude. But the military aid that the Zionist movement secured through Yugoslavia in 1945 was not an isolated gesture. Three years later, this time with the collaboration of Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union again supplied weapons to Israel, and even violating the UN Security Council resolution of 29 March 1948, organized the influx of young Jews from Eastern Europe, who would reinforce the army of the Jewish state in the war with the neighboring Arab countries. Thanks also to Moscow, what has been defined as “the Prague-Jerusalem axis” was achieved. Yes, “the weapons the soldiers of the nascent State of Israel brandished to fight

their war of independence were of Czechoslovakian production [...]. Precisely when the other governments refused to sell weapons to the Jewish state, Czechoslovakia decided to continue openly selling to them, also giving them special prices [...]. In this way Israeli aviation was founded in Czech territory: here they organized parachute exercises⁷¹¹. A veritable airlift was put into action, supplying the Zionist army with weapons, instructors, and even volunteers⁷¹². In autumn of the same year, the Israeli foreign minister reported from Paris to Prime Minister Ben Gurion with satisfaction that the Soviet delegates at the UN Conference on the Palestinian question had acted as advocates for Israel⁷¹³.

The least that can be said is that Stalin's Soviet Union made an essential contribution to the foundation and consolidation of the Jewish state. Interesting elements also emerge with regard to its relationship with Judaism and Jewish culture in general. Still fully within the so-called "anti-Semitic campaign", a "Moscow suburb" was named "New Jerusalem": here was the dacha of Ilya Ehrenburg, a Jewish intellectual who played a leading cultural and political role in the Soviet Union, winning the Stalin Prize, a recognition that was also achieved by other Jewish writers and "some Jewish musicians of international fame"⁷¹⁴.

How does it make sense, then, to speak of Stalin's "anti-Semitism"? The support provided for the foundation and consolidation of the Jewish state was at the same time a contribution to the *Nakbah*, that is, the national "catastrophe" of the Palestinian people, who for decades continued to languish in refugee camps and territories subjected to a ruthless military occupation and a growing process of colonization. If we continued this *ad absurdum*, Stalin should be charged with a kind of "anti-Semitism", this being anti-Arab "anti-Semitism". It should be noted, however, that in this regard the preferred option of the Soviet Union was "an independent, multinational state that would respect the interests of both Jews and Arabs"⁷¹⁵.

The shift of the Cold War and the blackmail of the Rosenbergs

Still on the eve of Stalin's death, Kerensky, living in the US, noted in a conversation with an Israeli historian that the accusations of anti-Semitism directed at the Soviet Union in those years was only an invention of the Cold War⁷¹⁶. Yes, this was the turning point, and to understand it it is necessary to

return to the climate of those years. A Cold War that could at any time be transformed into a nuclear holocaust certainly knew no ideological limits. From one side and the other flew charges of rampant anti-Semitism in the enemy camp. The trial and death sentence in the United States of the Rosenbergs, who were communists and Jews accused of treason and espionage in the service of Moscow, were almost simultaneous with the trials and death sentences in the socialist camp of “Zionists” accused of treason and spying on behalf of Tel Aviv and Washington. Suspected of disloyalty and pressed to provide unequivocal proof of patriotism, in both cases the Jewish community was subject to more or less explicit pressure and blackmail.

The climate of suspicion was not less oppressive in the US than in the USSR. It is not easy to relive the memories of the moment today, when the special relationship between Washington and Tel Aviv is in full view of everyone, but the situation was quite different at the beginning of the Cold War: often urban centers that were “whites only” or “Caucasians only” continued to exclude Jews as well, considered just as “stupid” as blacks. As late as 1959, the Anti-Defamation League felt the need to denounce the abuses suffered by the Jews because of the persistence of this practice⁷¹⁷. Together “the 1940s and 1950s represented a politically traumatic era for the Jewish minority”⁷¹⁸. The circles connecting Judaism and communism were still active, regarding the Jews as foreigners on American soil and accomplices of the Soviet enemy, and along with texts by Henry Ford they even continue to print *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*⁷¹⁹. Of course, after Auschwitz and thus the revelation of the horrors to which anti-Semitism had led, it could not continue to enjoy the support it had before. And yet “the threat of anti-Jewish bias was far from dissipated. Jews comprised a majority of the employees who were suspended or reclassified in 1953 at the radar laboratories in Fort Monmouth, New Jersey”⁷²⁰.

According to French Communist leader Jacques Duclos, who was very active in denouncing the persecution of the Rosenbergs in the United States, anti-Semitism played no role in the trials in Czechoslovakia that were directed precisely against “Zionist” traitors in service to the war policy of Washington⁷²¹.

The vision that the enemies of the Soviet Union were dedicated to spreading was the opposite. When rejecting Duclos’s accusation of anti-Semitism against the United States, the American Jewish Committee announced its support of the execution of the Rosenbergs without hesitation and opposed any act of

clemency: all Americans had to be dispelled of “the illusion that the rank and file of American Jews regarded” communist spies and agitators (whether Jew or Gentile) “with anything but abhorrence”⁷²²; in fact, McCarthy’s collaborators also includes two Jews, dedicated, of course, to fighting communism, but also to demonstrating patriotic loyalty to their own community⁷²³.

It was not only a matter of defending the United States against the charge of anti-Semitism. The FBI devised a plan which was agreed to by a Jewish volunteer lawyer, who was entrusted with a very specific task:

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.”⁷²⁴.

Ineffective in the case of the two Communist activists who courageously faced the electric chair on June 19, 1953, blackmail at other times achieved the desired result: “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”⁷²⁵; there were many who agreed to denounce the “anti-Semitism” of Stalin and the Soviet Union.

However, before this black legend could become established, it ran into serious difficulties. In 1949, we see one of the champions of the Cold War, Churchill, make an eloquent comparison between Nazism and Communism several times: the first was less dangerous, since it had “only the *Herrenvolk* pride and anti-Semitic hatred”, unlike the second, which could count on “[a church of Communist adepts, whose missionaries are in every country](#)” and in every people. Consequently, we have on the one hand the stoking of national and racial hatred on the basis of hatred directed at Jewish people; on the other we have a universalist responsibility, even if it was instrumental in a project of “[imperialist expansion](#)”⁷²⁶. Perhaps even more significant was Adorno’s contribution in 1950. When he published his studies on “the authoritarian personality”, he pointed out “the correlation between anti-Semitism and anticommunism” and then added: “During the last several years all the propaganda machinery of the country has been devoted to prompting 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”⁷²⁷. At this time, far from being directed against Stalin and his followers, the accusation of anti-Semitism continued to be directed against the anti-communists.

Unequal to begin with, the balance of power between the two sides of the Cold War displayed the increasingly clear predominance of the West, both militarily and with regard to the ideological offensive and the firepower of the media. Of the two opposite accusations of anti-Semitism, only one remains standing today: the other has even been lost from memory. It should be added that, beyond Stalin, this allegation was also directed against his successors, starting with Khrushchev: he too would show signs, it is not known why, of being “strongly anti-Semitic”!⁷²⁸ And yet:

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 scientists⁷²⁹.

Additionally, an English historian, who is also devoted to describing Stalin as anti-Semitic at least since the 1930s, not only recognizes that the people the Soviet leader worked with and even “many of his closest collaborators [...] were Jewish”, but added that in 1937 the Jews “formed a majority in the government” (or the government apparatus)⁷³⁰. It is quite difficult to sustain the thesis of the anti-Semitism of Stalin and the Soviet Union by using statistical data and empirical research!

Stalin, Israel, and the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe

Of course, the Jewish community did not avoid the conflicts that characterized the history of the Soviet Union and the socialist camp. Let us consider first of all the situation that was created 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 government apparatus. Aside from the composition of these institutions, it is necessary to consider the feelings of gratitude that Jews in Hungary felt, by the fact that, one authoritative witness reports, “it had been the Soviet soldiers and no one else who had saved us from certain death”⁷³¹. However, the honeymoon that appears to have reigned for some time would end up breaking down. Jews returning to Hungary after having managed to avoid the genocidal policy of the

Third Reich and its henchmen, they had to engage in the reconstruction of a destroyed country, or maybe emigrate to the Jewish state that was being formed in the Middle East? Initially, proponents of this second option acted impassively:

Zionist officials [...] led the Hungarian section of the American Jewish Joint Committee, which after the war invested huge sums of money in the reconstruction of Jewish communities. This was the channel of economic assistance to the survivors. A Zionist sympathizer, Dr. Fabián Herskovits, became the Rabbi of the most prestigious Budapest synagogue, in Dohany Street, and from there gave speeches every week in favor of emigration to Israel [...]. It was said that the Zionists possessed a more widespread and efficient organization than the Hungarian Communists did [...]. It is estimated that about a fifth of the Jewish population took the path of emigration⁷³².

This massive emigration, which was a real drain in qualitative terms especially, depriving the country of the officials it desperately needed to rise from the ruins of war, could not but have worried the government and the party (including Jews who had rejected the Zionist option):

The communists [...] not only blocked the exodus of the Jews in 1948, but they were able to establish their own hegemony in the Jewish world. Remember the Zionist leader Ariè Yaari: “For us it was less problematic to convince people to move to Palestine. The elderly in particular were afraid to begin a new life, with a new language. The regime offered them political appointments that had never before been held by the Jews. They could become judges, functionaries, enter the government. The communist movement was rather weak and needed many officials. How could the Jews resist the temptation?”⁷³³

As can be seen, it makes no sense to talk about anti-Semitism. Not only was there no trace of negative discrimination against Jews, but also they may have enjoyed preferential treatment to the extent that they accepted staying in Hungary. It should be added that, even before the Jewish community and the communist world became opposed, the battle being spoken of here had fractured the Jewish community as such. Defeated firstly by the Jews who choose to integrate into the country of which they were citizens, the Zionists

despite all their efforts, failed to sow among Jews the idea of ethnic

separation. When in the late 1940s the communists outlawed the Zionist movement, the vast majority of Jews had not welcomed the discourse of Jewish national identity at all. The idea that the Jewish community had to be defined as a national minority was the last thing on the minds of the Jews, who once again were oriented towards the search for a new assimilation⁷³⁴.

A similar crisis occurred in the Soviet Union, and in this case as well the conflict took place within the Jewish community. Warning against the danger posed by Zionism (guilty of hindering the reconstruction of the country that had been devastated and tortured by the Nazi army, and of reopening a Jewish question that had been settled happily in the Soviet Union) was Ilya Ehrenburg, a writer of Jewish origin, in the columns of *Pravda* on September 21, 1948⁷³⁵; his anti-Zionist position was intertwined with condemnation of anti-Semitism, which, significantly, he described as an expression of “racial chauvinism” and “cannibalism”, following the words of Stalin⁷³⁶.

The conversation that took place in Moscow in 1948 between Golda Meir and Ilya Ehrenburg is revealing. When the first expressed her contempt for the assimilated Jews (“I’m sorry for Jews who don’t speak Hebrew or at least Yiddish”), the second angrily reacted: “You are a servant of the United States”⁷³⁷. Speaking with another interlocutor, the Soviet writer states:

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 the Jews⁷³⁸.

There is no doubt: the approaching, colossal brain drain would open another dispute outside of the Cold War, in particular because of the fact that to achieve their goal, Israeli diplomatic representatives in Moscow bypassed the Soviet authorities and established direct contact with the Soviet Jewish community⁷³⁹. In any case the dispute became more serious the more the alignment of Israel with the West took shape: many valuable Soviet scientists of Jewish origin were called by Zionist propaganda to emigrate and become part of an alliance to crush the country that had made their emancipation and social promotion possible. And yet “despite the growing frictions, authoritative representatives of the USSR

had repeatedly affirmed Soviet support for Israel, but they had made it dependent on the neutrality of the Israeli government in the context of the confrontation between East and West”⁷⁴⁰. However, these last illusions of Moscow dissipated quickly. The break with the Jewish state was also a head-on collision with the Zionist circles who were still very active in the socialist camp and would now be ruthlessly repressed. In Czechoslovakia, Slansky was imprisoned and sentenced to death; according to the testimony of his daughter, “he was in favor of emigration to Israel»⁷⁴¹.

More fortunate was Ana Pauker in Romania, who got off with a few months in jail. And yet, we witness a similar case: “Zionism had long been an ideology condemned by the regime, but that had not prevented the flow of Romanian Jews to Israel until the release in 1952 of Pauker, who had discreetly kept the way to the Promised Land open”; thanks to her, “not less than one hundred thousand Jews left Romania to settle in Israel”⁷⁴².

We can then understand the growing distrust of Stalin, to whom is attributed the statement that “every Jew is a nationalist and an agent of American intelligence”.⁷⁴³ To many communists, the radical shift in the attitude of the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe must have made them think about the “betrayal” alleged against the German Social Democratic Party at the outbreak of World War I. Should we read the conflict that erupted as “Stalin’s war against the Jews”? This is what is suggested by the title of a book on the topic, written by a journalist from the *Jerusalem Post*. But is this reading actually more convincing than the one provided by Stalin, who denounced the “war of the Zionists against the Soviet Union and the socialist camp”? A historian (Conquest), despite his commitment to reducing Bolshevism and communism to a criminal phenomenon, acknowledges that in the Soviet Union “anti-Semitism as such was never an official doctrine”, that “open persecution of the Jews as Jews was forbidden”, and that there was no reference to “race theory”⁷⁴⁴.

How does it make sense, then, to compare Stalin with Hitler? The aforementioned historian adds that the first “hoped to use Israel against the West and continued to accuse the West of anti-Semitism”⁷⁴⁵. But it does not appear that the Nazi leader would have described his enemies as anti-Semitic! Conquest begins from the assumption that Stalin’s accusations of the West’s anti-Semitism were ridiculous, but he does not even raise the question of the validity of the West’s accusations of Stalin’s anti-Semitism. Why should this capitalization

occur on one side, then? And why would the country described by Hitler (but also by important sectors of Western public opinion) as the embodiment of the “Judeo-Bolshevik plot” and as definitive confirmation of the conspiracy “revealed” by the publication of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* be considered the heir to the Third Reich’s anti-Semitism? In any case, the myth of “Stalin’s war against the Jews” was not believed by the numerous and often prominent Israelis who, upon hearing the news of the Soviet leader’s death, mourned and honored him as a “sun” that “has set” (see above, p. 13).

However, Israel’s victory in the Six-Day War and the entrenchment of the Palestinian tragedy further deepened the gap in Eastern Europe separating the communist governments from the Jewish community and the pro-Israeli and pro-Western circles organized around it. But is it correct to talk about anti-Semitism? With confidence in the reconstruction produced by the two historians of Jewish origin previously mentioned, let us see what happened in Prague in 1967: “The sympathy of the Czech students for Israel has [...] a fairly trivial motivation: the antipathy they harbored towards the thousands of Arab students enrolled at the university.” Something similar occurred in Warsaw: “Suddenly people remembered that many of the Jews living in Palestine came from Poland.” A taxi driver exclaimed: “Our brave Polish Jews are teaching those fucking Russian Arabs a lesson⁷⁴⁶. In the conflict produced with the communist government, aligned with some of the Arab countries, who was demonstrating racism? Are we facing an anti-Jewish racism or an anti-Arab racism instead?

The question of “cosmopolitanism”

The “doctors’ plot”, which is generally argued as confirmation of Stalin’s anti-Semitism, perhaps proves just the opposite: after all, he continued to entrust his health to them until the end. And, as a matter of fact, only a few of the accused doctors were Jews, and the “conspiracy” as a whole was described by the Soviet leaders and press “as capitalist and imperialist rather than Zionist”⁷⁴⁷. Were the suspicions simply motivated by paranoia? A detail makes us wonder: “The CIA became more friendly [towards the Jewish state] from the time when it made use of Israeli intelligence sources in Eastern Europe and the USSR. For example, Mossad agents were the first foreigners to receive the full text of Khrushchev secret speech about Stalin’s crimes”⁷⁴⁸, and immediately passed it to the American services.

It should not be forgotten that the “age of suspicion”, as it has been aptly described, stimulated witch hunts in ways that were obviously different on both sides⁷⁴⁹. Moreover, it is no mystery to anyone that US secret services were engaged in the physical elimination of Stalin, as with Castro, Lumumba, and other “mad dogs”⁷⁵⁰. How could they reach the undisputed leader of the international communist movement, if not by making use of nearby persons who were susceptible to being recruited by Western intelligence services after a recent conflict, such as the one that emerged after the founding of the Jewish state and the policy towards Jewish immigration carried out by him? At the time the “conspiracy” was uncovered, “at least one prominent Western diplomat present in Moscow, the Englishman Sir A. (“Joe”) Gascoigne [...], thought that the Kremlin doctors probably were really guilty of political treason”⁷⁵¹. In addition, suspicion of doctors seem to be a recurring motif in Russian history: an Israeli historian of Russian origin blames the death of Tsar Alexander III on the German doctors who had cared for him.

It should be added that a book recently published in the United States formulated the thesis that the people who assessed the death of Zhdanov would have been the doctors “caring” for him. Should we therefore conclude that Stalin’s concerns were not unfounded? Without providing any evidence, and indeed recognizing that there are no documents supporting their thesis, the book’s authors are quick to point out that behind the murderous doctors were not the enemies of the Soviet Union, but the Kremlin dictator himself! Furthermore, apart from a radiology technician, none of the doctors caring for Zhdanov was Jewish!⁷⁵² By now it is clear: we are in the field of mythology, and a mythology of disturbing tones: it would be reasonable to suspect the doctors only if they were German or Russian “gentiles”! But let us return to the field of historical research: keep in mind that the person who suspended the investigation could have been Stalin himself, perhaps aware of the blindness into which he had fallen⁷⁵³.

In the absence of further arguments for to the thesis of Stalin’s anti-Semitism, there is his condemnation of “cosmopolitanism”: who were the cosmopolitans if not the Jews? In fact, the accusation of cosmopolitanism should be placed within a quite heavy debate between the two sides. Those who were determined to devote themselves primarily to the construction of socialism in the country that emerged from October 1917, renouncing the messianic expectation of the arrival or export of revolution worldwide, were accused of “national isolation” and

“national narrow-mindedness”⁷⁵⁴, not to mention provincialism: if Stalin was the “oafish provincial” with the “coarseness of the peasant” (see above, pp. 14 and 27), Molotov was not in much better standing in Trotsky’s opinion, because he “[does not know any foreign country or any foreign language](#)”⁷⁵⁵. Both of them had the defect of remaining rigidly attached to the “[reactionary role of the national state](#)” in a provincial and obscurantist way⁷⁵⁶. Those being attacked reacted to their accusers by defining them as abstract cosmopolitans and incapable of actually building a new social order.

To read the condemnation of “cosmopolitanism” as one of anti-Semitism means diminishing a problem that is at the heart of all great revolutions driven by a universalist mission. Rejecting the thesis of the export of revolution, defended by proponents of the “[one and universal Republic](#)” or the “[Republic, or rather the universal conflagration](#)”⁷⁵⁷, Robespierre explained that the new France would not contribute to the cause of world revolution by acting as “[the capital of the globe](#)” from which to send its “[armed missionaries](#)” for the conversion and “[conquest of the world](#)”⁷⁵⁸. No, what would put the European old regime in crisis would not be the “[exploits of warriors](#)” but rather the “[wisdom of our laws](#)”⁷⁵⁹. In other words, revolutionary power would develop a real internationalist role to the extent in which it fulfilled the national task of constructing the new order in France.

This is a problem that is deeply reflected in German idealism. For Kant, who while writing in 1793-1794 was in a way tracing the historical balance of the French Revolution, if patriotism is in danger of slipping into exclusivism and losing sight of the universal, abstract love of humanity, it “[cannot fail to dissipate \[its\] inclination through its excessive generality](#)”. He then tried to reconcile “world patriotism” (*Weltpatriotismus*) with “local patriotism” (*Localpatriotismus*) or with “[love of country](#)”; someone who is genuinely universalist “[in fealty to his country must have an inclination to promote the well-being of the entire world](#)”⁷⁶⁰. This line of thought was further developed by Hegel: after having celebrated as a great historical achievement the development of the universal concept of man (a holder of rights “[in virtue of his manhood alone, not because he is a Jew, Catholic, Protestant, German, Italian, &c.](#)”), in the *Philosophy of Right* (§ 209 A) he adds that it should not however lead to “[cosmopolitanism](#)” and indifference or opposition to the “[concrete life of the state](#)” in which one is a citizen. “Universal love of man” carries the risk of taking the form of an “empty universality” that is devoid of content (§ 126 Z): in the

first place, the individual contributes to the universal by specifically acting in the specific area (family, society, nation) in which he lives. On the other hand, the acclaimed “universal love of man” is at best a declaration of noble intentions; at worst, it is a technique of evading concrete responsibilities.

This problem, with its universalism further exacerbated, was inherited by the October Revolution from the French Revolution in particular. Long before Stalin, Herzen, in exile in Paris, would be quite suspicious and critical of a cosmopolitanism that is unaware of the idea of nation and national responsibility (see above, p. 128). The controversy went beyond the limits of the Soviet Union. Rejecting the “accusations of nationalism” directed at most of the CPSU and most of all at Stalin⁷⁶¹, Gramsci takes a clear stance against the “so-called ‘internationalism’” that is in reality synonymous with a “vague ‘cosmopolitanism’”. The main target here is Trotsky, who is criticized as “cosmopolitan” for the fact that he is “superficially national” and therefore incapable of “purging internationalism of every vague and purely ideological (in a pejorative sense) element”, as opposed to Stalin and especially Lenin, who showed signs of a mature internationalism precisely at the same time they appeared “profoundly national”⁷⁶².

In the USSR the criticism of cosmopolitanism was accentuated as the threat posed by fascism and Nazism worsened. We know of Dimitrov’s impassioned call to the revolutionaries, two years after Hitler’s rise to power, to refuse “national nihilism”. An internationalism that flows into national nihilism: this is cosmopolitanism. We have also seen Stalin, on the eve of Operation Barbarossa, pointing out that, unlike a “cosmopolitanism” that is incapable of assuming its national responsibilities, internationalism should know how to combine itself with patriotism. That is, far from being synonymous with anti-Semitism, criticism of cosmopolitanism was an essential element in the fight against Nazi fascism (and anti-Semitism). This criticism again became urgent with the outbreak of the Cold War, when a new and terrible threat hung over the USSR.

The criticism of cosmopolitanism is even stronger if the country where the revolution has broken out is engaged in a struggle for national survival. In China, Sun Yat-Sen wrote: “In order to preserve their privileged position in oppressed countries as well as their supremacy over the world, the imperialist Powers are advocating the doctrine of cosmopolitanism” and by every means attempt to discredit nationalism as “being too narrow and detrimental”⁷⁶³. In the same vein is Mao, according to whom internationalism was not by any means

rendered obsolete by patriotism: “The universal truths of Marxism have to be integrated with the concrete conditions of different countries, and there is unity between internationalism and patriotism”⁷⁶⁴.

Were the “cosmopolitans” of the USSR mostly Jews, thus making anti-cosmopolitanism only one form of barely disguised anti-Semitism? It is worth noting that in the development of his argument against cosmopolitanism, Sun Yat-Sen invited the Chinese people to follow the example of the Jews who, despite millennia of oppression and diaspora, had never lost their sense of identity and therefore their obligation of mutual solidarity⁷⁶⁵. But let us concentrate on the Soviet Union: there was a large Jewish presence in the ranks of most of the CPSU. However, among the first to level the accusation of cosmopolitanism against the opposition leader was the German writer of Jewish origin (Feuchtwanger) whom we have already cited: “Trotsky was never a Russian patriot”; his only concern was “[world revolution](#)”⁷⁶⁶.

Moreover, on the basis of the hermeneutics of suspicion used with Stalin, Trotsky cannot escape the accusation of anti-Semitism either. In his analysis of pre-revolutionary Russia, he underscored how “the aristocracy of the stock exchange” had “turned the Tsarist government into its financial vassal”, which guaranteed “[usurers’ rates of interest](#)”⁷⁶⁷. It should be added that “[the domain of the stock exchange](#)” is represented by “[the Rothschilds and the Mendelssohns](#)”, and furthermore, the “[international Mendelssohn](#)”, that is by individuals committed to respecting “[the laws of the stock exchange, like those of Moses](#)”⁷⁶⁸. As can be seen, in this case the reference to the Jewish world is explicit. Should we therefore conclude that the argument against the “aristocracy of the stock exchange” was actually targeting the Jews as Jews, so that we have yet another manifestation of anti-Semitism? This manner of arguing would be absurd, and not only because of Trotsky’s Jewish origins: what is more significant is that fact that the same text devotes pages to describing the “[black \[...\] bacchanal](#)” of blood spilled by anti-Semitic bands, who were tolerated or encouraged by the authorities as well as by “[Nicholas Romanov, Most August patron of the pogromists](#)”, who was fought with courage and determination by the revolutionary socialist movement⁷⁶⁹. But Stalin was no less clear in his condemnation of anti-Semitic “cannibalism”.

Stalin in the “court” of the Jews, the Jews in the “court” of Stalin

The USSR is the “country that has saved the most Jews”: this is the observation of a journalist and researcher of Trotskyist background who, as a “witness of those years”, considered it necessary to take a stand against the campaign orchestrated by the West. He adds: “no country has had in the senior cadres of the army as many Jews as the Red Army.” And that was not all: “One of Stalin’s sons and his daughter married Jews”⁷⁷⁰. It may be added that in the within Stalin’s leadership group Jews were quite well represented until the very end, and at the highest levels. To remain on its feet, albeit weakly and hesitantly, the thesis of Stalin’s “anti-Semitism” requires removing the Jewish nature of the Jews who collaborated with him. This is in fact what happened: “Iagoda, Kaganovitch, and many others in Russia and Central and Eastern Europe” played an important role alongside the ferocious dictator, but they were “apostate Jews”: so pronounced a Jewish intellectual, using language that was clearly referring to religious history⁷⁷¹. At other times, the weight of religious tradition is felt in a mediated and involuntary way: we can even find journalists in the largest Italian newspaper in circulation denouncing the “Jewish renegades in the court of Stalin”⁷⁷².

In truth, the rhetoric of “apostates” and “renegades” (i.e. the “Jews of the court”) constitutes an implicit denial of the accusation of anti-Semitism which, like racism, is directed against an ethnic group independent of the religious and political behavior of its members. Recognizing the presence of Jews in leading positions in Stalin’s USSR and in the socialist camp he led means admitting that in those countries access to power and social and political positions was determined not by racial membership, which is immutable, but rather by political behavior, which is variable. However, removing the Jewish character of the Jews considered shameful today (as “apostates”, inauthentic “renegades”, and “courtiers”) allows the transformation of anti-Semitism into a term that is capable of resisting all refutations coming from empirical analysis, which can thus be applied not only to Stalin but to the entire history of the Soviet Union.

Immediately after the October Revolution, the campaign against obscurantism which criticized various religions (including Judaism) took place with the participation of leaders belonging to important Jewish circles. But this is the commentary of the previously-quoted journalist of “Corriere della sera”: “It was the Yevsektia, the Jewish section of the CPSU, that fomented the new anti-Semitism”⁷⁷³. A professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem argues analogously: “during the Bolshevik revolution [...] many Jewish Bolsheviks

were engaged in the cause of Russian revolutionary nationalism with such vigor that they became anti-Semites”⁷⁷⁴. Labeled as “apostates” and “renegades”, communist Jews were now turned into “anti-Semites” *tout court*. At this point, which is beyond Stalin, the accusation of “anti-Semitism” implicates Lenin as well, the supreme leader of these “anti-Semitic” campaigns.

And yet the same Israeli historian writes: “Lenin probably never really believed in the organizational abilities of Russians. In a private conversation with Gorky, he remarked that every clever Russian was Jewish or had some Jewish blood in his or her ancestry.” The Soviet leader’s opinion was shared by his interlocutor: “Gorky would, however, have like to see Jews as administrators of Russian economics, and in 1916 wrote that ‘the Jewish organizational talent, their flexibility and restless energy, must be duly estimated in a country as badly organized as our Russia’”⁷⁷⁵. Therefore, judging by this text, Lenin and Gorky (who was also a member of the Communist Party) if anything could be accused of anti-Russian racism, and certainly not of anti-Semitism.

The leading role played by the Jews was not limited to the overthrow of the old regime in Russia. The Jewish historian continues: to the “omnipresent Jewish minority” Lenin assigned the role of “guardians of communism”. In other words, “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 genius to rely on them and on other national minorities in the revolution”⁷⁷⁶. As can be seen, the expansion of communism was contributed to in a relevant and perhaps decisive way by these “anti-Semitic” Jews: the Judeo-Bolshevik plot spoken of by the Nazis is here re-read as an agitation or a plot orchestrated by Jews, yes, but by anti-Semitic Jews!

This is an agitation and a plot with a very long history behind it. Again according to the historian previously cited, Lenin would have used the Jews who had broken with their community of origin, just as he had previously used Christianity⁷⁷⁷. Again, there are analogies with the Nazi reading of history, denouncing the role of Jews in the destructive cycle in which Christianity leads to Bolshevism. The only novelty is that now the role is played by Jews who, having been adherents of Christianity before and Bolshevism after, should be considered “apostates”, “renegades”, and ultimately “anti-Semites”. In the effort to destroy both Stalin and the whole Soviet experience, the accusation of “anti-Semitism” leads to the reproduction, with some modest variations, of the Nazi philosophy of history!

From Trotsky to Stalin, from the “Semitic” monster to the “anti-Semitic” monster

The thesis of Stalin’s anti-Semitism is revealed to be untenable in light of historical and conceptual reflection. However the emergence of this “anti-Semitism” is dated (which must be in 1948, 1945, 1933, or perhaps in 1879, the year of Stalin’s birth), the diagnosis is determined to be not only unfounded, but also quite offensive with respect to the majority of Jews who continued to pay homage to their butcher. How, then, can the origin of this black legend be explained? Let us return to the years immediately following the October Revolution. On October 4, 1919, the *Völkischer Beobachter*, which at this time was not yet an organ of the (still nonexistent) Nazi party, pinned responsibility for the Bolshevik horror on a “Jewish terrorist horde” of “circumcised Asiatics”, and in this regard also recalled that Jewish blood ran in the veins of Lenin as well. Similar denunciations resounded in England and the West as a whole⁷⁷⁸. Given this background, it is understandable that, even before Lenin, Trotsky was “the ideal satanic subject of anti-Bolshevik posters”⁷⁷⁹. He was described as “a monstrous ‘Jewish mass-killer’ of the Russian people”⁷⁸⁰. A manifesto of anti-communist propaganda disseminated during the Russo-Polish war of 1920 portrayed him with not quite human features as seen from above, with the Star of David around his neck, and a mountain of skulls⁷⁸¹. “Trotsky, alias Bronstein”, in other words, the Jewish Bolshevik par excellence, was to Goebbels in 1929 the person “who probably has more crimes on his conscience than any other human being”⁷⁸².

On the other hand, as late as the invasion of the Soviet Union, which was proclaimed a crusade for the salvation of European and Western civilization from Bolshevik, Asiatic, and Jewish barbarism, we see Hitler describing Stalin as a puppet of international Jewry, if not by blood a Jew, at least one in spirit. In the years in which anti-Semitism spread through or enjoyed favor in the West, the monster par excellence could not have but assumed Jewish features. The situation created after the Third Reich’s collapse and the revelation of the ignominy of the “final solution” is different: today the monster that is capable of evoking the greatest horror tends to be the anti-Semitic monster. However, despite variations the continuity of the *topos* is clear, and the portrait of an anti-Semitic Stalin is not much more convincing than the one painted of Trotsky, displaying the Star of David and contemplating a pyre of his infinite victims

with pleasure.

6

Psychopathology, morality, and history in reading the Stalin era

Geopolitics, terror, and Stalin's "paranoia"

What kind of approach will allow us to better understand the genesis, characteristics, and significance of Stalinism? According to Arendt, obsession with the “objective enemy” drove Stalin’s totalitarianism (as it did Hitler’s) to always seek new targets for its repressive machine: after “the descendants of the former ruling classes”, the *kulaks*’ turn came, then traitors within the party, the “Volga Germans”, etc.⁷⁸³ In order to realize the futility of this schema, simply reflect on the fact that it could be applied without difficulty to the history of the United States: in the late 19th century, the US participated in the celebration of the community of Germanic nations or races (itself, Great Britain, and Germany) who were at the forefront of civilization; after its intervention in World War I and for decades afterwards, the Germans (and Americans of German origin) become the main enemy. This was the moment of the Grand Alliance with the Soviet Union. However, after the collapse of the Third Reich, the USSR became the main enemy, so that Americans of German (or Japanese) origin were no longer subject to persecution, but Americans suspected of communist sympathies were. At least in the last phase of the Cold War, Washington could make use of the collaboration of China on the one hand and the Islamic “freedom fighters” who fueled the anti-Soviet resistance in Afghanistan on the other, but with the defeat of the Evil Empire, those who represented the new incarnation of Evil were the former allies: the “freedom fighters” (and their sympathizers both on US soil and in every corner of the world) were on their way to Guantanamo. There is a detail that reveals the poverty of Arendt’s schema, which attributes the deportation of the “Volga Germans” during World War II to the obsession with the “objective enemy”: in fact, similar measures had been taken in 1915 by tsarist Russia, when it was an ally of the liberal West. Immediately after Pearl Harbor, F. D. Roosevelt too would behave in a similar way regarding the “objective enemy”, this time represented by American citizens of Japanese origin. Taking the geographical and military situation into consideration, the concerns of the Soviet dictator seem more justified than those of the American

President.

At times Arendt seems to recognize the problematic nature of the category she uses. The first edition of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* denounces the obsession with the “potential enemy”, but over the course of the Second Thirty Years’ War, with the Soviet people threatened by mortal danger, it can hardly be considered an expression of paranoia to be on guard against a potential enemy. Subsequent editions of the work, then, speak of the “objective enemy” instead, so as to accentuate the psychopathological character of a behavior that continues to be exclusively attributed to totalitarian dictators⁷⁸⁴.

But this linguistic adjustment does not change the terms of the problem. Despite her resolute opposition to Nazi Germany and her sympathy with the country of the Third Republic and the Great Revolution, at the outbreak of World War II Arendt was imprisoned in France, in a concentration camp, and suffered this fate ultimately as a “potential enemy” or “objective enemy”. We shall see that this category also works with Churchill’s England or F. D. Roosevelt’s US

Unfortunately, Arendt operates on a purely ideological level, without even considering the problem of a comparative analysis of the policy pursued by the leaders of different countries in situations of acute crisis. We should try to fill this gap. After World War II, Churchill outlined this assessment of the situation in his country on before the war’s immense outbreak: “There were known to be twenty thousand organised 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 prelude of sabotage and murder”⁷⁸⁵. Thus the statesman justified the policy adopted by his government during the conflict, when in England anyone suspected of “sympathizing” with the enemy or its political system could 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”⁷⁸⁶. Those targeted were not responsible for concrete and specific actions, but rather for being “potential” or “objective enemies”.

Protected by the Atlantic and the Pacific, not to mention by its powerful navy, the US should not have felt particularly threatened. But F. D. Roosevelt warned: the enemy was not discouraged by the ocean; it was necessary to note “the lesson of Norway, whose essential seaports 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.⁷⁸⁷

And that was not all: the aggression carried out “by secret spreading of poisonous propaganda by those who seek to destroy unity and promote discord” also had to be confronted. At this point, these tended to be “objective” traitors or enemies who expressed views that were considered opposed to the national interest, and resistance took the form of a task that must be accomplished not only by the army but by the whole country. Both needed to show unyielding 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 calling for cannot be based on a disregard of all the things worth fighting for⁷⁸⁸.

To defeat an omnipresent aggression, which was also manifesting politically, only a total mobilization also involving the political sphere could be effective. From these assumptions unfolded a “well-orchestrated media campaign”⁷⁸⁹: “When will Hitler invade the US?” asked a poster, with images of Nazi paratroopers landing on defenseless American cities, which, a second manifesto alleged, were exposed to even an attack and landing from the sea. Equally serious was the danger that “Hitler’s army is here.” Thus there is at least a third message, warning against the “Fifth Column in U.S.A.”⁷⁹⁰. Calling attention to the gravity of this threat were movies and books that achieved great success, while the committee on “un-American” activities estimated that there were around 480,000 members of organizations that were ready to help the invaders!⁷⁹¹ In the US, as in England, the category of agent and accomplice of the enemy was extended to include anyone who wanted to stop the country from becoming involved in or being dragged into the war⁷⁹². They were accused of

being “the Nazi transmission belt”, the “Trojan horse” of the Third Reich, or to quote F. D. Roosevelt, the “appeaser fifth columnists”. This last expression is particularly significant: a political attitude became synonymous with treason, and those who held it thus become the targets of denunciations, lawsuits, and intimidation; they entered the spotlight to the extent that they were, ultimately, “potential” or “objective” enemies.

An atmosphere of fear and suspicion spread across the country, and was quickly used by the authorities to “increase the FBI’s power”⁷⁹³. The president revealed to the press that pro-German elements had infiltrated “the Army and the Navy” and had organized or attempted to organize sabotage operations in “forty or fifty factories in this country”. Even a level-headed intellectual such as William L. Shirer asked people to prepare, with war already at the gates, to confront “sabotage by thousands of Nazi agents from coast to coast.” Everywhere the work of the enemy was suspected or glimpsed. The fifth column had played a fundamental role in dismantling Belgium and France from within, and now, the argument went, the Nazi “termites” were also operating in the American Republic, which ran the risk of suffering the same fate⁷⁹⁴. “Some attempts”, it seemed, were 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”⁷⁹⁵. It is then unsurprising that “little children sometimes became frightened by scare propaganda”, which was tireless in proclaiming and describing in the most horrible manner the imminent arrival of the Nazi hordes⁷⁹⁶.

When the US officially entered the war, the atmosphere became even more charged. It became filled with obsessive warnings of the presence of spies, against careless talkativeness (“Watch your tongue,” “Silence Means Security”). Even “casual conversations” were silenced; the war posters, displaying the faces of children about to be orphaned because of irresponsible people (gossips), never tired of warning against “sabotage” (another poster announced a new crime, the “misuse of work instruments” and shows “Mr. Toolwrecker”, charged and arrested by a policeman)⁷⁹⁷. Obviously, the real danger was interspersed with a deliberate manipulation of reality. The American historian we are following 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”⁷⁹⁸.

We are seeing the constituent elements of the terror that dominated Russia. Undoubtedly, those phenomena are here presented as monstrously gigantic when analyzed in relation to England and the US, but did ideology, paranoia, or the objective situation play the decisive role? Beyond the changing but incessant civil war, geopolitics must be taken into account. In April 1947, when the Cold War was on the horizon, Stalin, in a conversation with Republican candidate Harold Stassen, pointed out with some envy the extremely favorable situation in the US, which was protected by two oceans and bordered on the north and south by Canada and Mexico, two weak countries that obviously did not represent a threat⁷⁹⁹.

Things were quite different for Soviet Russia. Stalin's "paranoia" may be ridiculed, but we have seen Goebbels confirm the great success of German espionage in France and its total failure in the USSR (see above, p. 43). On the other hand, the first ones to insist on the penetration of the German fifth column in Russia were no less than the enemies of Bolshevism. For Kerensky, as the "capitulation of Brest-Litovsk" and the signing of a "traitorous peace at the border" showed, the protagonists of October 1917 were working in the service of Wilhelm II, by whom they were massively funded and assisted. And again, according to the Menshevik leader, the German secret services had played an important role in the anti-war agitation that had undermined the war effort in the country⁸⁰⁰. In the same way, Churchill argued that "German gold" carried weight in the events that took place Russia⁸⁰¹.

In our time, moving back further, an Israeli historian (from the then-Soviet Union) locates the origins of the course of imperial Germany—which was committed to using any means to weaken neighboring, rival powers—with the untimely demise of Alexander III in 1894, who "died as the result of incorrect medical treatment given him by his team of doctors, among whom Germans predominated", or the 1911 murder of Pietr Stolypin, which took place with the "involvement" of "some high-ranking pro-German Russian officials", or with some of Nicholas II's eccentricities ("his wife was a German princess")⁸⁰². In any case, with regard to the collapse of the tsarist regime, we must not lose sight of "the real German fifth column in the Russian court and army" and thus at the very heights of power. Indeed, "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 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 plan outlined by Brockdorff-Rantzau”⁸⁰³.

Is the situation outlined here convincing, or was it affected by the paranoia usually attributed to Stalin? In any case we can start from an assumption: the defeat of the Second Reich did not eliminate intelligence activity in Russia, though it impaired it for some time, whereas the dissolution of the old regime coincided with the strengthening of the presence of the major Western powers at all levels. Overall, reading any history of the Cold War is sufficient to realize that the country born of the October Revolution was particularly exposed to the danger of not only military invasion, but also infiltration and espionage. In the 1920s, thanks to the collaboration of Russian exiles, England was able to decrypt the coded messages of the Soviet Union, which continued to be the main target of its intelligence services even “in the mid-1930s.” Meanwhile, the Third Reich took power, which in preparing for aggression could rely on the consummate skill of Colonel Reinhard Gehlen, “a master of intelligence, subversion and deception”; later, immediately after Germany’s defeat, Allen Dulles appeared “clairvoyant” for putting the person who “had played a great role in the German attack on Russia in 1941” in the service of the newborn CIA⁸⁰⁴. During the Cold War, in addition to espionage, the activity of Western intelligence services included “sabotage” and even support for insurrectional movements⁸⁰⁵.

More than twenty years after the death of Stalin, the overall picture had not changed. This is stated in an article in a prestigious American newspaper. The author refers with satisfaction to “how a CIA campaign of computer sabotage led [in 1974] to a huge explosion in Siberia—all organized by a highly-educated economist named Gus Weiss—helped the United States win the Cold War”⁸⁰⁶. If we then consider that the practice of sabotage also has a peculiar Russian tradition behind it (see above, p. 89), we can reach a conclusion: in order to understand what happened in the Stalin years, instead of resorting to a single paranoid personality as a *deus ex machina*, we should follow the approach that is suggested by an illustrious witness, who in 1937 Moscow spoke of unquestionable “acts of sabotage” as well as a “‘wrecker’ psychosis” that developed from that reality⁸⁰⁷.

The “paranoia” of the liberal West

If Arendt limits herself to the inherent folly of totalitarianism (of Stalin or Hitler), François Furet goes further: “**Revolutionaries had to have something to hate**”: this applies to the Jacobins, but more so to the Bolsheviks and, in a very special way, to Stalin, who “**felt it necessary to invoke the fight against saboteurs, enemies, imperialists, and their agents in order to support his fantastic goals**”⁸⁰⁸. The French historian speaks of “revolutionaries” in general, but is actually only referring to Russia and France, forgetting to add that, besides the Bolsheviks and the Jacobins (and Rousseau), a similar psychoanalysis has also been applied to the leaders of the Puritan revolution, not to mention the abolitionist “revolution” that ended the institution of slavery first in England and then in the US. And Furet also does not consider the “**paranoid style**” that, according to an eminent American historian, deeply characterizes the history of that country. The belief, also shared by George Washington, in London’s intention to enslave the colonists who had settled across the Atlantic was a central element of the American Revolution. When later, in the late 18th century, sharp contradictions arose within the new leadership group, Jefferson was suspected of being an agent of France, while Hamilton was described as a British agent. A similar dialectic manifested itself some decades later, during the crisis leading to the Civil War, when the two warring sides accused the other of having betrayed the legacy of the Founding Fathers⁸⁰⁹. This is not to mention the fact that, for Nietzsche, a disturbed relationship to reality characterizes the revolutionary tradition as a whole, starting with those “Christian agitators” who were the “fathers of the Church” and, before them, the Jewish prophets.

Was Stalin’s personality characterized by a particularly pronounced sickness? If this was the case, the fascination for him shown by leading figures of the West would be inexplicable. One fact is thought-provoking in any case: Freud, who died in 1939, had considered it appropriate to make a psychoanalytic study not about Stalin, and certainly not about Hitler, but about Wilson, including him among dangerous “fanatics” who were convinced of “having a special and personal relationship with divinity” and as a result considered themselves anointed by providence for the mission to guide and transform the world⁸¹⁰. Of course, a statesman who pushed his country into World War I despite knowing the magnitude of the carnage, who despite being moved by material and geopolitical interests rather than “corporeal” ones celebrated the American intervention as a “holy war, the holiest of all wars” and American soldiers as

“crusaders” of a “transcendent undertaking”⁸¹¹, seems to be at least an unusual leader...

But Furet focuses on a psychopathological reading of the period that began in October 1917, especially focusing on Stalin’s thirty-year rule: didn’t he suspect dangers, traps, and conspiracies everywhere, like a true paranoid? What should we then say about F. D. Roosevelt and his collaborators? While counting on a clearly more favorable political and geopolitical situation, in the months preceding the US intervention in World War II, Roosevelt sounded the alarm about the possibility of a German landing in America, describing anti-interventionism as a synonym for national treason and warning of the industrial “sabotage” caused by the enemy and a fifth column made up of half a million people. This was why Hitler accused the American president of having a sick and “stupid imagination”, the imagination of a “sick brain” man⁸¹². As can be seen, the accusation of paranoia or madness is not new, and it can be cast on the most unexpected characters and directed towards the most diverse subjects.

But another consideration is more important: the two conspiracy theories that perhaps most distinguished the story of the first half of the 20th century prominently featured the Bolsheviks, not as perpetrators, but as victims; these theories were developed and disseminated with the decisive contribution of the United States. In September 1918, Wilson authorized the publication of documents that contained sensational revelations: not only was the October Revolution a German plot, but even after Lenin took power, Trotsky and other Bolshevik leaders were still in the service of imperial Germany; what’s more, the seemingly dramatic internal fracture that took place over Brest-Litovsk was completely staged, in order to conceal the permanent control the German High Command exercised over Soviet Russia. All of this was proven by the so-called Sisson Papers: named after the representative in Russia of the Committee on Public Information, a committee created by Wilson as part of his plans for total mobilization, which included propaganda. They were highlighted by recognized American historians who supporting the alleged authenticity of the documents (later exposed as a blatant forgery); later, they would justify their actions using the pressures placed on them “in the name of wartime necessity”⁸¹³. This is an issue that is echoed well outside the United States. In “Il Grido del Popolo”, Gramsci quips: “The two citizens called Lenin and Trotsky in Russia are two impostors manufactured in German scientific laboratories and who, as ‘machines’, cannot be killed by the gunfire of terrorists” (the allusion is to the

attack on Lenin of 30 August 1918)⁸¹⁴.

Later, a second conspiracy theory to explain the October Revolution appeared; besides the Bolsheviks, this time the Germans were not accused but the Jews. After making a wide impact in the US, the denunciation of Judeo-Bolshevik intrigues, which spread sedition in the world and threatened order and civilization as such, would later play a principal role in the “final solution” (see above, pp. 230-234).

“Immorality” or moral outrage?

If the psychopathological approach is misleading, not much more convincing is the reading of the great historical crisis in Russia in the 20th century, which accuses the Bolsheviks and Stalin in particular of having developed a vision of world that is totally deaf to the reasons for morality and humanity. However, if we begin with the years or decades preceding October 1917, we see that the roles of defendants and accusers can be easily interchanged: it is the leaders of the revolutionary movement who saw the world that tried to topple them as responsible for the crimes they are attributed today. Does communism lead to genocide? In the years of World War I, it was the liberal and bourgeois society they tried to overthrow that was synonymous with genocide. Stalin spoke of the “[terrible slaughter](#)” and the “massive extermination of the vital forces of the people”⁸¹⁵, while Bukharin described it as a “[horrible corpse factory](#)”⁸¹⁶. Rosa Luxemburg’s description is terrible but accurate: on the battlefield, “[mass extermination](#)” and “[genocide](#)” (*Völkermord*) were turned into “[the tiresome and monotonous business of the day](#)”, while in the rearguard an “[atmosphere of ritual murder](#)” was widespread. Karl Liebknecht, too, would call for struggle against “genocide”, actually against the “triumph of genocide”, and condemned the “worship of brutal violence”, the “collapse” of “everything that is noble in the world” and the growing “moral barbarization”. While he pushed to salute the October Revolution, the moral indignation at the unprecedented horror of World War I led Liebknecht to envision in Soviet Russia a power that was not only “solid” but also “tough”, capable of in any case avoiding a repeat of the tragedy and a return to a system denounced even before the war for its lack of “moral scruples”⁸¹⁷.

Finally, we have to quote Trotsky: “the Cainite work of the ‘patriotic’ press” on both sides was “the irrefutable demonstration of the moral decadence of

bourgeois society.” Yes, he could not but speak of “moral decadence” when he saw humanity falling into a “blind and ruthless barbarity”: he was witness to the beginning of a “mad and bloody race” for the most advanced technologies of war; it was a “scientific barbarism”, which uses the great discoveries of mankind “only to destroy the foundations of civilized social life, and to annihilate man.” Everything good that civilization had produced was drowned in the blood and viscera of the trenches: “health, comfort, hygiene, everyday relationships, the bonds of friendship, professional duties, and finally the apparently indestructible rules of morality”⁸¹⁸. Trotsky also uses the term “genocide” with a small variation; in 1934 he warned of the possibility of a new world war, a new “resort to genocide” (*Völkermorden*) looming over the horizon⁸¹⁹. On 31 August 1939 Molotov accused France and England of having rejected the Soviet policy of collective security in the hope of pushing the Third Reich against the Soviet Union, without hesitating to provoke “a grand new slaughter, a new holocaust of nations”⁸²⁰.

This denunciation of the horrors of the war is clearly inspired by moral indignation. In this respect the behavior of a statesman like Theodore Roosevelt is quite different. Between the 19th and 20th centuries, he made a vitalist celebration of war as such, from a viewpoint that in a way aspires to be, as we might use Nietzsche to say, “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 mar the fight; he revels in them, in the toil, the pain, and the danger, as but setting off the triumph”⁸²¹. These are recurring motifs that, in thinly disguised form, continue to reverberate in Churchill, who in reference to the colonial expeditions declares: “War is a game that is played with a smile.” The worsening bloodshed in Europe since August 1914 did not detract from this view: “War is the greatest game in world history. We play for the highest stakes”; war is “the only meaning and purpose of our life”⁸²². Passing from the coarsely vitalist celebration of war to a spiritualist transfiguration, World War I would be welcomed by Max Weber as “great and wonderful”, while Benedetto Croce expected from it a “regeneration of the current social life”⁸²³, as did many other prominent figures of the liberal West at the time. Standing out from these is Herbert Hoover, a notable representative of the American administration and the future US president, who immediately after the signing of the armistice attributed to the conflict that had just concluded a function of “the purification of men” and therefore of preparation for “a new golden age. We were indeed proud

that we had had a part in this rebirth of mankind”⁸²⁴.

Lenin continued to maintain a political and moral condemnation of the war, as well as the political and social system that generated it. The moral pathos that inspired the Leninist analysis of capitalism and especially colonialism is evident. He described the Italian war in Libya, this “typical colonial war, waged by a ‘civilised’ twentieth-century nation”, as follows: we see how “a civilised, constitutional nation [...] ‘civilised’ by bayonet, bullet, noose, fire and rape”, stopping “at no carnage”. Actually, it was “a perfected, civilised blood bath, the massacre of Arabs with the help of the ‘latest’ weapons [...]. By way of ‘retaliation’, about 3,000 Arabs were butchered, whole families were plundered and done to death, with women and children massacred in cold blood”⁸²⁵. The arrival of a more advanced bourgeois republic did not put an end to the horror: “the French ‘republican’ troops [...] in Africa [...] exterminated peoples with equal ferocity”⁸²⁶.

Denunciation of the genocidal practices of the West played a central role especially in the portrait sketched by Lenin in *Notebooks on Imperialism*, which collected material extracted from the liberal-bourgeois literature of the moment. Just one year before the outbreak of the gigantic conflict, 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 was already a reality in the colonies: in Africa the Herero had been “for the most part wiped out” by Germany, which in repressing the “uprising of the Hottentots” also made use of England’s active collaboration. But let us see how the country that led the liberal West behaved in its colonies: “The British exterminated the Tasmanians to the last man. But the Irish are not Tasmanians! They can’t simply be exterminated.” Despite being subjected to a ruthless domination and repression, in South Africa blacks were multiplying alarmingly: “Many settlers ositively want an uprising in order to check the dangerous growth of the Kaffir population and deprive it of its rights and landownership”⁸²⁷. Cold and written with a certain detachment, these descriptions are loaded with moral indignation when they pass from the bourgeois historians to Lenin, who notes: behold the “results of colonial wars”; because of the expropriation and annihilation of the Herero, the newcomers could “rob the land and become landowners”⁸²⁸.

No less full of moral indignation was Stalin’s reading of colonialism. However,

Theodore Roosevelt seemed to be responding in advance to these allegations that pointed out practices of slavery and genocide already in full swing 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 were moved by the fate of the colonial peoples should be considered worse than “the professional criminal class”⁸²⁹. The same could be said of General Bugeaud, who Tocqueville considered a model of “incomparable energy and vigour” when he was directing “the only kind of war that is feasible in Africa”⁸³⁰.

Is communism today synonymous with a state that is total and totalitarian? In the years of World War I, those who embodied those qualities were the capitalist countries, including those of liberal orientation as well. Lenin stressed the fact that on the front, “fraternisation” was prevented using “the hateful discipline of the barrack prisons”, and even positions in the rear had become “military convict prisons”⁸³¹. Civil society was subjected to the same discipline and iron fist; in this respect the Russian revolutionary emphasized the topicality of the analysis done some decades earlier by Engels, according to whom the growing 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”⁸³². Bukharin, in turn, while denouncing the “centralization of a barracks” and the “iron heel of the militaristic state”, saw on the horizon a “New Leviathan, beside which the fantasy of Thomas Hobbes looks like a child’s toy”⁸³³.

This theme is also found in Stalin, for whom the war ended up mutilating or destroying “democracy” even where it seemed most rooted: in contrast to Russia, in England the “national oppression” did not generally assume “the form of pogroms and massacres”; it was “milder, less inhuman”; but with the outbreak of hostilities the situation worsened dramatically, as both the Irish and the Hindus had personally experienced⁸³⁴. The Western democracies also tended not to differentiate themselves from countries characterized by a fierce and “inhuman” autocracy. This language could be opposed to the use of “‘manly’ and ‘masterful,’ two of the most common words in [Theodore] Roosevelt’s prose”⁸³⁵, prose that refers to an attitude that is, again, “beyond good and evil” and to a cult of willpower devoid of moral boundaries.

As we can see, the commonplace preference to contrast the robust moral sense of the liberal-bourgeois world with the unscrupulous Machiavellianism of the

communist movement does not withstand historical analysis. Immediately after the October Revolution, which he greeted favorably, the young Lukács saw in the “historical movement” of “socialism” a radical reckoning with “*Realpolitik*”⁸³⁶; for Benedetto Croce, however, the hateful and ridiculous figure of the “political moralist” was embodied in the Bolsheviks, in the “Russian revolutionaries”. They “have opened a grand tribunal calling all people to an examination, in the name of morality, of their war aims, in order to review them, admitting the honest and excluding the dishonest; thus, proceeding in a moralistic way, they have made public their previous diplomatic treaties”, classified as immoral by the fact that they planned for war in order to obtain territorial gains. But, objects the liberal philosopher, it is absurd “to pass moral judgment on the States” and “to treat politics as moral, when politics (as is obvious) is political, exactly political and nothing but political; [...] their morality consists quite simply of good politics.” Therefore, it makes no sense to argue by “attributing rights to those who do not know how to win them or are incapable of defending them, and placing limits and duties on those who by their own conviction, and shedding their own blood, do not correctly recognize other limits and duties apart from those that their own conviction and strength assign and impose”⁸³⁷. We could say that Stalin made an ideal response to Croce on March 10, 1939, at the time of the dismemberment and the tragedy of Czechoslovakia, thanks to Munich and the complicity of the West who, refusing to condemn and contain the willpower and expansionist vitality of the Third Reich, contrived to instead direct them further eastward: “[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](#)”⁸³⁸.

But let us focus on World War I. It is worth rereading what Vilfredo Pareto wrote in 1920: before the conflagration, “*workers and, especially, socialists*” considered themselves ready to stop it with the general strike or even more radical means. “*Such nice speeches did nothing to stop the outbreak of World War I.*” The general strike was not seen; on the contrary, socialists approved war credits in different parliaments, or were not particularly opposed to them, such that “the precept of the master [Marx]: ‘Proletarians of the world, unite!’ was then implicitly transformed into: “*Proletarians of all countries, kill one another*”⁸³⁹. To Pareto, at least at the time a typical representative of liberal-bourgeois world, who did not hide his cynicism and his satisfaction at the bloody defeat of the socialist internationalism moment, Stalin seemed to have had an early response; his words, in contrast, sound full of moral indignation and at the

same time of hope (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!](#)"⁸⁴⁰

In the new situation created in Russia (and in the world) it was possible to rekindle the struggle to end the slaughter and to promote "mass fraternization on the battle fronts" and "[new ties of fraternity among the peoples](#)"⁸⁴¹. 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](#)", to which the provisional government was however opposed, calling for the "[offensive](#)" and for new bloodbaths⁸⁴², threatening with court-martials those "culprits" of precisely this "[fraternization](#)"⁸⁴³.

It is true that in the clandestine period the Bolshevik Party and Stalin had led the struggle against autocracy through quite violent methods (robbing banks and armored cars), and this is where the historians who are determined to describe Stalin as a gangster from youth stop. What can we say about this approach? Let us make a comparison with Churchill, five years older than Stalin. The future English statesman began his career fighting and favorably describing the wars of the British Empire, including the inglorious: no prisoners were taken in Sudan, and in South Africa the conquerors erected concentration camps destined to become a sad model for the future. From these experiences Churchill began to emerge as a political leader, arduously fighting for the defense of the "British race" and the white race in general. To achieve this result it was not enough to tighten control over the colonial peoples; it was also necessary to intervene in the metropolis, to proceed with the forced sterilization of the "feeble-minded", the misfits, the potential repeat offenders; in turn, the "lazy bums" needed to be imprisoned in labor camps. This was the only appropriate way to deal with "a national and racial danger that is impossible to exaggerate." The author who cites these fragments comments: as Home Secretary, in 1911 Churchill was the instigator of "draconian" measures that "would have conferred an almost

unlimited personal power over the lives of individuals”⁸⁴⁴. Were Churchill’s beginnings really more edifying than Stalin’s? A year later, while the second dreamed of the brotherhood of the soldiers and the peoples from the prison in which he was detained by the Tsarist regime—an ally of England—the first was dedicated to fight to the finish a war that for him was intended to reinforce the hegemony of the Empire and the “British race”.

In conclusion, for a historian who cuts the story short in October 1917, it would be quite difficult to see the Bolshevik Party and Stalin as people who ignore moral reasoning; in fact, this would be more applicable to the other side of the conflict.

Reductio ad Hitler and its variations

The psychopathological and moral approach is shown to be equally inconclusive by the fact that the tragedy in Russia had been anticipated decades or centuries in advance by quite different characters: it could hardly be explained by the psychological abnormality or moral turpitude of particular individuals.

Conversely, like the first approach, the second could also be used to point an accusing finger at the leaders of the liberal West. We can begin with the support provided, especially by Britain, for the attempted coup of Kornilov and later of the Whites, at a time when they were still encouraging a bloody manhunt of the Jews, their hands stained with blood, in a way anticipating the “final solution”. Despite imposing Russia’s participation in what the communists described as the “genocide” of World War I, the West closed its eyes before other monstrous crimes

After the military victory it came time to divide the colonial spoils. To England was given Iraq, which however rebelled in 1920. This is how one of the leading countries of the West dealt with the situation: British troops launched “vicious reprisals”, “burning down villages and engaging in other actions that today we would regard as overly punitive if not downright barbaric.” They were certainly not restrained by Churchill, who actually invited the air force to give the “recalcitrant natives” a severe lesson, using “experimental work” based on “gas bombs, especially mustard gas”⁸⁴⁵. In this case we are reminded not of the “final solution” but rather fascist Italy’s colonial war against Ethiopia, which was carried out in a particularly barbaric way, with weapons banned by international conventions: Churchill appears here as the precursor of Mussolini. On the other hand, when safeguarding or expanding the Empire, the English statesman’s

accelerated methods were constant: in 1942, independence demonstrations in India were suppressed “using extreme measures, such as using airplanes to strafe crowds of protesters”⁸⁴⁶; in the following two years, Churchill would stubbornly deny and ignore the hunger that decimated the population of Bengal. Finally, continuing in the colonial context, how much did the “final solution of our Indian problem” in Canada, part of the British Commonwealth until 1931, cast a shadow on as prominent a member of the British political class as Churchill? He, as prime minister from 1951 to 1955, should be considered in every way responsible for the genocidal practices being employed by the London government in its attempt to crush the Mau Mau revolt.

But let us return to the interwar period in Europe. After Hitler came to power, the London government attempted to use all means to divert the expansionist fury of the Third Reich to the east and primarily to the Soviet Union. In this respect, two Canadian historians have reached 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”⁸⁴⁷.

And yet, Britain failed to avoid a confrontation with Nazi Germany, and it confronted it by first turning to the indiscriminate and terrorist bombing of German cities, with the consequent massacre of the civilian population: this led two American historians to a comparison with the treatment inflicted by the Nazis on the Jewish people. The people trying to contain it were the Soviet leadership group, as seen in Dimitrov’s journal entry 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 they need is for some Germans to appear who are capable of salvaging what could still be salvaged for the survival of the German people. Organize the municipality [local urban council], reestablish the economy, etc., on the German territory taken and occupied by the Red Army. Establish local government agencies out of which would eventually develop a German government.⁸⁴⁸

The hell unleashed by the British air force appears even more hateful due to the fact that, two weeks after the outbreak of war, 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 purposes of mere terrorism](#)”⁸⁴⁹. In fact, plans for indiscriminate bombing had begun to take shape during World War I: as the war grew longer without reaching its conclusion, Churchill “[had planned a thousand-bomber attack on Berlin, for 1919.](#)” These plans continued to be developed after the victory⁸⁵⁰. It could be said, in imitation of the rapid manner of arguing of the ideologues fashionable today, that the country that led the West was already scheduling a new “genocide” while it was still carrying out the one started in 1914. In any case, England would be the perpetrator of the systematic destruction inflicted on German cities at the end of World War II (consider Dresden, in particular), a destruction scheduled and carried out with the declared aim of not leaving any escape routes for the civilian population, targeted and engulfed by flames, their escape attempts blocked by delayed-fuse bombs, and often strafed from above.

These practices are perhaps even more sinister if we consider Churchill’s statements in April 1941: “[There are less than seventy million malignant Huns – some of whom are curable and others killable](#)”. If it was not outright genocide, as Nolte considers it, it is in any case clear that here he was thinking of massively decimating the German population⁸⁵¹. It is within 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](#)”⁸⁵². The British prime minister was no less ruthless when he was dividing up London’s zone of influence and systematically eliminating partisan forces considered hostile or suspicious. The orders transmitted to the English expeditionary force in Greece are quite revealing: “Do not hesitate to act as if you found yourself in a conquered city in which a local revolt had been triggered”. And: “Certain things should not be left half finished”⁸⁵³.

We now come to the Cold War. Some time ago *The Guardian* revealed that between 1946 and 1948 Great Britain established camps in Germany meant to imprison communists or elements suspected of sympathy for communism, together with alleged Soviet spies: “[The pictures show men who had suffered months of starvation, sleep deprivation, beatings and extreme cold \[...\]. A few were starved or beaten to death.](#)” “[Dozens of women were also detained and](#)

[tortured.](#)” Tools inherited from the Gestapo were used to carry out the torture; indeed, the camps were “[reminiscent of the German concentration camps](#)”⁸⁵⁴. As we can see, the comparison constantly arises between the practices carried out by Great Britain in the 20th century and the practices preferred by the Third Reich.

We obtain results that are not too different when we turn to the United States. In this case the hypocrisy which, as we have seen, characterized Chamberlain, reached its zenith; Immediately after the outbreak of World War II, Franklin D. Roosevelt would condemn aerial bombardment of civilian populations as contrary to the feelings of “every civilized man and woman” and contrary to the “conscience of humanity”, as well as an expression of “[inhuman barbarism](#)”⁸⁵⁵. Subsequently, the US war machine would demonstrate precisely this “inhuman barbarism” in an even more excessive form, proceeding with the systematic destruction of Japanese cities, and actively participating in the similar operation being carried out against German cities. The bombings suffered by Italy, which targeted civilians and also the morale of the country, should not be underestimated either. F. D. Roosevelt himself would demonstrate this: “[we will give the Italians a taste of some real bombing and I am quite sure they will never stand up under that kind of pressure](#)”⁸⁵⁶.

The campaign of terrorist bombings culminated under the Truman administration, which used nuclear weapons against a country already on its knees. A particularly horrifying detail must be added: it has been asserted that the annihilation of the civilian populations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was aimed, more than at Japan itself, already close to capitulation, at the Soviet Union, which was thus sent a severe warning⁸⁵⁷. Hence, we are confronted with two acts of terrorism on the very largest scale, and oblique ones at that: tens of thousands of unarmed civilians of the old enemy were massacred (in fact, the old enemy who was preparing to become an ally) in order to terrorize the ally, already designated as the new enemy and as the next target of the newly tested genocidal practices!

But the war in Asia lends itself to further consideration. In the United States, it has been widely accepted that the attack on Pearl Harbor was planned in advance (in fact, it was provoked by an oil embargo that left Japan few alternatives). But once the attack occurred, the war was led by Washington under a banner of moral indignation that was certainly hypocritical, in light of what we now know, but just as much criminal. It was not only the destruction of cities. Consider the

mutilation of corpses and even the mutilation of dying enemies for the purpose of obtaining trophies and souvenirs of the battle, often shown off with calmness and pride. The ideology that preceded these practices is especially significant: the Japanese were described as “sub-humans”, turning to a category that was central in Nazi rhetoric⁸⁵⁸. And we are brought back to this rhetoric when we see F. D. Roosevelt entertain the idea of “castration” to be inflicted on the Germans. They, with the war finished, were locked in concentration camps where, by pure sadism or pure vindictiveness, they were forced to suffer hunger, thirst, privations, and humiliations of every kind, while the specter of hunger wandered across the defeated nation.

To continue with the statesman who is considered, above all others, the champion of freedom: Roosevelt did not change the policy traditionally followed by Washington in Latin America, and in 1937, thanks to the National Guard directed by the US, a bloodthirsty dictator, Anastasio Somoza, came to power in Nicaragua⁸⁵⁹. In the American interior, cities built during the F. D. Roosevelt administration continued to explicitly exclude African Americans; furthermore, “housing the government built or subsidized for defense workers during World War II was deliberately more segregated even than the housing in surrounding communities.” Moreover, “the armed forces also maintained rigid segregation throughout the war.” And, despite pressure from sectors of the Republican Party, “the president never pushed for an anti-lynching bill”⁸⁶⁰, which continued to occur in the south as a spectacle for women, children, and men, who enjoyed the sight of the most sadistic humiliations and torture inflicted on the victim, a torture that was slow, prolonged for as long as possible, interminable.

Finally, after celebrating the United States in January 1941 as the country that progressed unceasingly and peacefully, “without the concentration camp”⁸⁶¹, immediately following the outbreak of war F. D. Roosevelt used this total institution to deprive the Japanese-American community of their freedom, without distinction of age or sex.

Nowadays it is almost obvious to compare Stalin with Hitler, but it may be interesting to read the account given by a German author of the strategic bombing of Germany, especially of the flames that devoured Dresden and its inhabitants:

The recovery of the corpses corresponded to the killing procedure. The exterminated did not receive an individual grave or an individual death,

because they did not have a right to live [...]. The one thousand children under ten years of age were not bombed as punishment. Bomber Harris [director of the air campaign on German cities] did not presume they were in any way guilty. Churchill merely claimed that they could not assert any rights from him. In World War I, they would have had such rights, but not in World War II. Hitler, Churchill, and Roosevelt took the rights from them⁸⁶².

The comparison of these three personalities is certainly somewhat forced with a polemic spirit, which appeared to reproduce a state of mind that was widespread in Germany in the immediate postwar period, a Germany destroyed, isolated by the ban on fraternization, and brought to the threshold of famine by the liberal West. A conversation has reached us today which took place between two desperate German citizens in the American zone:

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”⁸⁶³.

If the first of the two previously cited texts proceeds with a partial equalization of Hitler, Churchill and F. D. Roosevelt, the second fully assimilates them. The ideology dominant today assimilates Stalin and Hitler, but in doing so it is certainly as rash as the two German citizens exasperated by hunger and humiliation: “there is no difference”!

Tragic conflicts and moral dilemmas

Even in the case that we want to concentrate on the strictly moral dimension, the comparison between the leaders of the anti-fascist Great Alliance is certainly not lacking in grey areas. But how, then, do we explain the current Manichean comparison? Let us return to the age-old process behind the catastrophe that broke out with the collapse of the tsarist autocracy. Unfortunately, at the time of historical reconstruction, the long-term perspective dissolves like magic when it comes to formulating moral judgment: everything is reduced to the demonization of the period beginning with October 1917, and of Stalin in particular. Is any responsibility borne by those who for so long supported a regime characterized by social relations so violent and so violently dehumanizing as to arouse in such different personalities (Maistre, Marx, Witte) the premonition of catastrophe? Is

there nothing with which to reproach those who unleashed World War I and who, in the West, in order to force Russia to participate until the end, did not hesitate to arm and support even the fiercest reactionary gangs? If “Stalinism”, as one of the authors of *The Black Book of Communism* maintains, began to take shape in 1914, why are those who sit on the bench of the accused not the ones responsible for the bloodshed, but only those who tried to prevent it or hasten its end?

At least with regard to the genesis and development of World War II, the problematic nature of the moral judgment that should be formulated of the Western liberal statesmen has not escaped the most attentive authors. We have seen two Canadian historians assign the English supporters of the politics of appeasement—in fact of *diversion from Nazi expansionism*—responsibility “for the tragedy of World War II, including the Holocaust.”

Then the problem is the way the war, once it had broken out, was conducted by the liberal West. Of course, in this case the dominant ideology manages quite well. A successful historian and journalist, whose articles also appear in the *New York Times*, has so few doubts “about the wisdom or morality” of using the atomic bomb against Japan, as to assert that “to decline to use the super-bomb would have been illogical, indeed irresponsible.” Of course, it resulted in a slaughter of innocent civilians, but “those who died in Hiroshima and Nagasaki were the victims not so much of Anglo—American technology as of a paralysed system of government made possible by an evil ideology which had expelled not only absolute moral values but reason itself”⁸⁶⁴. These quiet certainties rest on a simple assumption: responsibility for a terrible action does not necessarily lie with the perpetrator of that action. The leaders of the USSR have argued in a similar way for a long time: they obviously recognized the horror that had occurred at crucial moments in the country’s history, but the responsibility for it was attributed to the “imperialist siege” and the aggressive policy of the major capitalist powers. It should be noted, however, that the journalist-historian hosted and feted by the most authoritative bodies of reporting enforces his discretion only for the liberal, Anglo-Saxon West. However, to apply a criterion only to oneself and one’s own side is the very definition of theoretical dogmatism, and of moral hypocrisy.

Luckily, in Dresden, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki it is possible to hear less simplistic voices. A famous American philosopher, Michael Walzer, notes that for the already “victorious” Americans to use the atomic bomb and “kill and

terrorize civilians”, without even attempting real negotiation with the Japanese, was “a double crime”. And Walzer reaches a similar conclusion regarding the destruction of Dresden and other German and Japanese cities, which took place “when the war was virtually won”⁸⁶⁵. The problem arises differently in the years that seemed to witness the triumph of the Third Reich, when Britain began its campaign of strategic bombing, which in Germany hit the civilian population systematically and ruthlessly. It was a tragic moment, and the British rulers found themselves facing a terrible moral dilemma that can be expressed 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 in order to uphold the moral law, but they cannot sacrifice their countrymen. Faced with some ultimate horror, their options’ exhausted, they will do what they must to save their own people.⁸⁶⁶

The danger of the Third Reich’s triumph, of “evil objectified in the world”, brought about a “supreme emergency”, a state of “necessity”; we must realize that “necessity knows no rules”. Of course, 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 argues in a similar way when, moved by the horror of the carnage of World War I, he meditated on his revolutionary commitment. Emphasizing the inevitability of “guilt” and making a call for “seriousness”, for “consciousness”, and for the “sense of [moral] responsibility”, he exclaims, paraphrasing Hebbel: “Even if God had placed sin between me and the deed enjoined upon me – who am I to be able to escape it?”⁸⁶⁷. With the same mindset, the Hungarian philosopher would also face the years of Stalin’s terror, when the threat of the Third Reich was increasingly evident.

We can now turn our gaze to the Soviet Union. It is worth noting that the thesis formulated at the time by Toynbee, according to which Stalingrad was made possible by the path Stalin’s USSR took “from 1928 to 1941”⁸⁶⁸, is now being confirmed by not a few historians and researchers who are experts in military strategy: it is quite likely that, without the abandonment of the NEP, the collectivization of agriculture (stabilizing the flow of food from the countryside

to the city and the front), and the industrialization at forced march (the development of the war industry and the emergence of new industrial centers in eastern regions, at a safe distance from the invading army), it would have been impossible to victoriously confront the Nazi aggression: “Soviet Russia’s unequalled and uncontested contribution to the defeat of Nazi Germany was closely bound up with Stalin’s willful Second Revolution”⁸⁶⁹. Moreover, according to Churchill even the trial of Tukhachevsky, as well as the Great Terror as a whole, played a positive and quite remarkable role in the defeat of Operation Barbarossa. Do we then have to justify the concentration camps, as a necessity that would have avoided “a horror without end” for the Soviet people and all humanity?

Walzer correctly subjected this principle to severe restrictions: it can be considered valid only if, in addition to being “unusual and horrifying”, the danger is also “imminent”⁸⁷⁰. It could be said that at least the second requirement was absent in the Soviet Union: Stalin began the forced collectivization of agriculture and the industrialization at forced march—which eventually led to a terrible expansion of the concentration camps—when the danger of war was still remote and Hitler had not even seized power. It could however be replied that Britain also planned to build a fleet of aircraft in preparation for future strategic bombing at least two decades before the appearance of the “supreme emergency”. In fact, this plan began to take shape during World War I and was inspired by a race for hegemony going back to at least the late 19th century.

The picture presented by the land of the October Revolution is quite different. Widespread in Europe, the analysis conducted 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”⁸⁷¹) was taken well into account by Stalin, who warned of the urgency of the task of correcting the backwardness shown by Russia during World War I. With respect to the eastern front, Wilhelm II had repeatedly read the conflict as a racial war in which the very “existence” of the peoples in the struggle was at stake, “whether the Germanic race is to be or not to be in Europe”. It was a confrontation that precluded any mutual reconciliation or recognition: peace “is not at all possible between Slavs and Germans.” Starting with Brest-Litovsk in particular, voices had emerged in Wilhelm’s Reich that looked to the east to solve the problem of living space, and that prepared for an alliance with Britain to carry out the dismemberment of Russia and “set the stage for Germany’s world leadership, with a grandiose continental

policy”⁸⁷². Some years later, in *Mein Kampf*, Hitler announced with perfect clarity his program of building a continental German Empire, which would be built firstly on the ruins of the Soviet Union. It is not difficult to identify the line that led from Brest-Litovsk to Operation Barbarossa, and this is sufficient to explain Stalin’s concerns. In any case, the category of imminent danger is anything but univocal: there is no fixed temporal scale by which to measure it; it is an imminent danger if, to be addressed properly, it does not allow delays. If apart from the temporal sense we understand “imminence” in a spatial sense, clearly it was the Soviet Union that was exposed to a more “imminent” danger. Finally: while the systematic killing of civilians by bombing *is a crime in itself*, the collectivization of agriculture and the industrialization by forced march *ended up* leading to a series of crimes.

This is proof of the dogmatism and hypocrisy of those who only wonder about the moral dilemmas of the Anglo-Saxon statesmen. On the other hand, even if we agree with Walzer that in facing the “supreme emergency” a statesman must knowingly assume “the weight of the crime here and now”, it becomes difficult to go from the general to the particular.

When we read of each horrific episode to which every Gulag prisoner was victim, unable to understand the origin of or reason for the horror that crushed him, we are led to exclaim with Petrarca: “Povera et nuda vai filosofia” (*Rime*, VII, 10)*. But a similar consideration is also applicable for the victims of strategic bombing. Could the “supreme emergency” really justify what is recounted in the chronicles? “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 they hurried to their death; some even took their own lives or threw themselves into the flames”.⁸⁷³.

Already criminal at the time when the Third Reich’s defeat was in sight, were these actions justifiable because of a supreme emergency? Again, the difficulty

of moving from the general to the specific becomes evident.

The Soviet Katyn and the American and South Korean “Katyn”

Unlike the collectivization of agriculture and the industrialization at forced march, the massacre of the Polish officers, decided by the Soviet leadership group and executed in Katyn in March-April 1940, was itself a crime. The confrontation with Finland was still very present: after an attempt to reach an agreed exchange of territories, undertaken by Stalin in order to confer minimal territorial depth to the defense of Leningrad (central after an epic resistance to Nazi aggression), the war now seemed expanded and generalized. How would the Polish officers captured by the Soviet Union react to that eventuality following the dismemberment of Poland? Moscow had tried in vain to get them to drop their fiercely anti-Soviet posture, a holdover of the conflict that began with the collapse of the Tsarist Empire, which therefore tended to assume the characteristics of a brutal civil war. The situation had become quite difficult: there was the lurking threat that the USSR as such would be engulfed by war, and there were plenty of Western circles thinking about an overthrow of the Stalin regime. It was these “security issues” which precipitated the “horrible decision” of which Stalin later “**bitterly regretted the subsequent embarrassment and complications**”⁸⁷⁴. That is, the moral dilemmas that Walzer called attention to were also not absent in the case of the Katyn executions. However, it would be wrong to invoke the “supreme emergency” in this case too, further widening a criterion which is already running the risk of being too broad.

Although unjustifiable, the crime we are now dealing with does not refer to the peculiar characteristics of the personality of Stalin or of the regime he led. Consider the crime committed by the US General Patton when, after landing in Sicily, he ordered the execution of Italian soldiers who surrendered after stiff resistance⁸⁷⁵. If here, too, was an ignominy of smaller dimensions, we must keep in mind that what caused it was not a real concern for the safety of the country, but rather the spirit of revenge or perhaps racial contempt as well. That is, in this case it was an offense because of its objectionable motives.

If we want to find a real analogy for Katyn, we have to refer to other tragedies and other horrors. Ten years after the Soviet Katyn, there occurred what could be defined as the American and South Korean “Katyn”. It was during the Korean War. From the north, which had been savagely bombed, a large mass of refugees had burst into 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 there were North Korean infiltrators among them, although after investigating one of the perhaps most documented cases (the deaths that occurred at No Gun Ri), “[no evidence emerged of enemy infiltrators](#)”⁸⁷⁶. This was not a matter of the orders of a lone but prominent general or marshal, as with Patton, but rather the policy promulgated by the highest military (and political) authorities of the US. And this fact reminds us precisely of Katyn, especially because in both cases security was at stake.

To ensure it, the US and its allies did not only kill the fugitives. The liquidation of a potential fifth column was also considered necessary. For example, “in the city of Taejon, in July 1950, the police ordered 1,700 Koreans accused of being Communists to dig their own graves before being executed.”

A witness reported:

One Sunday morning, at dawn, in the seemingly deserted city of Chochiwon, I saw a procession of men and women, tied together, their hands behind their backs, beaten and battered, as they walked from the police station to the trucks that they boarded. They were later executed and abandoned without burial, one or two miles further⁸⁷⁷.

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.](#)

Even “[women and children](#)”⁸⁷⁸ were the victims of “[summary executions](#)”: it seems that in these cases neither they nor the families of suspected communists were able to escape their fate. The obsession with security had to do not only with the rear, but also with the towns that were just conquered or reconquered. This is what happened 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 were the victims of the two practices, the killing of fugitives and the liquidation of suspected communists? In fact, the extent of “[what the victim’s families call Korea’s killing fields](#)” has not been fully measured. For now we can do with a provisional account: “Investigators have since identified 1,222 probable instances of mass killings [...]. The cases include 215 incidents in which survivors say U.S. warplanes and ground troops killed unarmed refugees”⁸⁷⁹.

The American and South Korea “Katyn” does not appear to have been of smaller proportions than the Soviet one, and in any case reveals an additional indifference (in a war fought thousands of kilometers from their country, the leaders in Washington would not have been able to appeal to a “supreme emergency” in the slightest). But this is not about establishing a hierarchy between two unjustifiable crimes, it is about noting the inadequacy of the moral-Manichean approach to understanding Stalin and the country he led.

Inevitability and complexity of moral judgment

While it is on the one hand inevitable, moral judgment would be superficial and hypocritical if it were formulated through abstraction from the historical context. Hence its complexity and problemat�city. It is necessary to consider and unravel the knot of objective circumstances and subjective responsibilities, and with respect to the latter we must distinguish between responsibilities attended to by a leadership group as a whole and those that call upon individuals. Regarding the leadership group of the USSR, it came to power in a period in which, in the words of a Christian witness who supported the change that occurred in October 1917, “[pity has been killed by the omnipresence of death](#)”⁸⁸⁰, and it was forced to face a very lengthy state of emergency, in a situation characterized—again taking up the analysis of one of the authors of *The Black Book of Communism*—by an “unprecedented brutalization”, widespread and “with no possible comparison with anything Western society has known”. That is, if the protagonists of the 20th century have been forced to confront the devastating conflicts and moral dilemmas that characterized the Second Thirty Years’ War, Stalin also had to be measured with the conflicts and the moral dilemmas of Russian history and the Second Time of Troubles. Arguably, the shadow of the “supreme emergency” dominated the thirty years when he exercised power.

Nevertheless, we must not lose sight of the fact that what seriously hampered or made the return from a state of emergency to normal conditions impossible was

not only the objective conditions. Messianism also contributed, of course greatly stimulated by the horror of World War I, and yet intrinsic to a vision that expects the dissolution of the market, of money, of the state, of the legal order. Disappointment or outrage at the absence of all of these further stimulated the conflict, a conflict that cannot be regulated by purely “formal” legal rules, to the extent that they themselves are supposed to disappear. Then there came an increase of violence that cannot be justified by appealing to the state of emergency or the “supreme emergency”. In this sense, moral judgment coincides with political judgment.

This also applies to the liberal West. Speaking of the person who recorded the strategic bombings against Germany,

As a young pilot, Harris had practiced civilian bombing against rebelling Indians. His shock psychology, as well, was originally tested as a culture shock. Primitive tribes in thatched huts who were confronted with the weapons arsenal of the industrial empire threw themselves down, dazzled⁸⁸¹.

On the other hand, it was Churchill in particular who promoted this kind of war, whom we have seen suggest attacking the “recalcitrant natives” of Iraq with bombardments of “gas bombs, especially mustard gas”, and compared the Germans to “malignant Huns”. We are also aware of the importance of racial ideology in the US’s war against Japan (see above, p. 292), which not incidentally later suffered the atomic bomb. Again there came an increase of violence that cannot be justified by the “supreme emergency”, but was rooted in the colonial ideology shared by the liberal West and Germany. If the Third Reich likened the “indigenous” of Eastern Europe to redskins to be decimated and blacks to be enslaved, England and the United States ended up treating the Germans and Japanese as if they were the colonial peoples, in need of a lesson in obedience.

Stalin, Peter the Great and the “new Lincoln”

Referring to the role he played during the Second Time of Troubles, not a few researchers, taking up a recurring motif that we have seen in Churchill, have compared Stalin with Peter the Great⁸⁸². The objection that is raised in this regard (“Peter, unlike Stalin, looked to the West and sought to open up his state to it”⁸⁸³) is not convincing to me. The condemnation of the “Asiatic

instructions”, “Asiatically barbarous steps”, and “[Asiatically aggressive tactics](#)” of those who were in charge of the government and the bourgeoisie of tsarist Russia was an essential part of Stalin’s revolutionary propaganda⁸⁸⁴. At least until October 1917, Stalin had no doubt that his country was backward in every way compared to the Western democracies, where the bloody anti-Jewish pogroms typical of a “semi-Asiatic country” did not occur (see above, p. 242). After winning power, Stalin not only insisted on the need to assimilate of Western technology, but also stated that, if they really wanted to live up to the “foundations of Leninism,” the Bolshevik cadres needed to know how to combine “Russian revolutionary sweep” with “[American efficiency](#)”. In 1932, again referring to the United States, he expressed a positive assessment of “the habits prevailing in its industry, the practices existing in productive processes”: these “[have an element of democracy about them](#)”⁸⁸⁵.

The reference to Peter the Great seems more convincing insofar as, in explaining the history of Soviet Russia, it explicitly referred to Lenin (since May 1918) and especially Stalin, who at times seemed to assume the figure of the great tsar as a model⁸⁸⁶. Trotsky himself, despite 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 work fulfilled by Peter I and his colleagues in relation to the old Muscovy, only on a larger scale and at a swifter tempo](#)”⁸⁸⁷. It is also interesting to note that, at the end of his trip to the Soviet Union, in 1927 a great philosopher as Benjamin noted with great interest the thesis of some “literati [...] who see in Bolshevism the crowning of the work of Peter the Great”⁸⁸⁸. Finally, we can go back and remember one of Marx’s predictions: after mentioning the violent social upheavals caused by the century-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 that sham and show introduced by Peter the Great](#)”⁸⁸⁹.

However, while it may partly serve to illuminate the relationship between the history of Russia and the Second Time of Troubles, the comparison in question ignores the Second Thirty Years’ War and Stalin’s extraordinary influence at the global level. His 1924 condemnation of the “[crying incongruity](#)” between nations, theorized and imposed by imperialism, and his exhortation to tear down “[the wall between whites and blacks](#)”, peoples considered “[civilised](#)” and peoples excluded from this dignity (see above, p. 235); his approval of a “[profoundly internationalistic](#)” Constitution—as Stalin emphasized while

presenting it—based on “[the proposition that all nations and races have equal rights](#)” regardless of “[colour](#)”, language, or degree of economic and military development of any one of them⁸⁹⁰: all of this could not but profoundly echo not only in the colonies but also in the colonial peoples in the heart of the West itself.

In the southern United States, where the regime of white supremacy was still in force, a new air was breathed: people looked to the Soviet Union with hope and to Stalin as the “[new Lincoln](#)”, a Lincoln who this time would put a real and definitive end to black slavery, oppression, degradation, humiliation, violence, and the lynchings they continued to suffer⁸⁹¹.

While it was advancing toward autocracy, Stalin’s USSR strongly influenced the struggle of African Americans (and colonial peoples) against racial despotism. The southern United States was witnessing a new and disturbing phenomenon from the point of view of the dominant caste: the growing “[impudence](#)” of young blacks. They were beginning, thanks to the Communists, to truly gain what power had stubbornly denied them: a culture beyond the basic instruction traditionally imparted on all who were intended to perform semi-servile work for the master race. Now, in the schools organized by the Communist Party in the northern US or in the schools of Moscow in Stalin’s USSR, blacks studied economics, politics, world history; they took up these disciplines to understand the reasons for the harsh fate reserved for them in a country that considered itself the champion of liberty. In those attending such schools, a profound change occurred: the “[impudence](#)” for which the white supremacist regime reproached them was actually self-esteem, hitherto prohibited and trampled on. A black woman, a delegate to the Women’s International Congress against War and Fascism, in Paris in 1934 was extremely impressed by the relations of equality and fraternity, despite differences of language and race, established between the participants in this communist-promoted initiative: “[It was heaven on earth](#)”. Those who came to Moscow, observes a contemporary American historian, “[experienced a sense of freedom that was unheard of in the South](#)”. A black man fell in love with a white Soviet woman and married her, but could not go home with her at his side, knowing the fate that awaited them in the south to anyone stained with the crime of miscegenation and racial bastardization⁸⁹².

The hopes that African Americans placed in the “new Lincoln” were not as naive as they might seem. Let us reflect on the times and modalities that characterized the end of the white supremacist regime. In December 1952, the

US Attorney General sent an eloquent letter to the Supreme Court, which had convened to discuss the issue 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 faith.” Washington, observes the American historian reconstructing the case, was in danger of putting not only against the “colored races” of the East and the Third World, but the heart of the United States itself: here, too, communist propaganda found considerable success in its attempt to win blacks to the “revolutionary cause”, destroying their “faith in American institutions”⁸⁹³. Undoubtedly, the challenge represented by the USSR and the influence it had among colonial peoples was crucial.

The impetus given to the process of African American emancipation was not the only way Stalin indirectly influenced the configuration of democracy itself in the West. The speech he gave presenting the draft of the new constitution condemned the three great discriminations that have characterized the history of the liberal West: “It is not property status, not national origin, not sex” that should determine political and social status, but only “[personal ability and personal labour \[...\] of every citizen in society](#)”⁸⁹⁴. As the speech mentioned, the three great discriminations were still present, in various forms and degrees, in one country in the liberal West or another. Finally, when he announced his support for overcoming the three great discriminations, Stalin also stated that the new Constitution would ensure “the right to work, the right to rest and leisure, the right to education” and to secure “better material and cultural conditions”, especially in terms of realizing “[Socialist democratism](#)”⁸⁹⁵. For Hayek, this theoretical sketch of “social and economic rights” represented the ruinous legacy of “[the Marxist Russian Revolution](#)” and profoundly influenced demands for a social welfare state in the West⁸⁹⁶.

Let us return to Russia. The reader will have noticed that I use quotation marks when speaking of “Stalinism”. The term is used by current followers of Trotsky in reference to the most diverse political realities, for example, to label the leadership group of post-Maoist China. But even if it is used to refer exclusively to the USSR, the category of “Stalinism” is not convincing: it seems to presuppose a homogeneous group of doctrines and behaviors that does not exist. In the three decades in which he held power, we see how Stalin, taking into account the dim prospects of any global victory of the socialist revolution, busily tried to develop and implement a government program to cast off utopianism (a legacy of Marx’s theory on one hand, and on the other of the messianic hopes for

a completely new world prompted by the horror of World War I) and the state of emergency (which in Russia acquired an exceptional force and sharpness due to the convergence of two gigantic crises, the Second Time of Troubles and the Second Thirty Years' War). With a clear desire to not challenge the Communist Party's monopoly of power, Stalin repeatedly tried to move from the state of emergency to conditions of relative normality, with the realization of a "Soviet democracy", a "socialist democratism", and a socialism "without the dictatorship of the proletariat". But these attempts failed. It is significant how, immediately after the death of Stalin, the problem of succession was "regulated": the elimination of Beria was a kind of settling of accounts in mafia style, a private violence that had no justification either in the state legal order or in the statutes of the party.

The comparison between Stalin and Peter the Great is now revealed in all its problematicity. Examined closely, the Second Time of Troubles did not end with the arrival of autocracy; it coincided with the opening of a new and prolonged state of emergency, before a terrible global conflict and a Cold War that could at any moment turn into a nuclear apocalypse. We could say that the Second Time of Troubles really ended with the collapse of the USSR: like the Jacobins, the Bolsheviks were also unable to adapt to the dissolution or alleviation of the state of emergency, and ended up appearing obsolete and superfluous to the majority of the population. Having overcome the "crisis of the entire Russian nation," the Bolsheviks were finally defeated by the arrival of relative normality, the result of their own policy.

It is internationally, however, where the influence of the October Revolution, and of the person who led the USSR for three decades, is revealed more strongly. It is possible to make ironic comments about the grandiloquence of a constitution that never entered into force, but we must take into account that statements of abstract principles, too, can have historic effect. It is possible to turn away, fearful of a landscape in which, after the collapse of racist and colonialist despotism and the three great historical discriminations, democracy—indeed, social democracy—was advanced under the guidance of a regime that was dictatorial and inclined to terror. But to surrender to such a reaction means, ultimately, running away from the complexity of every historical process. Those who would prefer to see a simpler landscape would do well to reflect on an observation of Marx's: "[It is the bad side that produces the movement which makes history](#)"⁸⁹⁷.

The image of Stalin, between history and mythology

The various historiographical sources of the current image of Stalin

Despite everything, historiography has failed to distance itself from the image of Stalin as a “[huge, grim, whimsical, morbid, human monster](#)”, otherwise so devoid of intellectual and political capacities as to be laughable. The origin of this mythology is also found in history. We must start with the author (Deutscher) to whom I have just referred, which in other circumstances noted: “[Unlike the Jacobins, the Bolsheviki did not execute their Girondists](#)”, that is, the Mensheviks, who were “allowed” and even “[encouraged, to leave Russia and establish their political centre abroad](#)”⁸⁹⁸. From there they would develop a strong campaign against the country led first by Lenin and then, for a much longer period of time, by Stalin. Deutscher continues:

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. More than one he said so [...]. 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 the firing squad⁸⁹⁹.

With the opposition leader’s arrival in Constantinople, a new and more involved political nucleus was formed, this time dedicated exclusively to unmasking and denouncing every aspect of the personality and activity of

Stalin. In this context can be placed defectors like General Orlov, who upon reaching the West devoted himself to revealing the “secrets of the Kremlin”, earning an “enormous amount of money”, fees that were presumably higher the more sensational the secrets were. Eagerly welcomed in the Soviet Union itself beginning in the Gorbachev years, and still “one of the most important sources” of Western Sovietology today, these revelations are in any case peppered with “[lies](#)”⁹⁰⁰.

Obviously, we should not lose sight of the political center of anti-Stalin agitation

in the West. Its motivations had been clarified beforehand by Lloyd George, who in the summer of 1919 pointed out that a united Russia, Bolshevik or not, would in any case be a source of danger to the British Empire⁹⁰¹. And public opinion (first British and then American) broadly saw Stalin as the embodiment of a double threat, the threat of communist agitation in the capitalist centers and especially in the colonies, and the threat of a great power whose expansionist intentions were now more dangerous by the fact that it inspired and led a political movement present in every corner of the world.

Of the various anti-Stalin political centers, which was more implacable? Sometimes one has the impression of watching a game of “who gives the most?” Immediately after the non-aggression pact between the Third Reich and the Soviet Union, Trotsky seemed triumphant: the truth was now finally revealed to “[the Kremlin’s professional apologists](#)” and Stalin’s, “[the simpletons who are ‘pro-Soviet’](#)”, who had been hoping for Moscow’s help in containing the expansionism of Nazi Germany. One of the favorite targets was Neville Chamberlain. Yes, the British prime minister, who even then had been criticized by Churchill for his appeasement policy towards Hitler, was also criticized by Trotsky for having fed illusions about... Stalin! “Despite all his aversion for the Soviet regime”, the British Conservative leader had “[tried with all his might to gain an alliance with Stalin](#)”: a colossal proof of his naiveté! He, Trotsky, had repeatedly made it clear since the advent of the Third Reich that, despite all the talk about anti-fascist popular fronts, “[the fundamental aim of Stalin’s foreign policy was the reaching of an agreement with Hitler](#)”; now all were forced to take note that the Kremlin dictator was “[Hitler’s quartermaster](#)”⁹⁰².

Seriously challenged by the Soviet Union’s epic resistance against the Third Reich, this manner of betting on two horses was taken up again with force after the 20th Congress of the CPSU and the *Secret Speech*. Did Khrushchev accuse Stalin of deviating from Lenin? In fact—as emphasized by Orlov, in an article in *Life* with a title announcing a “sensational secret”—the person who led the Soviet Union for three decades had been an agent of the tsarist secret police, and was obviously willing to eliminate the unfortunates who knew of his shameful past. This revelation is still upheld today by a Russian historian (Rogowin), a fervent follower of Trotsky⁹⁰³.

The game of *who gives the most* reached singular heights. In 1965, Deutscher reflected on the evolution of the Menshevik leader Dan: patriotically blinded by the image of a Russia “[emerging triumphantly from Armageddon, with the Third](#)

[Reich prostrate at her feet](#)”, he came to recognize the historical reasons for the October Revolution, but also, unfortunately, the reasons for “[Stalinism, with its violence and ideological prevarication](#)”. There was only one mitigating factor for this indulgence regarding 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](#)”!⁹⁰⁴ Fortunately, to refute and ridicule once and for all the gullible and unsuspecting who were still following their masters in Moscow, there was information coming precisely from the capital of the Soviet Union and from inside the Communist Party itself.

Only by virtue of this convergence of heterogeneous interests can we explain the paradox of a historiography that, while it never tired of denouncing the farce of the proceedings initiated by Stalin in Moscow, calmly accepted the legitimacy of the proceedings against Stalin led in several ways, first by Trotsky and later by Khrushchev.

Other issues with the image of Stalin

So widespread is the image of the “[huge, grim, whimsical, morbid, human monster](#)” today that we have forgotten the contradictory history that predates the consolidation of that image. We have seen the recognition paid to Stalin at the time by distinguished statesmen, diplomats, and intellectuals. The pages of his thirty years of government, now simply considered monstrous, were read quite differently in the past.

Nowadays, it is commonplace to represent the revolution from above that would radically change the face of agriculture in the Soviet Union as an exclusive product of ideological furor. But in 1944, while mentioning its terrible human costs, De Gasperi expressed an essentially positive judgment of “[the great economic project](#)” of the collectivization of the countryside and industrialization, necessary because of the war danger and “[the threat revealed in *Mein Kampf*](#)”⁹⁰⁵.

In our days, very few would dare to question the thesis that the bloody, large-scale repression carried out by Stalin had been only and exclusively a product of his *libido dominandi* or his paranoia. And yet, between the late 1920s and early 1930s, Malaparte spoke calmly about preparations for a coup in Moscow and about Stalin’s doubts when he intercepted it; a prominent member of the German press went further, ridiculing the naiveté of the Kremlin dictator in “[not having](#)

sent Trotsky and the Trotsky crowd into the Great Beyond”⁹⁰⁶. About twenty years later, it was Churchill himself who endorsed—at least indirectly—the proceedings 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 (on the bench of the accused sat Soviet leaders who were “filled with jealousy of Stalin, who had ousted them”)⁹⁰⁷. The position of the English statesman, the champion of the struggle against Nazi Germany, is more significant because it was formulated in a dispute with Chamberlain, the promoter of the appeasement policy. More radical or more explicit than Churchill was the American ambassador to the Soviet Union, 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”⁹⁰⁸. De Gasperi also noted in 1944 that the authenticity of the charges against the anti-Stalinist opposition was confirmed by “objective American information”⁹⁰⁹.

Then came a radical change of course, but the fragility and inconsistency of the image conveyed of Stalin after the Cold War and the *Secret Speech* begin to become evident in the investigations of a growing number of researchers. In certain aspects there was even an obvious rectification. Take the example of the Great Terror. Along with the leading political figures previously mentioned who considered the Moscow trials more or less authentic, there was, in 1948, an ardent admirer of Trotsky: Deutscher. According to him, the murder of Kirov had not at all been staged by the regime. The long tradition of revolutionaries who in tsarist Russia had “attacked autocracy with bombs and revolvers”. again had influence over 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 and revolver into the hands of some impatient anti-Stalinist Komsomoltsy*”. “Ideas of revolutionary terrorism”. had expanded to become “fairly widespread among the young”., including Kirov’s murderer⁹¹⁰. As late as 1948, Deutscher recognized a certain “psychological truth” in the Moscow trials in general, and even an empirical truth with regard to the execution of Tukhachevsky in particular: in that case, while certain sources spoke of a frame-up by the Nazi secret services, “all non-Stalinist versions concur in the following: the generals did indeed plan a *coup d’état*”⁹¹¹; in either case, Stalin’s paranoia or *libido dominandi* had played no role.

It should be added that one year later, unimpressed by the revelations of the *Secret Speech*, an American historian, not at all unsympathetic towards the anti-Stalin opposition (whom 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”⁹¹².

Today it is the same Trotskyist researchers who call attention to the civil war that had erupted inside the Soviet leadership group, and who assert the merit of the opposition in promoting by any means the overthrow of the Thermidorian regime imposed by the betrayers of the revolution. It is significant that the change in perspective also affected the camp of the followers of Trotsky, who in his time was perhaps more dedicated than anyone else to denouncethe Moscow trials as an outright farce.

With respect to the Soviet Union’s trajectory before and during World War II, Deutscher’s evolution is especially torturous and significant. We are already aware of his quite flattering 1948 portrait of Stalin as a war leader. In 1956, writing after the immediate impact of the *Secret Speech*, Deutscher has no difficulties in putting faith in the “revelations” according to which, in the days immediately after the start of Operation Barbarossa, Stalin would have helplessly withdrawn, “taciturn and angry, to his dacha”, in order to then, yielding to the requests and entreaties of his collaborators, return to leading the country and the war by “tak[ing] a globe and trac[ing] the front line on it”. Deutscher’s only rebuke to Khrushchev and his circle is for not having followed the recommendation Trotsky made in 1927, that is, for not having realized “the duty of party leaders to overthrow Stalin in order to wage war more efficiently and to a victorious conclusion”!⁹¹³ Ten years later, returning to this argument, Deutscher writes: “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”⁹¹⁴. It must be said that the most recent historical research goes far beyond this partial and timid reconsideration.

As for the thesis of the oppression of nations, we are already familiar with the radical and positive innovation of the USSR’s affirmative action for national minorities. But now we should read the account recently outlined 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 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 the local dialect because it had never been written. These policies of promoting national cultural autonomy even extended to attempts at linguistic assimilation of Russians: Soviet officials and managers were expected to learn the language of the titular nationality they served⁹¹⁵.

The same conclusions are reached by a French researcher of Central Asia, Olivier Roy, referenced favorably in an article published in *The New York Review of Books*, which synthesized the current perspectives of the area: strong, operative states could secure themselves if they “intelligently” made use of the Soviet “heritage”. “The Muscovite architects of the policy of nationalities [...] codified languages (sometimes creating new alphabets for them), built national parliaments, national libraries, and instituted policies of affirmative action in favor of ‘local cadres’”. Distinguishing himself among the promoters of this enlightened policy was “first and foremost Stalin.” How far we are from the thesis reigning during the Cold War formulated by Arendt, according to whom Stalin had deliberately disorganized and disjointed the “nationalities” in order to create favorable conditions for the triumph of totalitarianism! An author, who was previously a leader of the anti-Soviet “dissidents”, expressed recognition of the Soviet Union (and of Stalin) for the policy of nationalities in decidedly emphatic terms: “In the years of Soviet power, with regard to the solution to the national question, the positive elements have been so many that it is difficult to find a comparable example in the history of humanity”⁹¹⁶.

Overall, the caricature of Stalin outlined first by Trotsky and then by Khrushchev can no longer enjoy much credit. From the investigations of prominent historians who can not at all be suspected of leniency towards the “cult of personality”, today there arises a portrait of a politician who rose and consolidated his presence in positions of power in the USSR primarily because he “outstripped his comrades-in-arms” in understanding the Soviet system’s modes of operation⁹¹⁷; a leader of “outstanding political talent” and “highly

gifted”⁹¹⁸; a statesman who saved the Russian nation from being decimated and enslaved by the Third Reich, not only because of his cunning military strategy but also his “masterly” war speeches sometimes contained true “fragments of brilliance” that encouraged domestic resistance in tragic and decisive moments⁹¹⁹; a personality who was not lacking in theoretical qualities either, as demonstrated by, among other examples, the “insight” with which he treated the national question in his 1913 work, and the “positive effect” of his “contribution” to linguistics⁹²⁰.

Of course, it is at the same time pointed out, and rightly so, that this recognition is not a moral absolutism; and yet the *Secret Speech*’s total lack of reliability is in any case clear. There is no detail in it that will not be questioned today. Let us consider the story of Stalin’s alleged psychological breakdown in the days immediately after the start of Operation Barbarossa: according to the previously-quoted analysis of two Russian historians (of assured anti-Stalinist orientation), this was an “episode” that was “a complete fabrication” and that, as one French historian remarks, is in “total contradiction” with the testimonies and documents that are gradually emerging⁹²¹. But it was not only an “episode”, otherwise quite significant; with regard to the so-called doctors’ plot. “Khrushchev crudely and deliberately distorted the facts”⁹²². Indeed, “he took more than a few licenses with the truth”⁹²³. There is a worthwhile observation (this time made by the English historian cited above) in a general sense regarding “Stalin’s war leadership”: “to show the truth it is necessary to look beyond both the cold war polemics of the west and the contingencies of destalinisation in the USSR”⁹²⁴.

Contradictory motives in the demonization of Stalin

Arendt’s thesis, which has been dominant in the West without question for so long and has been repeated uncritically again and again, demonstrates the irresistible attraction that, despite everything, is instituted between communist “totalitarianism” and Nazi “totalitarianism”: “the only man for whom Hitler had ‘unqualified respect’ was ‘Stalin the genius’”; on the other hand, “we nevertheless know since Khrushchev’s speech before the Twentieth Party Congress that Stalin trusted only one man and that was Hitler”. This would be true to the extent that, contrary to all warnings, “Stalin refused to believe that Hitler would violate the treaty” until the last moment: as confirmation of this Arendt again cites the *Secret Speech* or, to be more precise, “Khrushchev’s ‘Speech on Stalin,’ text released by the State Department”⁹²⁵. This statement,

which rests on a speech that is immediately political and certainly not at all concerned with historical rigor, can be contrasted with the well-documented analysis according to which, in the post-war period, in Hungary and Eastern Europe Stalin “only trusted” cadres of Jewish origin, who were indeed called to constitute the skeleton of the new state apparatus (see above, pp. 246-247). As can be seen, the antithesis to Hitler could not be any clearer.

But let us remain on the fragility of the ideological position relevant to Arendt and to the dominant opinion. In recent times, we are witnessing positions change places. For some years, leading researchers and indefatigable anti-communist ideologues have insisted on portraying Stalin as an insatiable expansionist, ready to strike at the right moment the very Germany with which it was bound by a non-aggression pact. Especially cited to support this is Stalin’s speech to the Military Academy graduates which, for brevity, I quote in 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”⁹²⁶. It was May 5, 1941, the same day Stalin called a meeting of the highest offices of the party and state, obviously in anticipation of the frontal collision with the Third Reich. The development of Soviet armaments discussed above had been promoted by Stalin in anticipation of an offensive war against which Hitler would try to react⁹²⁷. This thesis, now incessantly argued by historical revisionists, can easily be refuted by referring to what an author, who is also among the most prominent members of this historiographical and ideological trend, cites: in early May 1941, General Antonescu, who had shortly before assumed power in Romania, informed his German allies that “factories around Moscow have been ordered to transfer their equipment into the country’s interior”⁹²⁸. On the other hand, the Nazis were desperately looking for a *casus belli*. The spy chief, Admiral Canaris, wrote 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 offence at nothing, then you will have to stage an incident to start the war’”⁹²⁹. Meanwhile, as they rob the revisionist historians of their central point, these testimonies clearly show who was the aggressor. Secondly, they clarify that what was making the Third Reich nervous was precisely the attitude Khrushchev criticized Stalin for.

The new accusation against Stalin soon found its consecration in the press,

which, **in order to later endorse it**, did not hesitate to exhume a speech of August 19, 1939, discussing an illustrious sovietologist with justified indignation: while he sent Molotov to Berlin to work out the non-aggression pact, Stalin had already developed, with revolting cynicism, a plan of aggression and Sovietization of all of Europe, including Germany⁹³⁰. Actually, this is a serious historical untruth (see above, p. 31-32). But this is not the most important point. The revelation of Stalin's new ignominy could have been an opportunity to re-discuss Arendt's thesis, also owing to the *Khrushchev Report*, on the on-going relationship between the two highest incarnations of "totalitarianism". And yet, nothing has been done!

Historians of the concentration camps rightly denounce the further turn of the screw of the Gulag and "the brutal exploitation of prisoners", which reached its horrible zenith after the "rapid growth of the economic plans in 1940-1941" (thus in the months of the non-aggression pact), when the Soviet leadership group, in anticipation of war, **ignored any consideration** with the intention of maximally accelerating implementation of plans "**of great strategic and economic importance**", such as the construction of airports, aircraft factories, and industries essential to the war effort⁹³¹. In light of this charge, the platitude defended by Arendt is more grotesque than ever, and yet it continues to be repeated obsessively: it is still necessary to show that Stalin trusted Hitler blindly! The dominant ideology, therefore, calmly promotes the most contradictory statements and accusations: the important thing is to be libelous. The tendency to slide from history to political mythology is clear.

The need for demonization, **however it is motivated**, is also evident in other fields. Nowadays the black legend of Stalin's anti-Semitism is still intact. But the diametrically opposite point of view is also present. Thus there appeared the investigation of a journalist, American and Jewish, who referred to "**Stalin's fondness for Jews**", whom he trusted to run the concentration camps where Germans would be locked up before they were expelled from Poland. In this way, the survivors of the "final solution" could take a terrible revenge and become the murderers of their murderers, all thanks to the cunning and perfidy of the Soviet dictator⁹³². He is also accused, in a book written by an author close to the military of the Federal Republic of Germany, of having circulated "**war propaganda**" of the gas chambers and the Third Reich's plan to exterminate the Jewish population, in order to discredit his enemies⁹³³. The contrast with the idea of an anti-Semitic Stalin is obvious and total, but nevertheless continues to

enjoy wide prevalence.

Finally, it is also worth noting how the theme of Stalin's "paranoia" is often developed in contradictory ways. **In openly diagnosing this disease**, one historian stands out who at the same time points out the role that Beria would have had in the Soviet leader's death⁹³⁴. Of course, one could say that he ended up a victim of the climate he himself created; however, at least after a certain point, the danger was real and not the product of a fevered imagination. Moreover, those who accuse Stalin of paranoia are figures and authors who, without providing any evidence, accuse him of being responsible for the deaths of his closest collaborators, such as Kirov and Zhdanov. Is this not the same attitude being alleged against the dictator? However, these questions and problems are not even brought up: the important thing is to maintain the perfidy of the communist and oriental despot.

Political struggle and mythology between the French Revolution and the October Revolution

In June 1956, after the impact of the *Khrushchev Report*, Deutscher observes: "[Communists had lain prostrate over a quarter of a century](#)" before a tyrant who was monstrous and repugnant both morally and intellectually; how could all of this have happened?⁹³⁵ Continuing along this line, he might have added: what had pushed famous philosophers and Western statesmen to pay tribute to such a monster with declarations of esteem and respect, and in some cases even admiration? These are legitimate and even unavoidable questions, but perhaps they should be completed with another: how could Deutscher himself have been infected by the attitude that he denounced so strongly in 1956? In fact, after World War II and on the occasion of Stalin's death, Deutscher had honored the statesman who was instrumental in the defeat of the Third Reich and had built socialism in the USSR. In those days the monster of unprecedented vileness and stupidity had not disappeared from the scene, and therefore the question about the enormous credit he had enjoyed for so long, despite everything, had not arisen. But perhaps in 1956, while reading the *Khrushchev Report*, Deutscher would have done better to consider a very different question: guided by a such a ridiculous "generalissimo" and political leader, how had the Soviet Union succeeded in defeating the terrible Nazi war machine that had rapidly subjugated the rest of continental Europe? And how had the Soviet Union done, from a position of extreme weakness, to become a military and industrial superpower?

Considering it carefully, a half century after Stalin's death and de-Stalinization, it is appropriate to take up Deutscher's question in order to invert it radically: how had a portrait as grotesque and caricatural as the one drawn by Khrushchev been promoted to the rank of historiographical and political dogma? What is more, this dogma has been gradually enriched with new details, more imaginative every time: from the "revelations" of the *Secret Speech*, that attributed to Stalin blind trust in the non-aggression pact, Arendt has in successive editions of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* constructed the theorem of the elective affinities between the two dictators, and this theorem has been gradually identifying new points of contact and new symmetries, until the two monsters have been made perfectly equivalent in every aspect of their political action and ideology, including the perpetration of an anti-Semitic holocaust and anti-Semitic hatred.

The key to explaining this singular phenomenon can be reconstructed in the history of political mythologies. After Thermidor, **the Jacobins were brought to the guillotine in a moral sense as well**. They turned into "these sultans," "these satyrs" who had built "pleasure-grounds" and "scenes of orgies" everywhere, where they "abandoned themselves to every excess"⁹³⁶. Together with sexual libido and further beyond it, what devoured Robespierre was above all the *libido dominandi*: he prepared to "marry Capet's daughter" in order to ascend to the throne of France⁹³⁷. No doubt the accusation is unbelievable, but there was no lack of evidence; in fact, it was abundant: "the marriage contract" had been signed; additionally, the home of the just-executed tyrant was found to have the "fleur-de-lis seal", that is, the seal of the Bourbon dynasty⁹³⁸. The execution, or rather, the murder of Louis XVI then appeared in a new light: the perpetrator had proposed simply getting rid of a rival, had wanted to remove the obstacle that prevented him from ascending the throne.

The moral decapitation of Robespierre was mixed with his more properly intellectual decapitation. During the Jacobin period there had been popular episodes, not encouraged from above, of vandalism and revolutionary iconoclasm, their targets being the symbols of the old regime. Such episodes continued to be expressed during Thermidor, this time aimed at everything that recalled the Terror. But this was how the new rulers levelled accusations against the Jacobins: out of hatred for culture, which they lacked completely, they had planned to burn down libraries; in fact they had already begun this demented project. Through several passages, the accusation was increasingly expanded and was transformed into an even more indisputable fact as it lost all contact with

reality. And so, Boissy d'Anglas could provoke the public ridicule of the Jacobins by saying:

Doubtless these wild enemies of humanity only consented to their crimes being lit up for a moment by the light of burning libraries, because they hoped that the shadows of ignorance would only become thicker. The barbarians! they have made the human spirit regress by several centuries⁹³⁹.

The Jacobins had introduced compulsory schooling, and against them and against the French Revolution as such, the counter-revolutionary propaganda never tired of denouncing the hubris of reason, celebrating instead the beneficial role of “prejudice”; however, in the ideological and political climate of Thermidor, Robespierre and his associates were accused of having wanted to extend the “darkness of ignorance.” And the new accusation was levelled without reflecting on the above: logical consistency was the last of the concerns.

In terms of the number of victims of the Terror as well, we witness a process similar to that seen with the libraries. Let us once again call on the eminent researcher who we are following here: “there was no miserliness about the figures: tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, some even spoke of millions.” It was, ultimately, a genocide, as denounced by the *jeunesse dorée*, who in their counter-Marseillaise thundered against the “blood-drinkers”, “this cannibal horde”, “these frightful cannibals”⁹⁴⁰. It was an accusation retaken and radicalized by the left. Immediately after Thermidor, Babeuf spoke of a “system of depopulation” (*dépopulation*) put into operation in the Vendée by Robespierre, who even pursued “a vile and unprecedented political goal: to weed out the human race”⁹⁴¹. Here we witness a convergence between the right and the extreme left of the political spectrum, both in agreement in portraying Robespierre as a genocidal monster. And yet, this paradox did not last long. Babeuf was quick to grasp the real meaning of Thermidor: in front of the judges who were ready to condemn him to death, denouncing the desperate situation to which the masses were doomed, on one hand he referred to Saint-Just and his idea of “happiness” and escape from misery, and on the other he expressed his disdain for “the system of hunger” put in place by the new rulers, calling the Thermidorean Boissy d'Anglas “genocidal” (*populicide*)⁹⁴². The accusation of genocide thus met a radical reversal: it no longer fell back on Robespierre, but on his victorious enemies.

It would be interesting to carry out a comparative analysis of the mythologies

that emerged from the great revolutions. After October 1917, the Jacobins “blood-drinkers” were joined by the Bolsheviks who, according to Russian fugitives in the US, had invented and frantically used an electric guillotine capable of murdering five hundred people every hour. We have seen how the Jacobins were described as frequenting “pleasure-grounds” and organizing “orgies”; in the autumn of 1919 the Hungarian communist leader Bela Kun was accused of having formed “a splendidly equipped harem” where the perfidious and insatiable Jew could “rape and defile honorable Christian virgins by the dozen”⁹⁴³. This ignominy was revealed by a newspaper that would later become the organ of the Nazi party, but at this time, expressing its horror at the events in Eastern Europe, shared an orientation that was widespread in Western public opinion, on both sides of the Atlantic. In America, too, the Bolsheviks were synonymous with debauchery and moral depravity: they had introduced nationalization of women in Russia, as shown by documents published with the approval of President Wilson and explained in abundant detail by a newspaper as reputable as the *New York Times*; yes, every woman who reached her 18th birthday was required to register at an “bureau of free love”, which then assigned a randomly chosen man to the young unfortunate, forced to suffer the imposition of the governmental entity in body and soul⁹⁴⁴.

If the Jacobins were “barbarians”, even more so were the leaders of the October Revolution, described above as agents of Imperial Germany (i.e. of the “Huns” and “Vandals”, as the Germans were defined in the propaganda of the Entente during World War I), and then as agents of international Jewry, doubly alien to real civilization both by its geographic origin and by its contribution to the revolt of the colonies and people of color, just as Nazi propaganda never tired of repeating. Finally, if Robespierre was for some time charged by Babeuf of wanting to “weed out the human race” as a whole, Conquest is content to ascribe to Stalin a plan to starve the Ukrainian people.

The themes outlined here are only modest suggestions for the future historian. Pending a comparative analysis of political mythologies, it is in any case worth noting that Stalin has met a worse fate than Robespierre: granted, in Russia today there are plenty of popular demonstrations that raise his portrait and the majority of adults speak positively about Stalin, seeing in him the “tough leader” that the country needed in such terrible times. Among the former “dissidents”, we see how Alexander Zinoviev described Yeltsin as the leader of a “criminal counter-revolution” and a “colonial democracy”, and made a striking evaluation of the history of the Soviet Union, including the three decades of the Stalin era:

“It was precisely thanks to communist that Russia was able to avoid bad and worse” and achieve “in the most difficult historical conditions” progress that “only a cynical gossip can deny”⁹⁴⁵. In the West, however, even on the left the charge of “Stalinism” is ready to fall on anyone who dares to express any doubt or question. If anything, it is in the “bourgeois” camp where we can glimpse some timid sign of reflection. A few months after the collapse of the Soviet Union, a respected Italian newspaper mentioned: “One and half million people are at risk of not surviving the winter due to a shortage of food and medicine throughout the USSR, says a report from the International Red Cross”⁹⁴⁶. Some time later, in an analysis of Yeltsin’s Russia, a well-known political scientist, Maurice Duverger, referred to a “collapse in average life expectancy”, whose culprits were the privileged few who had succeeded in “accumulating enormous wealth” that was speculative and parasitical in origin, if not patently illegal, and he denounced the “veritable genocide of the elderly”⁹⁴⁷. The accusation of genocide is now applied widely, with the condemnation of a hero of the West (Yeltsin) and the condemnation of the West as such, considered responsible for a tragedy that occurred not in the course of an acute political and economic crisis, but after the end of the Cold War, in a period in which, at least in the most advanced countries, shortages were only a distant memory.

An evaluation made of the French Revolution at the time by Edgar Quinet comes to mind: “The Terror had been the first calamity; a second, which destroyed the Republic, was the trial of the Terror”⁹⁴⁸.

Demonization and hagiography in the interpretation of the contemporary world

From forgetting the Second Time of Troubles in Russia, to forgetting the century of humiliation in China

For decades, particularly from the outbreak of the Cold War, the Western anti-communist campaign has revolved around the demonization of Stalin. Until the time of the Soviet Union's defeat, exaggeration did not take place in the polemic against Mao, or even against Pol Pot, whom Washington backed against the Vietnamese invaders and their Soviet protectors until the last moment. Hitler only had one twin monster: he had dominated for thirty years in Moscow and continued to disastrously weigh on the country that dared to challenge the hegemony of the US.

The picture could not but change with the extraordinary rise of China: now it would be the great Asian country that would be attacked until it lost its identity and self-esteem. The dominant ideology endeavoured to identify other twin monsters of Hitler besides Stalin. And so we have an internationally successful book that describes Mao Zedong as the greatest criminal of the 20th century, or perhaps of all time⁹⁴⁹.

The methods of “proof” are the ones we are already familiar with: it begins with the childhood of the “monster” rather than with the history of China. Hence it is necessary to try to fill this gap. With a long history behind it, China, which had occupied a leading position in the development of human civilization for centuries or millennia, even in 1820 had a GDP that made up 32.4% of global GDP; in 1949, at the time of its founding, the People's Republic of China was the poorest country, or one of the poorest, in the world⁹⁵⁰. The cause of this collapse was the colonialist and imperialist aggression that began with the Opium Wars. Enthusiastically celebrated by the most illustrious representatives of the liberal West (such as Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill), these ignominious wars opened a decidedly tragic chapter in the history of the great Asian country. The Chinese balance of trade deficit, brought on by the victory of

the “British *narcotraficantes*”, the terrible humiliation they suffered (“Chinese women are accosted, raped” by the invaders; “graves are violated in the name of scientific curiosity”; “the small bound foot of a woman’s corpse is taken from her coffin”), and the crisis, underscored by the country’s inability to fend off external aggression, played a primary role in causing the Taiping Rebellion (1851–1864), which made the fight against opium the order of the day. It was “the bloodiest civil war in world history with an estimated 20 million to 30 million dead”⁹⁵¹. Having contributed strongly to provoking it, the West became its beneficiary, since it could extend its control over a country that was defenseless and silenced because of an ever-deepening crisis. It opened a historical period of a “crucified China” (the Western murderers were joined by Russia and Japan):

As the end of the nineteenth century approached China seemed to become the plaything of a destiny which she could no longer ward off. Both mankind and the elements conspired against her. China of the years 1850-1950 – the China of the most terrible insurrections in her history, of foreign bombardments, of invasions and civil wars – was also the China of great natural cataclysms. Almost certainly the number of victims involved had never been so high in the history of the world.

The general and drastic reduction in living standards, the disintegration of the state and government apparatus, along with its incapacity, corruption, and increasing subjugation and subordination to foreigners: all this made the impact of floods and famines even more devastating: “the great famine of north China in 1877-1878 [...] killed more than nine million people”⁹⁵². This was a tragedy that tends to occur periodically: in 1928, the toll was “nearly three million deaths in the province of Shensi [Shanxi]”⁹⁵³. There was no escape from hunger and cold: “Beams from houses were burned for warmth”⁹⁵⁴.

It was not only a devastating economic crisis: “The state is virtually destroyed.” One statistic is in itself significant: “130 wars between 1,300 warlords took place in the period between 1911-1928”; the feuding “military bands” were supported in some cases by one foreign power or another. On the other hand, “the many civil wars between 1919 and 1925 could be considered new Opium wars. What was at stake was control of production and transport”⁹⁵⁵. Besides the armed forces of the warlords, pure and simple banditry became common, fueled by army deserters and by the weapons sold to the soldiers. “It is estimated that

around 1930 bandits in China reached 20 million, 10% of the total male population”⁹⁵⁶. On the other hand, it is easy to imagine the fate that awaited women. Overall, it meant the dissolution of all social ties: “Sometimes the farmer would sell his wife and children. The press described the rows of sold young women led through the streets by traffickers, in a Shanxi devastated by the famine of 1928. They would become domestic slaves or prostitutes”. In Shanghai alone there were “about 50,000 regular prostitutes”. And the activities of both bandits and pimps could rely on the support or complicity of Western authorities, who derived “gainful activities” from them⁹⁵⁷. The lives of the Chinese were worth very little, and the oppressed tended to share this view with the oppressors. In 1938, in an attempt to halt the Japanese invasion, Chiang Kai-shek’s air force blew up the dikes of the Yellow River: 900,000 peasants drowned while another 4 million were forced to flee⁹⁵⁸. About fifteen years before, Sun Yat-Sen had expressed fears that “our nation and our people will be destroyed”; indeed, the Chinese were perhaps the next to suffer the end inflicted on the Native Americans of that continent⁹⁵⁹.

This tragic history that preceded the revolution is dissolved in historiography and in propaganda that revolves around negative hero worship. The interpretation of Russian history proceeds by obscuring the Second Time of Troubles; with respect to the great Asian country it is the century of humiliation (the period from the First Opium War to the communist conquest of power) that is elided. Just as in Russia, in China what saved the nation and even the state was ultimately the revolution led by the Communist Party. In the aforementioned biography of Mao Zedong, not only is the historical background briefly reconstructed here ignored, but the primacy of the horrors blamed on the Chinese communist leader is achieved by ascribing to him the victims of the hunger and shortages that had befallen China.

On this last point, we should now consult a book by an American author who favorably describes the major role played by the Cold War policy of economic siege and strangulation instituted by Washington against the People’s Republic of China. The situation in the fall of 1949 was desperate. It must be emphasized that the civil war had not at all ended: the bulk of the Kuomintang army had taken refuge in Taiwan, and from there continued to threaten the new government with airstrikes and raids, while pockets of resistance continued to exist on the continent. But this was not the main aspect: “After decades of wars, civil and international, the nation’s economy was at the edge of total collapse”.

The collapse in agricultural and industrial production was joined by inflation. And that was not all: “Severe floods had swept a large part of the nation that year, and over 40 million people were victimized by this natural calamity”⁹⁶⁰.

To make this most serious economic and humanitarian crisis more catastrophic than ever, the US embargo entered into play. Its objectives were clear from the studies and plans of the Truman administration and the admissions or statements of its leaders: to make China “be plagued” by “a general standard of living around and below subsistence level”; to cause an “economic backwardness”, a “cultural lag”, an “uncontrolled crude birth rate,” “popular unrest”; to inflict “heavy and long prolonged cost to the whole social structure”, and to create, ultimately, “a state of chaos”⁹⁶¹. This was a concept that was repeated obsessively: a country needed to be brought from a situation of “desperate need” to a “catastrophic economic situation”: “towards disaster” and “collapse”⁹⁶². This “economic weapon” aimed against an overpopulated country was fatal, but for the CIA it was not enough: the situation provoked “by economic warfare measures and by naval blockade” could be further aggravated by a “campaign of aerial and naval bombardment against selected ports, rail systems, industrial capacity and storage bases”; with US assistance, the Kuomintang continued to bomb industrial cities in mainland China, including Shanghai⁹⁶³.

At the White House, one president gave way to another, but the embargo continued, and included medicines, tractors, and fertilizers⁹⁶⁴. In the early 1960s, a collaborator of the Kennedy administration, Walt W. Rostow, said that thanks to this policy, China’s economic development has been delayed at least “tens of years”, while CIA reports underlined “the serious agricultural situation in Communist China” already seriously weakened by “overwork and malnutrition”⁹⁶⁵. Did they then try to reduce the pressure on a people reduced to hunger? On the contrary, the embargo would not be held back “even for humanitarian relief”. Also taking advantage of the fact that China “lacks key natural resources—particularly oil and arable land” as well as using the serious crisis in relations between China and the USSR, they tried for the final blow: “explor[ing] possibilities of a total Western embargo against China” and halting sales of oil and wheat as much as possible⁹⁶⁶.

Does it make sense to then exclusively or principally attribute to Mao the responsibility for the economic catastrophe that affected China for so long, lucidly and ruthlessly planned in Washington since the autumn of 1949?

Determined to produce a cartoonish portrait of Mao and to denounce his insane experiments, the authors of the best-seller on the Chinese leader do not ask this question. In addition, the same US leaders knew, from the moment they applied the embargo, that it would be even more devastating because of “**Communist inexperience with urban economics**”⁹⁶⁷. It is no accident that we see them explicitly speak of “economic warfare” and “economic weapons”.

This practice would not go away even after the end of the Cold War. A year before China entered the World Trade Organization, a US journalist described the behavior of Washington in 1996: “[America’s political leaders are about to wheel out one of the biggest guns in their trade arsenal, ostentatiously aim it at China and argue furiously over whether to pull the trigger.](#)” After being established, the threat of cancelling trade relations would have constituted “[the largest U.S. trade sanction in history, in dollar terms, excluding world wars](#)”; it would have been “[the trade equivalent of a nuclear strike](#)”⁹⁶⁸. This was also the opinion of a famous American political scientist, Edward Luttwak: “[By way of metaphor one could say that the blockade of Chinese imports is the nuclear weapon America is pointing at China](#)”⁹⁶⁹. Revived as a threat in the 1990s, the economic “nuclear weapon” had been systematically used against the Asian country during the Cold War, as Washington (explicitly and repeatedly) reserved the right to also use the real nuclear weapon.

On taking power, Mao was aware that the “**formidable task of economic reconstruction**” awaited: it was necessary “**to operate in industry and business**” and “**learn from every expert (no matter who he is)**”⁹⁷⁰. In this context, the Great Leap Forward was a desperate and catastrophic attempt to face the embargo⁹⁷¹. This partly applies to the Cultural Revolution, which was characterized by the eagerness of the government to drive a rapid development urging mass mobilization and the methods adopted successfully in the military struggle. Everything was done in the hope of finally putting an end to the devastations of “economic warfare”, behind which loomed the threat of total war. With regard to Mao’s behavior as an oriental despot, particularly during the Cultural Revolution, the history of China would certainly be as helpful in explaining it as the ideology and personality of the person who wielded power; the fact is that we have never seen a country democratize when it has been savagely attacked economically, isolated diplomatically, and subjected to a terrible and constant threat militarily. This being so, it is doubly grotesque to exclusively blame Mao for the “**well over 70 million people [who] had perished—in peacetime—as a**

result of his misrule”⁹⁷².

In reality, the “social achievements of the Mao era” were “extraordinary”, conquests that achieved clear improvement in economic, social, and cultural conditions, and a sharp increase in the “life expectancy” of the Chinese people. Without considering these, it is impossible to understand the prodigious economic development that, at the end of the day, freed hundreds of millions of people from hunger and starvation⁹⁷³. However, the dominant ideology switches up the roles: the leadership group that ended the century of humiliation becomes a gang of criminals, while those responsible for a tragedy that lasted a century, and those who tried their best to prolong it with an embargo, appear as the champions of freedom and civilization. We have already seen Goebbels in 1929 describing Trotsky as “probably” the greatest criminal of all time; perhaps in the following years he would have placed Stalin first on the list. In any case the method of argument of the Third Reich’s head of propaganda and manipulation must have seemed too problematic for the authors of the acclaimed biography of Mao. They have no doubts: the absolute first place among the criminals of world history has passed to the Chinese leader!

The erasure of war and the serial production of Hitler’s twin monsters

The forgetting of history, especially the history of colonialism and the two great wars, is a constant in the mythology dedicated to transforming Stalin, and all the leaders of the communist and anti-colonial movement, into Hitler’s more or less twin monsters. This is an operation that was fairly easy to do with Pol Pot. And we should now pause on precisely him, certainly not to rehabilitate him or to minimize the horror for which he was responsible, but rather in order to better clarify the ways in which the now dominant mythology is constructed. In doing so I rely almost exclusively on a book by an expert US researcher on Asia, and especially on the case study on Cambodia written by a journalist who has worked for the *Times*, *The Economist*, and the BBC. So let us begin by asking ourselves a question: when and how did the tragedy that culminated in the horror of the Pol Pot regime begin? Here is an initial response, provided by the US researcher:

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 three-quarters of a million Cambodian peasants⁹⁷⁴.

The calculation that appears in the book about Pol Pot's Cambodia is more prudent: the victims reached "half a million". The fact is, however, that "the bombs fell massively and above all on the civilian population", which was decimated, with survivors often terribly disfigured and traumatized by the experience of the daily bombings and the escape from the countryside (reduced to looking "like the valleys of the moon") to cities in the hands of government troops. They had been saved from hell, but overwhelmed by the chaos of the increasing arrival of survivors from the countryside, forced to live "a precarious existence on the edge of starvation": at the end of the conflict, in the capital alone there were two million Cambodians uprooted by war, crammed into "slums and shanty towns" and with the sick and wounded in hospitals where they had "little hope of survival"⁹⁷⁵. To all of this must be added the "full-scale pogroms" that were carried out by the troops of Lon Nol, who took power in 1970 in a Washington-planned coup. This is the way in which the regime, with "hundreds of millions of dollars" of US assistance, dealt with the problem represented by ethnic minorities: "At least 3,000 people, all males over the age of fifteen, were rounded up in Vietnamese villages in the suburbs north of Phnom Penh, taken downriver and shot. The women left behind were raped." Or: "in the Parrot's Beak, [Vietnamese] camp inmates 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 were just two examples. Reliable journalistic testimonies reported their impressions immediately after visiting this or that place similar to those just cited: "It looked and smelt like a slaughterhouse"⁹⁷⁶.

It is clear that the brutality of Lon Nol's troops was directed not only at the Vietnamese: "communist prisoners were routinely killed"; in addition, the perpetrators of those deaths enjoyed photographing themselves proud and smiling while exhibiting the severed heads of guerrillas⁹⁷⁷. On the other hand, it would be wrong to attribute exclusively to the Asians the atrocities occurring in Cambodia and all of Indochina. An American professor made a chilling reference, in a magazine of his country, to 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"⁹⁷⁸.

At this point a new question is raised: was there a link between the first act of the Cambodian tragedy and the subsequent ones? In an effort to minimize such a link, the book I quote is not without contradictions or vacillations: “The bombing may have helped create a climate conducive to extremism. But the ground war would have done that anyway”. Was the “ground war” a necessary evil? Wasn’t it for the sake of war, as such, that it would begin? “The equation, ‘No Vietnam war, no Khmers Rouges’, is simplistic, but it reflects an undeniable truth”⁹⁷⁹. The English journalist and writer finds it difficult to admit, however the embarrassment of his words implies that the primary responsibility for the tragedy could be found in Washington. And from his story comes an even more disturbing truth than the usual simplifications. This is how the book on Cambodia recounts the capture of Phnom Penh by the guerrillas: after all, everything “could have been far, far worse”⁹⁸⁰. At least in terms of the very first phase of the management of power, it is confirmed that moderation in Pol Pot could hardly have been recognized by the Washington leaders!

On the other hand, the new rulers were facing real and dramatic problems: would the US begin a new wave of terrorist bombings? And how could an urban population that had grown inordinately be fed, with an agriculture devastated because of the transformation of the country into “the valleys of the moon”? How could they meet the threat of the CIA, which “had established secret radio terminals and clandestine spy cells” in the cities?⁹⁸¹ Of course, Pol Pot’s extremist and messianic populism also contributed to the decision to evacuate the cities, but this attitude was fueled by the spectacle of the terribly overcrowded cities, exposed to the threat of the enemy and surrounded by chaos, with a population largely unable to develop any productive function.

In conclusion: why does the moral judgment of Pol Pot have to be more severe than that of Nixon and Kissinger (who were responsible for the war)? The same English author whom I quote, while on one hand rejecting the intentional explanation of the massacres to which Pol Pot’s adventure had led (“it was never CPK [the Cambodian Communist Party] policy”; “the goal was not to destroy but to transmute”), in terms of the ferocity of the US war seen from afar: “Bombing became a virility symbol”⁹⁸². It should be added that after his taking of power, during the subsequent conflict with Vietnam, Pol Pot was supported by the US politically and diplomatically. But the dominant ideology silences the principal and decisive role of Nixon and Kissinger in the Cambodian tragedy. Instead, the barbarians are always outside the West, and whenever political

leaders are criminalized, the criminals are always revolutionary leaders, never the ones responsible for wars.

This hypocrisy is even more disgusting due to the fact that while Pol Pot had stopped torturing and killing, the effects of the US-led war continued to remain in force. “People are dying today throughout Indochina from starvation, disease, and unexploded ordnance”⁹⁸³. At least with regard to Vietnam, we must take into account the calculation made some time ago by a conservative French newspaper, according to which thirty years after the end of hostilities, there were still “four million” victims with their bodies wrecked by the “terrible Agent Orange” (referring to the color of the dioxin dropped by American planes on an entire people)⁹⁸⁴. And in Cambodia? Let us leave the physical damage aside. How many Cambodians still suffer from devastating and “irreversible psychological damage” caused by the bombing?⁹⁸⁵ A conclusion is reached: concentrating solely on Pol Pot means being content with a half-truth, that actually ends up constituting a total lie that obscures the main perpetrators of the horror.

Socialism and Nazism, Aryans and Anglo-Celts

Having assimilated the “monsters of totalitarianism”, the ideology dominant today goes even further. Besides the people who historically embodied it, communism as such is closely connected by elective affinities and kinship ties with Nazism. The most insistent in this direction is Conquest, who begins his “proof” by saying of Hitler: “And though he hated ‘Jewish’ Communism, he did not hate Communists”⁹⁸⁶. The hostility between the two political movements would be only a mirage. What can we say about this new theorem?

Immediately after taking power, the Führer explained to the top leaders of the armed forces that he primarily intended to liquidate the “poison” represented by “pacifism, Marxism, and Bolshevism”⁹⁸⁷. A few days later, Göring further clarified the new government’s program against Marxism (and Bolshevism): “Not only will we annihilate this plague; we will pluck the word Marxism from every book. In fifty years, no man in Germany will know what the term means”⁹⁸⁸. On the eve of Operation Barbarossa, Goebbels wrote in his diary:

Bolshevism is dead (ist gewesen). Thus we will fulfill our real task before history [...]. The Bolshevik poison must be expelled from Europe. Against

this undertaking, even Churchill or Roosevelt have little to object to. Perhaps we can also convince the German episcopate of both denominations to bless this war as the will of God [...]. Now we are really annihilating everything we have fought against all our lives. I have spoken with the Führer and he is in full agreement with me⁹⁸⁹.

These were not mere words, as evidenced by the systematic annihilation of the Communist cadres ordered by Hitler shortly before Operation Barbarossa. There is more: “By the end of 1941 the Germans had captured 3 million Soviet prisoners. By February 1942, 2 million of those POWs were dead, mainly from starvation, disease and maltreatment. In addition, the Germans simply executed those prisoners they suspected were communists”⁹⁹⁰. That is, already within the very first months of Operation Barbarossa, the Nazis had killed or caused the death of more than two million Soviets, executing communists first. And that was not all. While forced into hiding to escape the “final solution”, Klemperer, the well-known German intellectual of Jewish origin we have already discussed, wrote a journal entry which we should consider. It was August 1942 and Zeiss-Ikon was using the forced labor of Polish, French, Danish, Jewish, and Russian workers; the situation of the last was particularly hard: “They are so hungry that their Jewish workmates help them. It’s forbidden; but people drop a slice of bread under the table, after a while the Russian woman bends down and disappears into the toilet with it.”⁹⁹¹. Therefore, according to this testimony, the condition of Russian (or Soviet) slaves was even worse than the Jewish slaves.

In his lapidary statements, Conquest does not stop halfway. He must prove the theorem of the elective affinities between communism and Nazism beyond Stalin’s personality and the borders of the Soviet Union. Of course the “long and formal mutual hostility” between the two “totalitarian parties” was a mere show. The reality was much different: “Gramsci, for example, was one of Mussolini’s closest comrades”⁹⁹². And yet, everyone should know that while the communist leader languished in fascist prisons, his tormentor was being praised by the highest representatives of the liberal world. In particular, consider Churchill, who declared of the *Duce* in 1933: “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”⁹⁹³. Four years later, while fascist Italy was carrying out the conquest of Ethiopia with barbaric methods, and was deeply involved in the overthrow of the Spanish Republic, the English statesman

defended his statement: “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, comprehension, self-control and perseverance which he exemplifies”⁹⁹⁴.

In particular we should read the account given by Croce towards the end of World War II. The object of his criticism was “the indulgent attitude of the British Tories toward the leaders of Germany, Italy, and Spain”⁹⁹⁵. Additionally, at least when it came to Italian fascism, England went further: “its politicians, and some of the most important of them, honored and pampered fascism; they visited its leader and some were even decorated with fascist emblems”⁹⁹⁶. Indeed, Mussolini “received the homage of the whole world, and most of all the British politicians, and [...], so I am told by people who live in England, the English public still considers him a great man”⁹⁹⁷. The pro-fascist attitude of the West even founds its philosophical consecration. Consider an author like Ludwig von Mises, who still is considered a master of liberalism and in 1927 applauded Mussolini’s coup d’état, which had eliminated the communist danger and saved civilization: “The merit that Fascism has thereby won for itself will live on eternally in history”⁹⁹⁸.

Hitler himself was portrayed in flattering tones by Churchill in 1937, who appreciated not only his “highly competent” politics but also his “agreeable manner”, “disarming smile”, and a “subtle personal magnetism” that was difficult to escape⁹⁹⁹. More emphatic were the words of former Prime Minister David Lloyd George, who spoke of the Führer as a “great man”; meanwhile, shortly before the war began, the program announced by *Mein Kampf* (of the subjugation and enslavement of the Slavs) was considered acceptable by the British ambassador in Berlin, provided of course that it was not “simultaneously designed against [the British Empire]”¹⁰⁰⁰. In any case, regardless of how the Führer was judged, the opinion expressed by the American ambassador in Paris in 1938 was to do everything possible to build a common front against “Asian despotism”, in order to save “European civilization” (see above, p. 180). However, Gramsci wrote in his *Prison Notebooks* in 1935: “after the demonstrations of brutality and unprecedented ignominy of German ‘culture’ dominated by Hitlerism”, it was time for everyone to take note of how “fragile modern culture is”¹⁰⁰¹.

Finally, to complete the crusade, which, besides communism, also targets all

currents related to socialism in any way, Conquest denounces “eugenics, which was fashionable even with the Fabians, with all its racist implications”¹⁰⁰². At this point the *tour de force* reaches its climax, and now any vague whim of reforming existing capitalist society is enough to be equated with Hitler’s relatives or twins. Of course, empirical research poses an obstacle to this line of argument: as a term, even before it was a “science”, eugenics was born in England liberal and immediately found great success in the United States. Austrian and German historians referred explicitly to the American Republic when, even prior to Hitler, they recommended “racial hygiene”: in resemblance to what was taking place across the Atlantic, rules were introduced in Austria and Germany prohibiting sexual and marital relations between different races of unequal status. It is no coincidence that the key term of the Third Reich’s eugenics and racial program, *Untermensch*, is simply the translation of the English *Under Man*, a neologism coined by Lothrop Stoddard, an author celebrated in both the US and Germany, and consecrated by two American presidents (Harding and Hoover) as well as by the Führer of the Third Reich, who received him personally and with full honors¹⁰⁰³. It is worth noting, however, that the person who criticized this current of thought, which celebrated white Nordic supremacy and defended eugenics, was Antonio Gramsci, the communist theorist and leader especially criticized by Conquest¹⁰⁰⁴.

To this author, obsessed with discovering in the remotest places unthinkable movements and figures with ideological affinities with Nazism, I would offer a suggestion: he should try submitting his books to the same treatment he applies to every book with a minimally socialist orientation. The thesis formulated in one of Conquest’s last publications is revealing: real civilization finds its most highly-formed expression in the “English-speaking community” and the supremacy of that community has a precise ethnic basis, consisting of the “Anglo-Celtic culture”¹⁰⁰⁵. The Anglo-Celtic mythology outlined here evokes Aryan mythology. There remains just one more detail. Aryan mythology, appreciated by a long tradition developed on both sides of the Atlantic, and then leading to Nazism, tended to be identified with white mythology; in any event, it paid tribute to the Nordic peoples and to all peoples who had emerged from Germanic soil, thus including the English and the Americans. The Anglo-Celtic community, however, is defined in contrast not only to the barbarians outside the West, but also to continental Europe. The club of the truly civilized peoples that Conquest defends is certainly the most exclusive.

The anti-communist Nuremberg and the denial of the principle of *tu quoque*

By now the tendency is clear. In the victors' camp, more than a few voices were raised recommending or demanding a kind of anti-communist Nuremberg, and this is the orientation that inspires the dominant ideology and historiography. We know that, during the Nuremberg trials, the accused Nazis were denied the possibility of using the principle of *tu quoque*, that is, they were not allowed to deny their own crimes by drawing attention to the analogous crimes committed by their accusers. The Tokyo trials were carried out the same way. Obviously, this was the justice of the victors. On the other hand, with the end of a gigantic conflict which had acquired the dimensions of an international civil war and the form of a planetary confrontation between revolution and counter-revolution (consider the Nazi theorization of the right of the master race to enslave "inferior races", an essential and terrible step backwards in the process of abolishing colonial slavery), we see in several countries (e.g. Italy) the emergence of revolutionary tribunals which, in the case of Germany and Japan (where the home front has resisted to the end), were imposed from above and from outside. The current historiographical proceedings of the anti-communist Nuremberg are the replica as farce of a great tragedy. A historical judgment is obviously unthinkable without a reconstruction of the climate that dominated an era: comparison and recourse to the principle of *tu quoque* are absolutely unavoidable. And it is in light of these criteria that I have tried to analyze the usual criminalization of the history that began with the October Revolution, and in particular, of Stalin.

On the terrorist methods through which he exercised power, there is no doubt. But we introduce the principle of *tu quoque*. We already know the hundreds of thousands of casualties caused by American bombing in Cambodia. Here I want to draw 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 remembered. 'Their brains were completely disoriented... They couldn't even hold down a meal.'

And many, "half-crazed with terror", never failed to recover¹⁰⁰⁶.

Terror is not always exercised in an "aseptic" manner, through bombs from

above. For the US, the 20th century began while it was still fighting guerrillas in the Philippines, repressing them, according to an American historian, with the “[butchery of entire villages](#)” or with the execution of all males over ten years of age¹⁰⁰⁷.

At other times, terror is exercised by delegating the dirtiest tasks to third parties, which in any case are assisted in their work. Let us see how the US got rid of its political opponents in Indonesia: hundreds of thousands of communists were killed after the 1965 coup, orchestrated and supported by Washington. The use of terror and even sadism was systematic:

The mass killings began in late October 1965 [...]. Lists compiled by the military were given to right-wing Muslim groups, who were armed with *parangs* and transported in army trucks to villages, where they killed with bloody mutilation. Schoolchildren were asked to identify “Communists,” and many so identified were shot on the spot by army personnel, along with their whole families. Many people were denounced as “Communists” in personal disputes, and “on the basis of one word or the pointing of a finger, people were taken away to be killed.” The killing was on such a huge scale as to raise a sanitation problem in East Java and Northern Sumatra, where the smell of decaying flesh was pervasive and rivers were impassable because of the clogging by human bodies [...]. In 1968 there was a renewal of mass executions, and in one single case in early 1969 army and local civic guards in Central Java “were said to have killed some 3,500 alleged followers of the PKI by means of blows of iron staves in the neck” [...]. According to [Amnesty International]: “[Young girls below the age of 13, old men, people who were frail and ill, were not exempt from torture. It was used not only for interrogation, but also as punishment and with sadistic intent.](#)”¹⁰⁰⁸

Was this a terror that Western liberal countries exercised only outside their national territory? No; just think of the violence that as late as the early decades of the 20th century terrorized blacks and was often staged as a pedagogical mass spectacle:

[Notices of lynchings were printed in local papers, and extra cars added to trains for spectators from miles around, sometimes thousands of them. Schoolchildren 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 and bones, even genitals of the victim, as well as picture postcards of the event¹⁰⁰⁹.

On the other hand, “the final solution of our Indian question” also lasted in Canada after it achieved independence.

Let’s focus on the 1930s, the years in which the Stalinist terror intensified in the USSR. In the US the titles and chronicles of the local newspapers were themselves revealing. “Big Preparation Made for Lynching Tonight”. Not a detail went ignored: “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 stuck to the rules, “no one would be disappointed.” Other headlines: “Lynching Carried Off Almost As Advertised”; “Crowd Cheered and Laughed at Negro’s Horrible Death”; “Heart and Genitals Carved from Lynched Negro’s Corpse”¹⁰¹⁰. It is fair to speak of terror, and not only considering the effects the spectacle had on the black community, with such excessive violence, and gleefully announced in a kind of advertisement insert. There is more. Those who suffered lynching were not only blacks guilty of “rape” or, most often, of consensual sex with a white woman. Much less sufficed to be condemned to death: the “Atlanta Constitution” of July 11, 1934 reported the execution of a 25-year-old black man “accused of writing an ‘indecent and insulting’ letter to a young Hinds County white girl”; in this case the “mob of armed citizens” had contented itself with filling the body of the unfortunate with bullets¹⁰¹¹. In addition to the “guilty”, death, inflicted more or less sadistically, threatened the suspects as well. We continue leafing 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”¹⁰¹². Finally, the violence was not limited to the guilty or the suspected: prior to his lynching, the cabin where the victim’s family lived could be completely burned to ashes¹⁰¹³.

Besides blacks themselves, the terror also struck whites who, by becoming overly acquainted with blacks, become traitors to their race. This is shown in the headline of an article in the *Galveston Tribune* (Texas) of 21 June 1934: “White Girl is Jailed, Negro Friend is Lynched”. The fact was, commented an editorial in the *Chicago Defender* a few days later, that “in the state of Texas, a white woman may associate more freely with a dog than with a Negro”¹⁰¹⁴. And if she

did not keep all this in mind, the terrorist regime of white supremacy would be doubly enraged with her: depriving her of her personal freedom and attacking her loved ones. Thus, the terror fell also on citizens (black and white) who did not undertake any political activity but were found guilty of leading a private life contrary to the norms of society.

“Betrayal” of the white race could take even more serious forms. Communists involved in a campaign against the practice of lynchings were described as “nigger lovers”, and so they were also punished by the white supremacist regime, forced to “[face the possibility of imprisonment, beatings, kidnapping, and even death](#)”¹⁰¹⁵. Again the newspaper headlines of the time are illuminating: “[“A Fear of Communism” Cited as Lynching Cause](#)”¹⁰¹⁶.

Let us return to Stalin’s USSR. There is no doubt that, especially from the forced collectivization of agriculture, the concentration camps saw a terrible expansion, which had already begun immediately after the October Revolution. But we assert the principle of *tu quoque* here. Besides the aforementioned concentration camps of the southern US between the late 19th and early 20th 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 London government maintained order in its colony: in the Kamiti concentration camp, women

were interrogated, beaten, starved, and sentenced to hard labor, including filling mass graves with corpses from other concentration camps. Many gave birth at Kamiti, but the death rate among children was overwhelming. Women buried six out of every six children.¹⁰¹⁷

With regard to genocidal practices as well, the accusation continues to invoke the principle of *tu quoque*. I do not know if the slaughter of communists in Indonesia (promoted or defended by the CIA) can be defined as “the second of the greatest holocausts of the 20th century.” In any case, it was a slaughter carried out without the industrial efficiency of the Nazis, and for that reason had an additional sadism. It should in any case be said that, even after the end of the Third Reich, the interventions of the liberal West in colonies or semi-colonies led not only to the establishment of ferocious dictatorships, but also to collaboration in “acts of genocide”: in Guatemala the Truth Commission can be highlighted, which decided the fate of Mayan Indians guilty of having sympathized with opponents of the US-backed regime¹⁰¹⁸.

To conclude. We have seen how the Jacobins were “frightful cannibals” in the eyes of the Thermidorian bourgeoisie; later, however, the descendants of this bourgeoisie would be denounced by the Paris Commune, due to the “[cannibal exploits of the Versailles banditti](#)”¹⁰¹⁹. Regarding the 20th century, as the civil war intensified, the Bolsheviks called for the struggle against “[bourgeois cannibalism](#)”¹⁰²⁰. Later, as we know, Stalin himself would describe anti-Semitic racism as an expression of “cannibalism”. But today, the tragedy and horror of the island of Nazino, where there were real cases of cannibalism, is used to reduce the history that began with the October Revolution to naked barbarism, and to denounce “red cannibalism”¹⁰²¹.

In fact, episodes of cannibalism had occurred even before then: in 1921 the severity of the famine “[even gave rise to cases of cannibalism](#)”¹⁰²². The following year, Italian philosopher Guido De Ruggiero noted:

The blockade by the Entente, who wanted to annihilate Bolshevism, instead killed Russian men, women, and children; could the poor and hungry possibly have discussed the subtleties of democratic elegance with the same Entente that was starving them to death? Naturally, they conspired with their government, seeing the enemies of their government as their own enemy¹⁰²³.

As can be seen, the liberal philosopher accuses the Entente, rather than the Soviet government. Neither can the “aforementioned cases of cannibalism” that occurred in certain regions of China in 1928¹⁰²⁴ be easily attributed to the communists, who would win power more than twenty years later; if anything the blame should be pointed at the West, which after the Opium Wars had pushed the great Asian country into the abyss. But let us return to the 1930s, moving however from Stalin’s Soviet Union to Franklin D. Roosevelt’s United States. This is how a cruel Alabama mob attacked a black man:

[First they cut off his penis. He was made to eat it. Then they cut off his testicles and made him eat them and say he liked it.](#)

[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 nigger 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 waiting his arrival.

The fun surrounding the cadaver continued for some time, and concluded with the sale of photographs "at fifty cents each"¹⁰²⁵, but here we will stop. It is clear that applying the principle of *tu quoque* has led us to discover in F. D. Roosevelt's US a case of cannibalism caused by a general shortage, by disorganization and famine, but rather of forced auto-cannibalism, organized as a mass spectacle in a society that otherwise was living in comfort.

In conclusion, the usual contrast between the communist movement on one hand and the liberal West on the other, reduces to abstraction, with regard to the latter, the fate of colonial peoples and the measures promulgated in crisis situations that were more or less acute. The comparison between two heterogeneities ends up being Manichean: a world analyzed exclusively from its own internal vision and referring only to its times of normality is triumphantly set against a world that, having questioned the barrier separating the space of the sacred from the space of the profane, the space of the civilized from the space of the barbarians, was forced to confront a prolonged state of emergency and the implacable hostility of the custodians of that exclusive sacred space.

Demonization and hagiography: the example of the "greatest living modern historian"

According to Conquest, the catastrophe of the 20th century actually began with the appearance of the *Communist Manifesto* in the "civil and democratic order" belonging to the West: the ideas espoused by Marx and Engels "have been a major source of trouble in the world over five generations"¹⁰²⁶.

So let us see what the situation was in the world of 1848, the year the fatal *Manifesto* was published. We will start with Great Britain, which for Conquest is one of two centers of the exclusive and superior "Anglo-Celtic" community and thus the nucleus of true civilization. In the mid-19th century, the industrial area

of Manchester and the workers' neighborhoods were, to Tocqueville, a "noisome labyrinth", a "Hades": the squalid shacks were like "the last refuge a man might find between poverty and death". And yet: "the wretched people reduced to living in them can still inspire jealousy of their fellow beings". Now let us move to the workhouses, again reading from the French liberal: they offer a view of the "most hideous and disgusting aspect of wretchedness"; on the one hand the sick were unable to work and waiting for death, and on the other women and girls were crammed "like pigs in the mud of their sty. It is difficult to avoid treading on a half-naked body."

In France the popular classes were not resigned to this condition. And this is how Tocqueville called for confronting the revolt of June 1848: anyone caught "in the act of defense" should be shot on the spot. On the other hand, he would not be content with "palliatives": the centers of subversion had to be dealt with once and for all by not only eliminating the Mountain, of Jacobin inspiration, but also "all the surrounding hills"; there should be no hesitation to apply "a heroic remedy".

In the mid-19th century, Ireland was part of Great Britain, and there we saw the "proto-Eichmann" condemn hundreds of thousands of people to death by starvation. In the other colonies of the United Kingdom, the situation was no better. In 1835 the viceroy informed London of the consequences of the destruction of the local textile artisans, eliminated by the large 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 did not end here. Two years later, certain regions experienced such a terrible famine that—as candidly verified by another British source, fully committed to celebrating the glory of the Empire—"the British residents [...] could not take their evening drive, on account of the smell 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"¹⁰²⁷. The slaughter was not only the result of "objective" economic processes: in New Zealand, observed the *Times* in 1864, settlers, bolstered by the support of the London government, were completing the "exterminating natives".

And now let us see what was happening in the other center of the "Anglo-Celtic" community and "true civilization". When the *Communist Manifesto* appeared in Europe, whatever Conquest may have thought, slavery was flourishing in the United States, where it had been reintroduced shortly before Texas was wrested

from Mexico by force of arms. Just before that, the US, led by Jefferson, wanted to condemn the people of Saint-Domingue (Haiti) to “starvation”, guilty of having broken the chains of slavery. To the tragedy of the blacks was added that of the Indians. With regard to the latter, we mention here only one chapter, as summarized by an American historian: “The destruction and degradation of the California Indians is one of the sorriest blotches on the honor and intelligence of a nation. It was less a matter of war than of ‘sport’.”

With respect to colonial peoples, the brutality of the Western “civil and democratic order” was not only practiced but also explicitly theorized by authors who have nevertheless entered the liberal pantheon without problems. Tocqueville entreated his compatriots to not get up in residual moral scruples and to be aware of reality: to carry out the conquest of Algeria, **which in no case was legal to refuse**, it was inevitable “that crops are burned, silos emptied, and lastly that unarmed men, women and children are seized”. In fact, they would go even further, as stated in the terrible motto: “To destroy anything that resembles a permanent gathering of population or, in other words, a town: I believe it is of the utmost importance not to allow any town to survive, or arise, in the regions controlled by Abd el-Kader [the leader of the resistance]”¹⁰²⁸.

The rose-colored landscape that Conquest presents of the world prior to the publication of the *Communist Manifesto* can be compared with the similar portrait outlined by a critic of abolitionism at the beginning of the 19th century:

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 doors¹⁰²⁹.

Despite this, Conquest the “Cold War veteran” is celebrated as “our greatest living modern historian”, even if it was another court historian who expressed that consideration¹⁰³⁰. It is clear: the *reductio ad Hitlerum* of the history of the

October Revolution, and especially of the figure who led the Soviet Union for longer than any other, is just another side of the coin of the insipid hagiography of the world before 1917 and even before the publication of the *Communist Manifesto*.

Abolitionist revolutions and demonization of the “blancophages” and barbarians

To clarify the logic underlying these ideological processes, the comparative approach can be helpful once again. There were three great revolutionary movements that with different modalities radically challenged the slavery or semi-slavery of colonial peoples, and the racist regime of white supremacy that existed, on a national or international level. First we must think of the great revolution of black slaves that broke out in Saint-Domingue after the French Revolution: led by Toussaint Louverture, the “black Jacobin”, it led to the proclamation of the independence of Haiti, the first country in the American continent to shake off the institution of slavery. The second great revolutionary movement was the one in the US that, gaining momentum from the abolitionist agitation of the Civil War, led to the establishment for a brief period of time (the years of Reconstruction) of a multiracial society, within which blacks not only enjoyed full civil rights but also full political rights. Finally, we must refer to the October Revolution, which urged slaves in the colonies to break their chains and gave intense help to what were hitherto “inferior races” in the struggle for decolonization and emancipation.

All three of these great movements have suffered, and in part still suffer, either direct erasure or banishment to the darkest corners of history. Take the revolution led by Toussaint Louverture. In the early decades of the 19th century, those who sympathized with him were described as “blancophages and murderers”¹⁰³¹. Speaking of Saint-Domingue, Tocqueville simply alluded to the “bloody catastrophe that has ended his existence.” Paradoxically, the island ceased to exist at the very moment in which it ended, for the first time in the Americas, the institution of slavery! But perhaps to depict the climate of the time a famous novel by Heinrich von Kleist should be mentioned (*Betrothal in Santo Domingo*), set in the early 19th century, “when blacks were murdering whites” and in fact a “slaughter of whites” was carried out on behalf of a “general spiral of revenge”. The criminalization of this great revolution has remained unsolved for a long time. It continued into the early 20th century with Lothrop Stoddard:

with the revolution of the black slaves of Saint-Domingue, the theory of white supremacy also condemned the second and third stages of the anti-slavery and anti-racist struggle, and consequently described as traitors to the white race both the French Jacobins as well as the American representatives of radical abolitionism and advocates of racial equality, like the Bolsheviks.

In speaking of so-called Reconstruction, the warning of an eminent American historian should be well heeded: “[the South, despite its military defeat, had long been winning the ideological Civil War](#)”¹⁰³². It would appear that at least in this case there should be no doubt: while it put behind it centuries of slavery per se, the Reconstruction would then be forced to give way to a regime of anti-black horror so fierce that it has been described as the most tragic moment in African American history. However, Wilson would summarize this historical period thusly: “**Domestic slaves were almost uniformly dealt with indulgently and even affectionately by their masters**”. After emancipation would come Reconstruction, during which political majorities formed in the South that relied on the black population: it was “**an extraordinary carnival of public crime**” that fortunately ended with “**the natural, inevitable ascendancy of the whites**”¹⁰³³. What horrified this member of the American and Western pantheon is not the period of the slaveowner’s absolute power over his human herd, nor the period in which the regime of white supremacy organized the lynching and slow martyrdom of former slaves as mass entertainment; what was synonymous with “public crime” was the brief period after the Civil War during which there was a concern for taking human rights seriously.

For a while Black Reconstruction or Radical Reconstruction was considered synonymous with “totalitarianism” or as a phenomenon that preceded “fascism and Nazism”: imposed as the conclusion of a war quite similar to the “total war of the Nazis”, it attempted to achieve the principle of racial equality and racial mixing by force, trampling on the will of the majority of the (white) population, and resorting to the help of savage populations, who contributed “their physical force to the defeat of civilization by barbarism”. Luckily, ready to answer or contain this horror were the knights of the Ku Klux Klan, immaculate and unafraid, the organization that continued to enforce the “**chivalric order**” that had long characterized the southern US! These were the motivations stirred up by a historiography that continued to be influential well after the collapse of the Third Reich¹⁰³⁴.

Finally, finishing the list of revolutions is the one that began in October 1917,

urging slaves of the colonies to break their chains, and culminating with the arrival of Stalin's autocracy.

Naturally, this is not in any way an idealization of the leaders of these three great emancipation struggles. A prominent historian of the black slave revolution of Saint-Domingue argues against “the current legend that the abolition of slavery resulted in the destruction of whites”¹⁰³⁵; but it is undeniable that there were massacres on one side and on the other. There is also no doubt about the then unheard-of brutality with which the American Civil War was carried out by the North, especially by Sherman, who explicitly proposed attacking civilians and saying he would “make Georgia howl”¹⁰³⁶; it is no coincidence that Hitler seemed to have considered it a model. Finally, the ruthless nature of the dictatorship exercised first by Lenin and then by Stalin is not up for discussion. At least seemingly, in the second of these conflicts, the slaveholding South was also defeated in the historiographical plane: it is no longer politically correct to lament the demise of slavery or of the regime of white supremacy. However, the reading of “Stalinism” (and the history of the October Revolution) as purely criminal has become a cliché, as has the assimilation of Stalin to Hitler, who, inheriting and radicalizing the colonial tradition, explicitly claimed the right of the “master race” to decimate and enslave the “inferior races”: this is the sign that the *laudatores* of colonialism have not lost the political battle, much less the historiographical one.

World history as a “grotesque succession of monsters” and as “teratology”?

The historical movement that is perennially doomed to *damnatio memoriae* is the one that, more radically than any other, questioned the arrogance of the “master race” that had dominated for centuries, from the classical colonial tradition to the Third Reich's attempt to radicalize it and enforce it in the very heart of Europe.

However, there is no historical movement that cannot be subjected to a similar criminalization. Take liberalism as an example. If we ignore the pages it wrote on itself (the need for limitation of power, the rule of law, and understanding the powerful stimuli that entail the development of productive forces and the wealth of the market, competition and individual initiative), and concentrate solely on the fate inflicted on colonial peoples (for centuries subject to slavery, more or less brutal forms of forced labor, and genocidal practices or even “holocausts”),

to use the expression most commonly used by historians), liberalism too can be read more or less as criminal.

In the current climate of the “war on terror” there is of course no shortage of books that, based on suicide bombings and the tragedy of Beslan, reconstruct the spread of Islam as the history of a bloody and ruthless conquest, savagely beating the defeated and leaving behind only an immense trail of blood. The role of Islam in the creation of the great multiethnic and multicultural civilization that characterized Spain prior to the Christian Reconquista is hidden and forgotten, just like its role in radically criticizing the caste society in India, and more generally the promotion, from as early as the 19th century, the struggle for the emancipation of colonial peoples.

To the opposite side, however, we can cite the publication of a monumental *Criminal History of Christianity*, which revolves entirely around the charge of intolerance and the violence that is inherent to a claim to know the one true god, and contains an indignant condemnation of the crusades of extermination (carried out against infidels abroad and heretics at home), the religious wars, the Inquisition, the witch hunt, the legitimation of Western colonial expansionism with its trail of horrors, and the endorsement given to tyrannical and bloody regimes in the 20th century¹⁰³⁷. So, again, insolence is interspersed with obliteration: according to its white-washed history, while preaching the idea of equality between men and fostering the abolitionist and anti-slavery movement in the 18th and 19th centuries, Christianity constructed an essential chapter of the process of formation of democratic society. This was well understood, in his lucid hatred, by Nietzsche, who precisely because of this could denounce the intrinsic violence and crime that, despite appearances, characterize Christianity and even before it, the Judaism of the prophets: while using the idea of equality and rejecting wealth, power, and the general condition of nobility, the Hebrew prophets were primarily responsible for the massacres that took place during the peasant wars, the Puritan Revolution, the French Revolution, and the Paris Commune. This was a historical thread that 20th-century anti-Semitism and Hitler successively extended into the communist movement and the “Judeo-Bolshevik” revolution of October 1917.

On the other hand, the communist movement has often been compared to early Christianity or to Islam: in this way the fresco is completed of world history understood as the world history of crime. From this procession of crimes, neither the motivations nor the reasons for its uninterrupted duration can be understood,

because history as a whole appears as, to borrow from Hegel, a “[slaughter-bench](#)” of planetary dimensions¹⁰³⁸, or an immense, unfathomable *mysterium iniquitatis*. At this point, as we can observe with Gramsci, the “past” seems “[irrational](#)” and “[monstrous](#)”: history as a whole is a “[grotesque succession of monsters](#)”; a “[teratology](#)”.¹⁰³⁹

Authors and figures committed to defending in some way the honor of communism react to this criminalization by distancing themselves from the blackest pages in the history of that movement, describing them as a betrayal or degeneration of the original ideals of the Bolshevik Revolution or the teachings of Lenin or Marx. In reality, this approach produces an outcome that is not very different from what we have just analyzed. Are all the pages ruthlessly described in the previously-mentioned *Criminal History of Christianity* a “betrayal” or a “degeneration” of Christianity? Was the Reformation (and the principle of freedom of the Christian solemnly proclaimed by Luther) “degenerated” by the regimes that later supported it as Protestantism? Following this line, Cromwell was a “degenerate” compared to the initial leaders of the Puritan Revolution, and the Jacobin Terror was a “degeneration” of the ideas of 1789. Is current Islamic fundamentalism also a “degeneration” of the Koran and the teachings of Mohammed? Consistent with this approach, anyone could consider the enslavement and annihilation of colonial peoples by the liberal West a degeneration of “liberalism”. And so the “traitors” would be Washington, Jefferson, Madison, and all the slaveowners, such as Franklin, for whom “it was in the designs of Providence to extirpate these savages [the Native Americans] in order to make room for the tillers of the earth.” Locke, too, could be considered a traitor to liberalism, despite being considered the father of this school of thought; not only did he legitimize the expropriation (and deportation) of Native Americans, but he was also, as noted by a prominent investigator (David B. Davis), “the last great philosopher trying to justify absolute and perpetual slavery.” If we proceed in this way, then, we would transform the pantheon of the great spirits of liberalism into a gallery of vile traitors.

This argument becomes equally debatable if one reflects on the fact that for a great liberal theorist of slavery as John C. Calhoun, it was precisely the abolitionists, with their Jacobinism and anti-slavery fanaticism, who betrayed the liberal ideals of tolerance and respect for property rights in all its forms. The approach does not become more convincing if we invoke it on the history of Marxism and communism. Especially from the 20th Congress of the CPSU, Stalin was the criminal and traitor par excellence. But we must not forget that,

according to the leaders of the Chinese or Albanian Communist Parties, it was precisely the champions of de-Stalinization who were guilty of treason and “revisionism”. Nowadays the process of criminalization is also targeting Lenin, Mao Zedong, Tito, and Pol Pot, and not even Ho Chi Minh and Castro can be saved from it. If the category of treason is used, the result ends up being rather poor.

The history of the communist movement as a crime, written triumphally by the dominant ideology, is simply renamed (in the works of those who are barely recognized by the dominant ideology) as the history of the betrayal of the original ideals. The results in reading liberalism or Christianity would not be very different if the intention is to describe the darkest pages of one or the other as an expression of the betrayal of the originating ideals. In conclusion, the approach being criticized here commits the error of throwing away real and profane history, replacing it with the history of an unfortunate and mysterious corruption, and the distortion of doctrines that are placed a priori in a limbo of purity and holiness.

However, theory is never innocent. The reading of Soviet Russia’s history in terms of “treason” and “degeneration” of the noble originating ideals is, for the most part, contemptuously rejected by current historiography, which is entirely committed not only to criminalizing the Bolsheviks as a whole, but also locating the theoretical assumptions behind the terror and the Gulag in the authors to whom the Bolsheviks referred. While we must avoid drawing railway lines of continuity and confusing the different responsibilities between them, it is still valid and even mandatory to inquire about the role (indirect and mediated) fulfilled by Marx and Engels, to reject the myth of innocence and to investigate the true history behind their success and the reasons for that success. But then we must proceed similarly with all the great intellectuals, as well as those placed in the context of a different and opposed tradition of thought. Take Locke, for example. Is there a relationship between his refusal to extend the tolerance or even “compassion” to “papists”, and the massacres suffered by Catholics in Ireland? What link is there between his theorizing of slavery in the colonies and the slave trade, or what current African American activists prefer to define as the Black Holocaust? Or, referring to the historical time of Marx and Engels: should a theorist, like John Stuart Mill, of the West’s “despotism” towards the “childlike” races (from whom “absolute obedience” was expected), and of the benefit of slavery for the unworking and undisciplined “savage tribes”, be considered co-responsible for the terror and massacres that accompanied colonial expansion?

COLONIAL EXPANSION:

No movement and no person can escape these questions. We have seen Nietzsche rely on the incendiary invectives against power and wealth that were made by the Hebrew prophets and the fathers of the church to explain the disastrous 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 an often-forgotten detail: the Old Testament is an integral part of the sacred texts of that religion, and it legitimizes and celebrates the “wars of the Lord” in its crudest forms. Here, too, it is incorrect to oppose the mediocrity or the horror of real history against the nobility of the original ideals.

Once we have confirmed the non-innocence of theory, we must distinguish between degrees of responsibility. Between the 17th and 18th centuries, the bodies of many black slaves were branded with the seal of the RAC, the initials of the Royal African Company (the company which operated the slave trade), of which Locke was a shareholder. The least we can say is that the authors of the *Communist Manifesto* did not benefit from the forced labor that characterizes the Gulag decades after their deaths. Marx and Engels can be accused of having legitimized beforehand the violence that would be carried out in any case after their deaths and decades later. Mill, however, proceeded to legitimize practices that were contemporaneous with him; in a similar way, we can read Tocqueville’s explicit recommendation of more or less genocidal colonial practices (the systematic destruction of the urban centers of the rebel-controlled area) referring not to the future but rather to his immediate present¹⁰⁴⁰. That is, for the ignominies of colonialism, which developed under their gaze and perhaps with their direct approval, the representatives of the liberal tradition cited here bear a far more direct responsibility than what is attributed to Marx and Engels for the ignominies of the Soviet regime and of “Stalinism”. If the road that led from Marx to Stalin and from Stalin to the Gulag is problematic, uneven, and in any case mediated by completely unpredictable events such as the World War and the permanent state of exception, the line connecting Locke with the slave trade, or Mill and Tocqueville with the forced labor imposed on indigenous peoples, or with colonial massacres, is immediately apparent.

As a theory, utopianism cannot claim innocence either. On this point the liberals are right, although they make use of such an argument dogmatically, applying it only to their adversaries and not to themselves: what terrible human and social costs have been brought about by the utopianism of a self-regulating market,

with its rejection of all state intervention, a utopianism to which England remained true even when, in the mid-19th century, a blight destroyed the potato crop and consequently ended the lives of hundreds of thousands of Irish? Or, to give a more recent example: how many catastrophes have been caused and continue to be caused by the utopianism (defended by Wilson, even before Bush Jr., apart from famous philosophers like Popper) of perpetual peace achieved by the global spread of democracy through force of arms? To avoid falling into precisely this dogmatism, a similar question should also be formulated regarding the history of the Soviet Union. There is no lack of people who read the history of the country born of the October Revolution and lament the progressive “betrayal” of Marx and Engels’ ideas; in fact, in some respects it was precisely these “originating” ideas (the messianic expectation of a stateless society with no juridical norms, no national boundaries, no market or money, ultimately lacking in any real conflict) that have played a nefarious role, hindering the move to a condition of normalcy, and prolonging and aggravating the state of emergency (provoked by the crisis of the old regime, by the war and the successive aggressions).

Although they are different from each other, the two here approaches criticized, which respectively make use of the categories of crime (or criminal insanity) and treason, share a common characteristic: they tend to focus attention on the criminal or treasonous nature of individual personalities. In fact, they give up on understanding the real historical development and the historical effectiveness of social, political, and religious movements that have exerted global appeal, and whose influence spread over quite a wide arc of time.

Such an approach is also inconclusive and misleading when applied to the Third Reich (which moreover only lasted 12 years and only managed a certain appeal towards the “master race”). It is too easy to attribute the ignominy of Nazism to Hitler exclusively, hiding the fact that he took from the world that preceded him, and radicalized, two central elements of his ideology: the celebration of the white race and the West’s colonizing mission, now called to extend its dominance to Eastern Europe as well; and the reading of the October Revolution as a Judeo-Bolshevik plot that, by encouraging colonial peoples to revolt and undermining the natural hierarchy of races—and more generally infecting the body of society like a pathogen—constituted a terrible threat to civilization that must be confronted at any price, including the “final solution”. Therefore, understanding the genesis of the horror of the Third Reich is not a matter of reconstructing Hitler’s childhood or adolescence, just as it makes no sense to use

Stalin's beginnings to analyze an institution (the Gulag) that was rooted in the history of tsarist Russia and that, in different ways each time, was also used by countries of the liberal West, both during its colonial expansion and during the state of emergency caused by the Second Thirty Years' War. It would be equally misleading to try to explain the enslavement and extermination of Native Americans by first starting with the individual characteristics of the founding fathers of the US, or to try to deduce the strategic bombings and atomic bombings used against German and Japanese cities by referring to the evil natures of Churchill, F. D. Roosevelt, and Truman. And it would be just as foolish to try to explain the horror of Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo using the childhood or adolescence of Bush Jr.

But let us go back to Stalin. Is rejecting the approach of interpreting everything as crime or criminal madness, or as betrayal of the original ideals, synonymous with being morally obtuse? Modern historians still debate about people and events from almost two millennia ago: should we endorse without hesitation the sinister portrait that the senatorial aristocracy on the one hand, and the Christians on the other, helped to draw of Nero? In particular: do we have to unquestioningly accept the Christian propaganda that accused the Roman emperor of lighting Rome on fire in order to blame and persecute the innocent followers of the new religion, or perhaps were there—as some researchers suggest—apocalyptic and fundamentalist currents underneath early Christianity, who aspired to see the capital of superstition and sin reduced to ashes, and wished to hasten the fulfillment of their teleological-eschatological yearnings? [1041](#) Let us leap forward several centuries. Regarding the great anti-Christian persecution unleashed by Diocletian, historians continue to wonder: was it just the result of an inexplicable and alien theological hatred of Roman traditions, or was there an important role played by real concern for the future of the state, whose military strength he saw undermined by the Christian pacifist agitation, precisely at the moment when the danger of barbarian invasions became more threatening? It is difficult to accuse the historians who pose these questions of wanting to minimize the persecution suffered by Christians, or to throw them back to the beasts and the most atrocious torments.

Unfortunately, it is easier to critically analyze the sacred history of Christianity than to express doubts about the sacred aura that tends to envelop the history of the West and the country that leads it; because of the much larger temporal distance and the much smaller impact on the interests and passions of the present, it is easier to understand the reasoning of those who were defeated by Christianity than to seek to clarify the reasoning of those whose defeat has paved

Circumstantially than to seek to clarify the reasoning of those whose defeat has paved the way for the triumph of the “American century”. This explains the influence that demonization and hagiography continue to hold in the interpretation of the 20th century, and the persistent fortune that the negative cult of heroes enjoys.

From Stalin to Gorbachev: how to end an empire

Luciano Canfora

It was a rule rigorously respected by historians of the Empire to say nothing about the reigning prince or emperor while he was alive. This was the task of the next historian, who would, in turn, keep quiet about the prince who ruled in his time. The fate of Justinian was, in this respect, somewhat different but very symptomatic. Procopius of Caesarea, the very historian who circulated many history books extolling Justinian's greatness, wisdom, victorious wars, and so on while he was alive, was simultaneously keeping, for circulation after the prince's death, a *Secret History* in which Justinian was torn apart and made to appear guilty of every ignominy, weakness, and useless cruelty, in addition to the vanity of taking credit that was due to others. The *Secret History* was written around 558; Justinian died on November 14, 565 at the age of eighty-three. Upon his death, the *Secret History* demolished the victor over the Goths, the reconqueror of Italy, and the restorer of the unity of the empire. Modern figures can oscillate freely between the two extremes, as between the two descriptions of Stalin written by Nikita Khrushchev: on the one hand, the Report to the Nineteenth Congress of the CPSU (October 1952), in which all the credit for the economic, military, and social strength of the USSR was attributed to "our dear leader and teacher, Comrade Stalin"; on the other, the *Secret Speech*, delivered at a private meeting at the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU (February 1956), about three years after Stalin's death. Here, as in Procopius' *Secret History*, the "beloved teacher" is presented as a ridiculous, cowardly, and bloodthirsty tyrant (so much so as to make it almost incomprehensible how he had been able to govern for so long and with Khrushchev's unlimited support). The view, in the Tolstoyan mold, that is aimed at annihilating the "greatness" of the "great personalities" of history is certainly a good antidote to heroic historiography. But it fails to account for the intertwining of individual meanness and political efficacy that causes some personalities to be placed at the epicenter of epochal events and transformations, which future generations continue to consider as such in spite of all possible "secret histories".

Santo Mazzarino—one of the most important Italian historians—used to place Stalin by Justinian's side, both of them having been great builders, great despots, and great intolerants.

and great intolerants.

Between 565, the year of Justinian's death, and the brief and disastrous reign of Foca (607-610), the great accomplishments of Justinian crumbled away. The reconquest of the West, and especially of Italy, was undone. Foca was unable, during his short reign, to confront insurrections, external attacks, and the spread of growing anarchy, until in 610, Heraclius, son of the governor of the province of Africa, conquered Constantinople unopposed and founded a new dynasty. The comparison, which is of course only partly accurate, like all historiographical comparisons, is between Justinian and Stalin on the one hand, and Foca and Gorbachev on the other.

Simplifications are not always enlightening, but they can provide a clue. What is not good, in my opinion, is that we still often give up on talking about Stalin clearheadedly, as is however done for Robespierre or other "bloodthirsty" defenders of the "revolution". One is lifted up, in place of weighing the pros and cons.

On the other hand, if *Time* declared Stalin "man of the year" in 1944, there must have been some reason. If European antifascism professed, during the years of the Nazi-fascist danger, clear words of appreciation and recognition for him, there must have been some reason. However, what some desire is that Stalin's deeds be assimilated with the uniquely nefarious and destructive ones of Hitler. Otherwise it would not be by chance that Nazism brought the world to war and catastrophe and the USSR did not. In the end it dissolved, without dragging its opponents and the world into the abyss.

Stalin took the line of action of staying out of conflicts, up to the point of blindness of ignoring the warnings that came to him from various places in June 1941.

On management of power in the USSR, I will not be able to summarize in only a few lines the results that many researchers have provided in previous decades. I will only say that the questions are twofold: a) what models of "popular power" (in fact, democracy) emerged from the 1917 Revolution; b) what actual praxis was established in the USSR and in its satellite countries. Talking about the first point is, I believe, legitimate (just think of the study of constitutional rights surrounding the legal codes in the USSR). At the same time, it is necessary to compare these texts and those efforts with the hard lessons of reality and with actual praxis. I wrote in my book about democracy that "in the last period of

Stalin's rule, the foundations were laid for the ruin of the system." And in fact there had been, since the break with Trotsky and the outlawing of the CPSU's internal opposition, an uninterrupted civil war waged fiercely and without excluding hard knocks, which after the victory of 1945 would have had to be exhausted or lessened. Perpetuating the instruments was his undoing. On this concept of civil war, referred to the entire period from 1927 to the eve of World War I, I like to remember the pages of Feuchtwanger (*Moscow 1937*), the Jewish writer exiled to the US, where he lived until his death. Everything said here has a single premise: to discuss history. But to discuss one must know the meaning of words. I quite enjoy observing the misunderstandings that provoked the expression I use, "to create a myth around a divided Poland." Some thought I was saying that Poland had not been divided! However, in Italian that phrase means that an (undisputed) fact is "mystified", that is, occupies the entire scene, is converted into fact par excellence. And this was *one of the aspects* of the pact of August 1939. The other aspects were: the desire to destroy the USSR sooner or later, well-rooted in Hitler's mind (as documented by Kershaw in his notable books), as well as the lack of desire by the English and French to in fact reach an anti-German pact with Stalin (Churchill shows this clearly in his *The Gathering Storm*). Not to mention the Polish hostility when Soviet troops passed through its territory in case of conflict with Germany, nor the Polish participation, in the previous year, in the division of Czechoslovakia. Let us take an example on another matter: Bacque documented in the book *Der geplante Tod (Other Losses)* the wiping out by the US of hundreds of thousands of German prisoners. Tibullus would have said these were "ferrous" times. To stand behind the podium and deliver votes and democratic credentials, now and then, almost makes us smile.

It is a good habit to understand ourselves through the words of those who look at us with a critical eye, and not through the sterile consensus of those who agree with us, or those who follow us. The most pertinent depiction of Julius Caesar, once he was dead along with the fear he inspired, was given by Cicero, who certainly had never loved him, in a well-chiseled passage of the *Second Philippic*, where he wisely took stock of the values and the limits of the dictator whom he had praised during his life. In the case of Stalin we can say, without fear of error, that both in life and in death, he has not gone without either laudatory literature or demonizing literature.

For people who, in a particular historical moment, assembled in their persons the meaning and the very symbolism of the movement they led, the "cult" of

personality is not only a well-documented phenomenon but, it seems, hardly avoidable. Many names could be invoked, but the most familiar and obvious are Caesar and Napoleon. The necessity, on the part of the followers, of mythologizing the “boss”, who, for his part, has the intuition of the indispensable function of such a “mythologizing” mechanism, is also a well-documented phenomenon. The more it is emphasized (and is revealed as a mechanism that goes beyond the will of the individual), when the person concerned himself, through his style and culture, remains apart from such a quasi-religious relationship and yet, **as it takes place, adapts himself to it**. This is the case of the “Incorruptible”, who was the exact opposite of the demagogue who craved enthusiastic crowds, or, in more recent times, the case of Antonio Gramsci as well. In a letter from prison, Gramsci relates with amusement the disappointment experienced by a comrade with whom he met during one of his prison terms: he had imagined the leader of the Communists to be of a quite different, and imposing, stature!

Also placed in this category (unusual as it may be to say so) is Stalin, who for not a short period of his long career wanted to stay in the ideal role of the “second”, of a mere faithful executor of the work and the project of another, who was far “greater”, and who even in death would continue to be perceived as “the boss”, namely, Lenin. To him, Stalin dedicated a mausoleum of the Byzantine-Hellenistic-Pharaonic type, so that upon the one “living” leader—despite being dead (and indeed properly embalmed)—continued to fall the Soviet masses’ need for charisma. By the same dynamic, Augustus long presented himself as Caesar's heir-enforcer-continuator-vindicator, and devoted to him a cult joining him to the gods.

It is therefore more necessary than ever, when confronted with historical figures whose myth was an essential part of their behavior (and their “perception” by others), to submit them to the limited, but unclouded, judgement of the non-followers, of the critical and the detached, and of the opponents as well. In the “Città libera” of 23 August 1945, Croce, who had never “conceded” anything to the side of the communist enemy, not even in times of greater “*CLNist*” * unity, and who in the *History of Europe* had written that “communism has not been realized in Russia as communism” (1932), wrote of Stalin words that might have even seemed like praise, but were not. “What has been realized in Russia,” he wrote, “is the government of a class, or a group of classes (bureaucrats, soldiers, intellectuals) that is longer guided by a hereditary emperor, but by a man of gifted political genius (Lenin, Stalin)”; and added with prophetic irony:

“Providence remains responsible for always providing comparable successors”! By “genius” (and this time not in a neutral sense, as in the words of Croce, but exaltingly) Alcide De Gasperi had referred to Stalin a few months earlier, in the Brancaccio Theater in Rome, **at the very moment in which he firmly projected the unfathomable distance of the Soviet experiment from that, still to be defined, of post-fascist Italy**. He had spoken of nothing less than “the immense, historic, and secular merit of the armies organized by the genius of Joseph Stalin.”

At that time it was otherwise easy to utter “secular” gratitude to the victors of Stalingrad. Paolo Bufaldini recalled a priest who, embracing him, had clandestinely whispered: “At Stalingrad we shall overcome!”. But as Herodotus knew, the victory of the Athenians at Salamis against a powerful and seemingly invincible adversary had little by little been forgotten, despite being the foundation of the “freedom of the Greeks”. It was forgotten by its beneficiaries because that victory had given rise to the Athenian empire, the oppressive inheritor of an initially equal alliance. It is a story that has been repeated, and in Italy after the Battle of Marengo was seen as the factions of the emperor gradually became stultified. Ultimately, it is too easy to speak of imperial objectives and trampled freedoms *en gros*. Regarding Eastern Europe after 1945, it is worth reading Ambler’s remarkable story, *Judgment on Delchev*¹⁰⁴², which gave itself over to schematic ejaculations about the “gallows of Prague”. And it is worth reading Wilfried Loth’s essay (*Stalin’s Unwanted Child. The Soviet Union, the German Question and the Founding of the GDR*¹⁰⁴³) on Stalin’s reluctance to permit the constitution of the Soviet zone of Germany as a republic, in place of vapid rhetoric about the “iron curtain”.

Today, Stalin has returned to the collective sentiment of Russians (according to many surveys) because, in the current malaise and decline of the former superpower, it is obvious, and only common sense, to recognize the statesman who had made it a superpower, lifting it from a situation of material inferiority and isolation. Molotov recalled that Stalin had once told him: after my death they will heap rubbish on my grave, but much later they will understand. The quasi-judicial accusation hanging over Stalin is that of the excessive loss of human life. This yardstick, which throughout the 19th century had accompanied and distorted the ups and downs (very similar to today’s) of the historiography of the French Revolution, has finally been contaminated by the monstrosities of Courtois and company’s so-called *Black Book*: a book which includes among the “victims of Stalin” the millions of deaths of World War I, or among the “victims of communism” the infinite victims of UNITA in Angola. After that monstrous

pamphlet it is difficult to turn the reflection back to honest limits; the rapid dismantling of these astronomical figures, which was produced later, suffices. It is the link between Revolution and Terror that is the difficult problem: it begins with Robespierre, not Lenin, and remains open.

But he sent many communists to their deaths: this is the other “judicial” accusation. Wajda’s *Danton*, moreover, he meant and denounce . A great Jewish writer, Lion Feuchtwanger, who credited Stalin for being the first to grant the Jews a state (in Birobidzhan, in the USSR) * has evoked, concerning the “great process” a factor capital: “Most of the accused were conspirators and revolutionaries in first place, for their whole lives they had been subversives and opponents, they were born for that”¹⁰⁴⁴. This same observation would be made years later by De Gasperi in the aforementioned speech at Brancaccio: “We thought the trials were false, the testimonies fabricated, the confessions obtained through extortion. And then objective American information proved that this was not a sham, and that the saboteurs were not vulgar swindlers, but old, idealistic conspirators [...] who faced death rather than adapting to what, for them, was a betrayal of original communism”.

Tiberius had, as “judge”, Tacitus; Stalin, less fortunately, had Nikita Khrushchev, said Concetto Marchesi with sarcasm after the Twentieth Congress of the Italian Communist Party. It was a joke. In fact, along with the Twentieth Congress opened a power struggle within the party leadership, not much different from the one between Trotsky and Stalin. It was a struggle that did not exclude low blows, in which “de-Stalinization” was a piece on the chessboard; it was not an attempt at historiography; if anything it was the most outrageous denial of it. And those, like Togliatti, who understood the instrumentality and the essential falsity could not unmask its nature and genesis, because Togliatti himself, and other leaders of the communist movement, were, willingly or unwillingly, a part of this new struggle. A struggle whose initial results were the revolutions within the Soviet “camp”, and in the long term, the very history we’ve ended up living. Curzio Malaparte, in an important but forgotten book, *Coup D’Etat: The Technique Of Revolution* (published in France in 1931, and ending up displeasing both the communists and their opponents) recorded an event that, better than any reasoning, explains the constant conflict and uninterrupted repression that characterized the years of Stalin’s rule up until the war: Trotsky’s failed coup in Moscow on 7 November 1927, during the parade for the tenth anniversary of the Revolution. A failed coup, which maintained an extremely deep split in the party, where the prestige of Trotsky remained

enormous, and a latent civil war, which Soviet propaganda reductively presented as judicial activity against “saboteurs”. This was the case in which the Stalin phenomenon is inscribed. The formation of the USSR, the industrialization, the war on the *kulaks*, the mass literacy programs, the creation of a free welfare state, the attempt to stay out of the war waged by Hitler, the victory over Nazism achieved through unimaginable efforts and without a real consensus: these are the events with which the historian must build his analysis, never forgetting that behind the scenes a civil conflict was growing, a fracture of the hegemonic party, which had never healed.

Stalin never liked ideological puritans. Colletti opportunely defined him, twenty years after his death, in *L'Espresso*, as “one who never let himself be tied up by the bonds of ideology.” But such realism was not an end in itself. The unsigned editorial with which the *Corriere della sera* commented on 6 March 1953 on Stalin’s death remains valid after fifty years of historiographical battles—and trends: “His deeds,” it reads, “cost unspeakable sacrifices and were carried out with a rigor that knew no mercy. Freedom, respect for the individual, tolerance, charity, were empty words and were treated as dead things. Only during World War II could it be seen how thorough those deeds had been. They are the history of yesterday. But when the hour of the supreme trial struck, the man rose to the occasion of the great tasks that he had sought and that history had assigned to him.”

There is much that can be argued about whether Stalin considered himself and his own political actions to be linked to the rebirth of his country after the catastrophe (war, defeat, revolution, civil war) or instead to be dependent on the world communist movement: in short, if all in all he felt himself a Russian statesman or a communist leader with global responsibilities. It is characteristic of historiographical reflections of Trotskyist inspiration (Trotsky himself, Deutscher) to give credence to the first answer. However, it was characteristic of the official party historiography (including after 1956) to reject such a response (which besides was also favored outside the political-historiographical debate within the communist movement) as reductive and distorting, and to prefer the figure and role of Stalin as a man of the party, for better or for worse, to the figure of Stalin the statesman.

Today, more than fifty years after Stalin’s death, the reasoning behind the party

historiography has become more insignificant in our eyes, while the historical problem of the place reserved for Stalin and his followers in the history of Russia in our century continues in full force (a similar reflection should be made with regard to how “communism” fit in the history of China, through the deeds of a “heretic” as Mao). Isaac Deutscher devoted an entire book¹⁰⁴⁵ to show that Stalinism, at a certain point, would have been “ripped” from the skin of Russia, like a scab from a wound: the “malformation” would have been torn off, and socialism and (restored) democratic praxis would have been reunited with with a more coherent internationalism. Never has a prediction been more unfounded.

There are three principal moments in the politics of international relations of the USSR, which constitute the “red child” and which illuminate each other. They are Brest-Litovsk (January 1918), the Russian-German “pact” (August 1939), and Yalta (February 1945).

The first was Brest-Litovsk. The confrontation that erupted within the Bolshevik leadership group, between the supporters and opponents of peace, is well-known. Trotsky resigned from the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs in order to not have to sign it. Zinoviev and Kamenev held great doubts. But in full agreement with Lenin, who argued the need for peace in any case, was Stalin. In the party hagiography this later became a point of strength and merit for the Stalinists, in their frenzy to discredit the other Bolshevik factions. In the unfortunate *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* can be read these expressions, which combined grounded concerns with phrases of disgusting mystification:

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—in order to secure a respite in which to strengthen the Soviet power and to create a new army, the Red Army, which would be able to defend the country from enemy attack.

All the counter-revolutionaries, from the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries to the most arrant Whiteguards, conducted a frenzied campaign against the conclusion of peace. 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 accomplice 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 and the counter-revolutionaries within the country, for they were working to expose the young Soviet Republic, which had not yet any army, to the blows of German imperialism. This was really a policy of provocateurs, skilfully masked by Left phraseology.

On February 10, 1918, the peace negotiations in Brest-Litovsk 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 conclude 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.¹⁰⁴⁶

The account is at times grotesque, as the slanderous insinuations against Trotsky pile up (it later argues that Trotsky and Bukharin were preparing a coup in order to sabotage the peace). In any case, the key point of the account is that, in their conflict over the issue of peace, Lenin and Stalin—perhaps in the minority—were on the side of exiting the war as soon as possible, while a large number of the other leaders, *in primis* Trotsky (who would resign in order to not sign it), were on the opposite. The confrontation was obviously harsh: it is not a coincidence that not only the *History of the Communist Party* but also Trotsky’s *My Life* dedicated entire parts to the matter (almost thirty pages, in the case of Trotsky)¹⁰⁴⁷. It is worth noting that although Trotsky’s account is to a large extent superior to the irritating prose of the *History of the Communist Party*, it is clearly apologetic and sometimes obscure, full of details intended to obfuscate the fact that Trotsky and Lenin were on opposite sides, and always reticent about the position Stalin took at the crucial moment.

The election that took place in Brest-Litovsk was also the birth of Soviet foreign policy, the foreign policy of a state mostly devoted to its own state interests (this is demonstrated on the basis of the following paragraph, the strengthening of the

is understood on the basis of the following corollary: the strengthening of the USSR benefits the cause of world revolution). Trotsky maintained the hope of replicating the Battle of Valmy, of fanning the revolutionary flames like in the time of Dumouriez and the victories of revolutionary France against the coalitions. Lenin and Stalin, who differed in so many ways but were in agreement on this, realistically measured the relations of forces and maintained the course of action that would reemerge in 1939, before the renewed danger of war: “The imperialists are massacring each other, we stay outside and strengthen ourselves.”

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*”¹⁰⁴⁸.

“To guarantee its survival.” This was the lodestar of Stalin’s foreign policy. If anyone still harbored illusions of broad fronts and possible alliances, then the foreign intervention in the civil war, the “cordon sanitaire”, and the long-term exclusion from international institutions were enough to clarify the actual relations with the outside world. Hence the dominant feature of Soviet foreign policy from the beginning: to *negotiate with anyone*. The agenda Lenin submitted to a vote on 22 February 1918, at a meeting of the Central Committee, during a phase (which quickly turned out to be fleeting) of the Brest-Litovsk negotiations (“Full powers will be given to Comrade Trotsky to accept the help of the French imperialist bandits against the German bandits”)¹⁰⁴⁹, is at the very least illuminating and clearly connotes this line of action and its assumptions. Thus, after the peace trap, it so happened that the Germany of Ludendorff was the only country with which Bolshevik Russia managed to maintain relations, at least for a few months. And the rather placid and sympathetic tone with which the bulletin of the German High Command (*Deutsche Kriegsnachrichten*) spoke of Russia and Lenin fits perfectly with this seemingly unnatural collaboration, which resumed with the center-right Weimar governments following the Treaty of Rapallo on 16 April 1922: precisely from the viewpoint that between “French bandits” and “German bandits” there was no need for illusions about the differences. And the possibility of greater collaboration with the Germans was born from the fact that they, too, were victims of the order imposed at Versailles

by the victors, i.e., by the great and “democratic” Western imperialist powers. The failure of the revolutionary wave of 1919-1920 (the occupation of factories in Italy, the Bavarian Soviet Republic, the Hungary of Béla Kun, the military defeat in the conflict with Poland) definitively confirmed to the Soviet leadership the correctness of their foreign policy decisions.

The “pact” of 1939 began from similar assumptions. It is always forgotten, when judging that major event at the eve of World War II, to consider what happened after the failure of Stalin’s one true attempt at an “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 to their fate by the governments of France (i.e., the socialist Léon Blum) and England. The fall of Madrid (28 March 1939) came a few months before the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact (August), which materialized—as is well known—in response to Anglo-French disinterest in an effective anti-German (anti-Nazi) agreement with the USSR. The decision to make a pact with German to stay out of the war, while the “bandits” undertook mutual destruction, was nothing more than the continuation of those policies, in a situation that was favorable to the German interlocutor, in exchange for the great benefit of assuring peace on the Eastern front.

The motives given *later*, according to which the pact was made in order to better “prepare”, in order to win time in anticipation of a later German attack, are probably motivations constructed *post eventum*: it is not at all clear that Stalin considered a German attack on the USSR inevitable; and in fact the little preparation that Operation Barbarossa encountered in the Soviet lines would suggest otherwise.

It is not superfluous to remember, finally, that the analogy between the situations in 1918 and 1939 was evidenced by Mikhail Gorbachev in his report to the Central Committee of the CPSU on 7 November 1987, on the 70th anniversary of the Revolution. “The question,” Gorbachev then said, “was raised more or less on the same terms that had been raised in times of the Brest peace: the fates of the independence of our country and the very existence of socialism on earth were decided”. He added: “From the documents it is known that the date of German aggression against Poland (no later than September 1) was already fixed by 3 April 1939, that is, long before the conclusion of the pact between the USSR and Germany. London, Paris, and Washington knew the background of the preparation of the campaign against Poland in detail.” He continued: “We

can not forget that in August 1939 the USSR was faced with the threat of a war on two fronts: in the west with Germany and in the east with Japan, which had launched a bloody battle over the Kalkhin-Gol river”. As during Brest-Litovsk, Gorbachev concluded, “life and death, *sweeping away the myths*, became the sole criterion of reality.”

Dragged into an unwanted war, Stalin led his country to victory through the hardest trials, in many respects reminiscent of those that faced Alexander I and Kutuzov against the French aggression of 1812. And he won uniting the country around the motto of the Great Patriotic War, restoring, moreover, a positive relationship with the Orthodox Church as well. American military assistance played an important role. Averell Harriman once recalled a phrase pronounced by Stalin, according to which “without American industrial power the war could not have been won”¹⁰⁵⁰. To be fair, however, it must be said that if that assistance had been so valuable, the exasperating delay in the opening of the “second front” meant that, until the Normandy landing (6-7 June 1944), the full weight of the war in Europe fell upon 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 only did so marginally: the Allied landing in the spring of 1943, at the southern tip of Italy, was such that it allowed the Germans to keep the Anglo-Americans in check with minimal forces for a long duration, forced to laboriously conquer the whole peninsula).

It is symptomatic that as the Anglo-Americans were preparing to begin Operation Overlord (the Normandy landings), the epistolary exchange between Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin, as can be clearly seen from the three statesmen’s correspondence between February and May 1944¹⁰⁵¹, insistently returned to the issue of the future status of Poland. In their correspondence of 4 and 24 February, Stalin 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 border. Despite the reluctance of the unrepresentative Polish government in exile (who scuppered the Moscow meetings precisely because of the border question), Churchill accepted the factual situation. And it is well known that the “carving up” at Yalta—preceded in October 1944 by the famous pamphlet with percentages of “zones of influence”—meant, although it was not officially approved in Crimea, that with regard to the Polish question, as well as other parts of the chessboard, the territorial advantages that the USSR had achieved with the “pact” of August 1939 were essentially confirmed. There was, in short, complete harmony between the actions taken by Stalin in the immediate

postwar period and the substance of the territorial agreements included in the Russian-German pact.

That is why, as has already been noted, a single thread connects the three cardinal moments of Soviet diplomacy: Brest-Litovsk, the non-aggression pact with Germany, and Yalta. These were three moments in which the toughest adversaries (indeed, especially them!) recognized Stalin's ability, as a high statesman, to intuit the interests of his country, and his coherence in pursuing those interests over such a long arc of time.

Not an imperial or expansionist policy, but a *security policy*: it was accepted as such by the Western counterparts. It suffices to think of the Yalta decisions, which were not codified but were accepted and reaffirmed even during the moments of greatest tension (the Berlin blockade, the Hungarian Revolution). This security policy had its formal definition in the new borders. In this regard, it is interesting to note that the reprinting of the correspondence of the leaders of the anti-Nazi coalition during the war years, 1941-1945, included an introduction by Gromyko which is essentially a hymn to the deliberations that closed in Helsinki on 1 August 1975: "Today," Gromyko writes, "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"¹⁰⁵². With these words, Gromyko, who had been part of the Soviet delegation at Yalta, captured the meaning of the CSCE recognized by all present: formal recognition of the borders that emerged from World War II. It was the formal coronation of a policy inaugurated by the great act of realism constituted in the distant acceptance, in February 1918, of the leonine clauses of the peace of Brest.

This is why, at the time of Gorbachev's rapid, tumultuous dismantling of the USSR, the Western powers had been perplexed: they had hesitated to extend their protection to initiatives, such as that of Landsbergis and his followers in Lithuania, which were intended to return to discussion everything that had been agreed and defended at Yalta and Helsinki, across an arc of thirty years.

This is why Gorbachev's foreign policy, consisting of the spontaneous dismantling of the keystones of the State of which he was the highest leader, was anticipated (and perhaps for a long time) by his historian, and even earlier by his

interpreter. Perhaps they had the impression of facing two different personalities, struggling against each other, locked within the same person. The leader who, in November 1987, still claimed the success of the “pact” of August 1939 can hardly be the same person who wrote in *La Stampa* on March 3, 1992: “Today we can say that everything that happened in Eastern Europe in these last few years would have been impossible *without the presence of this Pope and without the important role—including the political role—that he played*”. These are words that Carl Bernstein, protagonist of Watergate and author of the February 1992 investigation into the secret pact between Reagan and Pope John Paul II to massively support Solidarity and the consequent collapse of the Polish communist regime, described in April 1992, in his first letter to *Il Sabato*, as “the unveiling of one of the greatest secrets of the twentieth century.”

Gorbachev’s journalistic contributions to *La Stampa* deserves a systematic analysis, since from the treacle of the characteristic verbiage that Gorbachev addressed to the major newspaper emerges from time to time expressions that should shed some light on the elusive personality of the last general secretary of the CPSU. For example, this appears toward the end of his long-winded essay of 26 November 1992 (“Yeltsin, carrot and stick”): “After having rightly freed ourselves from the useless communist model, we should avoid falling into other rigid models.”

Above all, the “revelation” to which Carl Bernstein has drawn attention—the valorization expressed by Gorbachev about the role played by John Paul II in the demolition of the communist regimes—does not sit comfortably with the final judgments of the dialogue between Gorbachev and John Paul II (1 December 1989). Its text was published by Gorbachev himself in his *Avant-Mémoires*, in which John Paul II says: “No one should claim that changes in Europe and in the world have to be made according to the Western model; this is contrary to my deepest convictions; Europe, as the protagonist of world history, must breathe *with both its lungs*,” and Gorbachev replied: “This is a very appropriate image”¹⁰⁵³. In light of what Gorbachev “revealed” in March 1992, this proclamation is quite perplexing, especially if we consider the brutal explicator of John Paul II’s thought, Polish president Walesa. Interviewed by Jas Gawronski for *La Stampa* (9 May 1993, p. 8), Walesa was asked the following question: “Who brought about the collapse of communism?”

“Would you agree with a *classification* like this: John Paul II, Walesa, Gorbachev, Reagan?”; to which he skillfully responds: “Of course the Pope’s

role has been very important, I would say decisive. *The others are all links in the chain*, the chain of freedom; it is difficult to say who would be the most important, *but if any chain is missing a link, it is no longer a chain*. Many, especially the Germans, consider Gorbachev to be the most important, but I do not agree” (and later in the interview he also provides a “revelation”: he had already proposed to Gorbachev in 1989 to take the initiative of the dissolution of the USSR).

After *Time*, on 24 February 1992, published Carl Bernstein’s investigation of the “secret pact” between Reagan and John Paul II for the overthrow of the communist regime in Poland (with details concerning, for example, the radio communications channel between the Vatican palaces and Cardinal Glemp after the Warsaw government had cut the telephone lines between Poland and the Vatican, or the CIA’s “recruitment” of the Polish Deputy Minister of Defense, or the flood of money sent to Poland for the funding of the “clandestine” union), objections and embarrassment occurred in the Vatican. Reagan confirmed, however, that he was elated, in an interview by Pino Buongiorno for *Panorama*: “*our intention* [Reagan was referring to his administration and to John Paul II, author’s note] from the beginning has been to unite to defeat the forces of communism.” He continued with multiple revelations and details, which were published by the Italian weekly in its 22 March 1992 installment.

But it is probable that the intervention, despite its enormous dimensions (which were somewhat novel, though enhanced by the Polish origin of pontiff), would not have been enough, at least according to an acute analyst of Soviet affairs, Helmut Sonnenfeldt. “When the Polish door opened,” said Sonnenfeldt in *Panorama*, “Moscow did not move a finger. *Who knows whether the people who influenced Gorbachev’s behavior were not exactly a Vatican intervention.*” This hypothesis seems to find confirmation in the very embarrassing words written by Gorbachev for *La Stampa* on 3 March 1992. It is therefore not surprising that soon after, in the same conversation, Sonnenfeldt spoke, without naming names, of “who, in some room of the Kremlin, decided to unleash it all.”

The political actions undertaken by Gorbachev since at least 1988 have mainly affected his people. François Mitterrand (in a meeting with the then-President of the Italian Senate, Spadolini) described the condition of Russia as follows: “Before, people ate little, but *all* ate equally little. Now in Russia there are many mafias (the president, Spadolini notices, uses the Italian expression with intentional emphasis) confronting and fighting each other, and privileged sectors

are securing themselves, monstrously distant from the widespread hunger and poverty. The situation, to say the least, is explosive”¹⁰⁵⁴.

Not bad as a step towards “freedom” (exactly what kind was seen when the parliament was shelled on October 1993). It is no surprise, however, that Gorbachev is one of the most detested people in his country (and increasingly less indulged by his friends abroad).

Anything can be expected of a historian, except that he has to believe in the “naivete” that led Gorbachev to commit error after error, capitulation after capitulation. Markus Wolf, the chief architect of East Germany’s security services, recalled in an interview with *La Repubblica*¹⁰⁵⁵ that the three architects of the USSR’s collapse—Gorbachov, Shevardnadze, Yeltsin—worked in the KGB.

In a speech to the assembly, Pericles taught the Athenians, who were weary of the conflict with Sparta, a great geopolitical truth: “It is not possible for you to give up this empire.” And with the conceptual crudity to which he was accustomed, he added that “your empire is now like a tyranny;” “it may have been wrong to take it; it is certainly dangerous to let it go”¹⁰⁵⁶. In the end the Empire, which lasted just over seventy years, collapsed in part due to the strategists (one named *Adeimantus*) who were “accused by some people of having betrayed the fleet” in the decisive battle of Aegospotami¹⁰⁵⁷. In a curious historical connection, the Soviet Empire, too, lasted seventy years. The comparison of Stalin and Pericles may be uncomfortable (although the greatness of the Georgian statesman is insisted upon by not naive historians, like Mikhail Heller and Sergio Romano): it is perhaps more feasible, despite the peril of analogies, to recognize in Gorbachev the mediocre and ignominious role of *Adeimantus*.

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Summary

Was Stalin that “[huge, grim, whimsical, morbid, human monster](#)”, as Nikita Khrushchev said in his famous *Secret Speech*? Or, as has been said later, the inept twin brother of Hitler? The sadistic, paranoid, anti-Semitic dictator devoid of the least scruples that has portrayed in the dominant historiography? Domenico Losurdo doesn't think so. Without exonerating Stalin from the horrors of the Gulag or denying his responsibility for other crimes, Losurdo is convincing when he argues that the accusation of anti-Semitism is false, when he points out the strategic and military genius of the Soviet leader, and when he rejects the parallel with the Führer, to name a few aspects that are incorrectly taken as certainties. Moreover, by contextualizing the often terrible decisions that Stalin took, Losurdo shows that it is easier to link the racist and imperial delusions of Hitler to his Western contemporaries and his predecessors than to the Bolshevik politician.

A book that questions the majority of current historiography, *Stalin: History and Criticism of a Black Legend* will not leave those who delve into its pages indifferent.

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Footnotes

1. [Medvedev \(1977\)](#), p. 705; [Zubkova \(2003\)](#), commentary below photos 19-20.
2. [Thurston \(1996\)](#), pp. xiii-xiv.
3. [Fejtö \(1971\)](#), p. 31.
4. [Nirenstein \(1997\)](#).
5. [Deutscher \(1972a\)](#), pp. 167-9.
6. [Trotsky \(1962\)](#), p. 447.
7. [Kojève \(1954\)](#).
8. [Roberts \(2006\)](#), p. 3.
9. [Deutscher \(1969\)](#), p. 522
10. [Roberts \(2006\)](#), p. 273.
11. In [Fontaine \(2005\)](#), p. 66; referring to a book by Averell Harriman and Elie Abel.
12. In [Thomas \(1988\)](#), p. 78.
13. [De Gasperi \(1956\)](#), pp. 15-6.
14. [Bobbio \(1997\)](#), p. 89
15. [Arendt \(1986b\)](#), p. 99.
16. [Croce \(1993\)](#), vol. 2, pp. 33-4 and 178.
17. [Mann \(1986a\)](#), pp. 271 and 278-9; [Mann \(1986b\)](#), pp. 311-2.
18. [Webb \(1982-85\)](#), vol. 4, pp. 242 and 490 (journal entries of 15 March 1931 and 6 December 1942); [Laski \(1948\)](#), pp. 39-42 and passim.

[19. Bobbio \(1997\)](#), p. 89; [Bobbio \(1977\)](#), pp. 164 and 280.

[20. Rosselli \(1988\)](#), pp. 358, 362 and 367.

* See Yuri Ribalkin, *Stalin y España* (ed. Marcial Pons 2007), Ángel Viñas, *La soledad de la República: El abandono de las democracias y el viraje hacia la Unión Soviética* (ed. Crítica 2006), *El escudo de la República: el oro de España, la apuesta soviética y los hechos de mayo de 1937* (ed. Crítica 2007), *El honor de la República: entre el acoso fascista, la hostilidad británica y la política de Stalin* (ed. Crítica 2008), Javier Iglesias Peláez, *Stalin en España. La gran excusa* (ed. Raíces, 2008). [Translator's note]

[21. Ibid.](#), pp. 301, 304-6 and 381.

[22. Churchill \(1974\)](#), p. 7290.

[23. Toynbee \(1992\)](#), pp. 18-20.

[24. Gleason \(1995\)](#), p. 121.

[25. Cohen \(1986\)](#), p. 13.

[26. Spengler \(1933\)](#), p. 86, note 1.

[27. Trotsky \(1988\)](#), p. 1285

[28. Kruschov \(1958\)](#), pp. 223-4.

[29. Deutscher \(1972b\)](#), p. 20.

[30. Kruschov \(1958\)](#), pp. 121-2.

[31. Ibid.](#), pp. 164-5 and 172.

[32. Ibid.](#), pp. 176 and 178.

[33. Zubkova \(2003\)](#), p. 223.

[34. Trotsky \(1962\)](#), pp. 170, 175-6 and 446-7.

[35. Trotsky \(1988\)](#), pp. 1259 and 1262-3.

* Armed forces of the Federal Republic of Germany from 1955 [Translator's note]

36. [Hoffmann \(1995\)](#), pp. 59 and 21.

37. [Wolkogonow \(1989\)](#), pp. 500-4

38. [Knight \(1997\)](#), p. 132.

39. [Medvedev, Medvedev \(2006\)](#), pp. 269-70.

40. [Montefiore \(2007\)](#), p. 416.

41. [Dimitrov \(2002\)](#), pp. 320-1.

42. [Ibid.](#), p. 314.

43. [Roberts \(2006\)](#), p. 7.

44. [Goebbels \(1992\)](#), p. 1620 (journal entry of 5 July 1941).

45. In [Butler \(2005\)](#), pp. 71-2.

46. [Goebbels \(1992\)](#), p. 1590.

47. [Wolkow \(2003\)](#), p. 111.

48. [Goebbels \(1992\)](#), pp. 1594-5 and 1597.

49. [Besymenski \(2003\)](#), pp. 422-5.

50. [Costello \(1991\)](#), pp. 438-9.

51. [Goebbels \(1992\)](#), p. 1599.

52. [Roberts \(2006\)](#), p. 35.

53. [Wolkow \(2003\)](#), p. 110.

54. [Costello \(1991\)](#), pp. 436-7.

55. [Kershaw \(2001\)](#), pp. 581 and 576-7.
56. Ibid., pp. 585-7; [Ferro \(2008\)](#), p. 115 (with respect to Maysky).
57. [Besymenski \(2003\)](#), pp. 380-6 (and especially p. 384).
58. [Roberts \(2006\)](#), pp. 66-9.
59. [Ferro \(2008\)](#), p. 64; [Beneš \(1954\)](#), p. 151; [Gardner \(1993\)](#), pp. 92-3.
60. [Liddel Hart \(2007\)](#), pp. 414-5.
61. Ibid., pp. 417-8.
62. [Goebbels \(1992\)](#), pp. 1601 and 1609.
63. Ibid., pp. 1601-2.
64. [Fest \(1973\)](#), p. 878.
65. [Ferro \(2008\)](#), p. 189.
66. [Goebbels \(1992\)](#), p. 1619.
67. Ibid., pp. 1639-40.
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70. Ibid., pp. 1665-6.
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77. [Webb \(1982-85\)](#), vol. 4, p. 472 (journal entry of 8 August 1941).
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80. [Hitler \(1965\)](#), p. 1682 (statement of 30 March 1941).
81. [Hitler \(1989\)](#), p. 70 (conversation of 10 September 1941) and [Hitler \(1980\)](#), p. 61 (conversation of 17-18 September 1941).
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83. [Werth \(2007a\)](#), pp. 352 and 359-60.
84. [Tucker \(1990\)](#), pp. 97-8.
85. [Stalin \(1971-73\)](#), vol. 13, pp. 67 and 274.
86. [Trotsky \(1988\)](#), p. 930 (= Trotsky, 1968, p. 207).
87. From a conversation with Fritz Todt, quoted in [Irving \(2001\)](#), p. 550.
88. [Hitler \(1980\)](#), p. 366 (conversation of 26 August 1942).
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90. Ibid., pp. 501, 641 and 570-2.
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92. [Montefiore \(2007\)](#), p. 503.
93. [Roberts \(2006\)](#), pp. 81 and 4.
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- [115. Cfr. Losurdo \(1996\)](#), ch. iv, § 2 (for Nolte) and ch. iv, § 5 (for F. D. Roosevelt and the “castration” of the Germans).

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- [117. Bujarin \(1984\)](#), p. 73.
- [118. In Hoopes, Brinkley \(1997\)](#), p. 2.
- [119. Schlesinger jr. \(1959-65\)](#), vol. 2, pp. 3-15.
- [120. Nevins, Commager \(1960\)](#), p. 455.
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- [130. Werth \(2007a\)](#), pp. 49-50.
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- [133. Bujarin \(1966\)](#), pp. 329-31.
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- [307. Feuchtwanger \(1946\)](#), p. 95
- [308. Maistre \(1984\)](#), vol. 12, pp. 59-60.
- [309. Marx, Engels \(1955-89\)](#), vol. 12, p. 682.
- [310. In Werth \(2001\)](#), p. 50.
- [311. Ibid.](#), pp. 53, 59-60 and 74-5.
- [312. Schmid \(1974\)](#), pp. 17 and 293.
- [313. Kerensky \(1989\)](#), p. 415.
- [314. Ibid.](#), pp. 340 and 328 ff.
- [315. Figes \(2000\)](#), p. 399; [Werth \(2007a\)](#), p. 27.
- [316. Figes \(2000\)](#), p. 400.
- [317. Werth \(2007a\)](#), pp. 28-9.

- [318. Figes \(2000\)](#), p. 481
- [319. Werth \(2007a\)](#), pp. 41-2.
- [320. Figes \(2000\)](#), p. 463.
- [321. Werth \(2007a\)](#), p. 31.
- [322. Ibid.](#), pp. 63, 52-3 and 55.
- [323. Ibid.](#), pp. 53 and 51.
- [324. Ibid.](#), p. xv.
- [325. Ibid.](#), pp. 27 and 37-8.
- [326. Ibid.](#), pp. 38-9 and 43.
- [327. Lincoln \(1994\)](#), p. 147.
- [328. Figes \(2000\)](#), p. 448.
- [329. Ibid.](#), pp. 407, 507, 447 and 486.
- [330. Ibid.](#), p. 441.
- [331. Ibid.](#), p. 909.
- [332. Ibid.](#), p. 903.
- [333. Ibid.](#)
- [334. Ibid.](#), pp. 877-8.
- [335. Ibid.](#), p. 122.
- [336. Ibid.](#), pp. 814-5.
- [337. Werth \(2007a\)](#), p. 26.
- [338. Ibid.](#), pp. 53-54.

- [339. In Flores \(1990\)](#), p. 41.
- [340. Lenin \(1955-70\)](#), vol. 31, p. 74.
- [341. Figes \(2000\)](#), pp. 840 and 837.
- [342. Benjamin \(2007\)](#), p. 44.
- [343. Cfr. Werth \(2007a\)](#), pp. 61 and 510, note 43.
- [344. Kautsky \(1977\)](#), p. 121.
- [345. Ibid.](#), pp. 129-31.
- [346. Ibid.](#), p. 113.
- [347. Ibid.](#), pp. 119 and 122.
- [348. Ibid.](#), pp. 120-1.
- [349. Trotsky \(1988\)](#), p. 848 (= Trotsky, 1968, p. 143).
- [350. Kautsky \(1977\)](#), p. 129.
- [351. Ibid.](#)
- [352. Ibid.](#), p. 100.
- [353. In Flores \(1990\)](#), pp. 41 and 53.
- [354. Ibid.](#), p. 32-3.
- [355. In Furet \(1995\)](#), p. 127.
- [356. Carr \(1968-69\)](#), vol. 1, p. 31.
- [357. Agosti \(1974-79\)](#), vol. 1, 1, p. 30.
- [358. Dimitrov's report to the Seventh Congress of the Communist International](#) appears in [De Felice \(1973\)](#), pp. 101-67 (quote on p. 155).

[359. Trotsky \(1969b\)](#), pp. 21 and 72.

[360. Herzen \(1994\)](#), pp. 176-7; cfr. [Losurdo \(2002\)](#), ch. 22, § 1.

[361. Stalin \(1971-73\)](#), vol. 13, pp. 33 and 36 (= Stalin, 1952, pp. 409 and 412).

[362. Ibid.](#), p. 38 (= Stalin, 1952, p. 414).

* This expression, taken by Losurdo from the German political **imagination** (Herrenvolk-Demokratie), is explained in detail in previous publications. Cfr. Losurdo [2002 and 2005 -ed. castellana: Contrahistoria del liberalismo, Editorial El Viejo Topo, 2007] and Losurdo, Democrazia o bonapartismo. Trionfo e decadenza del suffragio universale, Ed. Bollati Boringhieri, 1993. [Translator's note]

[363. Mao Tsé-Tung \(1969-75\)](#), vol. 2, p. 218.

[364. Carr \(1968-69\)](#), vol. 1, p. 31; in [Kollontai \(1976\)](#), p. 200.

[365. Hegel \(1969-79\)](#), vol. 3, pp. 431-41.

[366. Trotsky \(1988\)](#), pp. 845-6 (= Trotsky, 1968, p. 141).

[367.](#) For the analysis dedicated to Rosa Luxemburg in these pages I refer to [Losurdo \(1997\)](#), ch. vii, § 2.

[368. Stalin \(1971-73\)](#), vol. 7, p. 120 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 7, pp. 159-60).

[369. Stalin \(1971-73\)](#), vol. 11, pp. 305-11.

[370. Bujarin \(1969a\)](#), pp. 160 and 168.

[371. Ibid.](#), pp. 159 and 161.

[372. Bujarin \(1969b\)](#), p. 113 and [Bujarin \(1969a\)](#), p. 169.

[373. Lenin \(1955-70\)](#), vol. 38, p. 313.

[374. Hegel \(1919-20\)](#), pp. 896-7.

[375. 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).

[376. Stalin \(1971-73\)](#), vol. 11, p. 308.

[377.](#) Ibid., vol. 15, p. 218 (= Stalin, 1968, p. 52).

[378.](#) Ibid., pp. 193, 195 and 204 = Stalin, 1968, pp. 18, 21 and 34).

[379.](#) Ibid., p. 206 (= Stalin, 1968, p. 36).

[380.](#) Ibid., p. 252 (= Stalin, 1968, p. 101).

[381.](#) Ibid., pp. 263-70 (= Stalin, 1973, pp. 18-29).

[382.](#) [Kelsen \(1981b\)](#), p. 171; also cfr. [Kelsen \(1981a\)](#), p. 62.

[383.](#) [Trotsky \(1988\)](#), p. 853 (= Trotsky, 1968, p. 148).

[384.](#) [Lenin \(1955-70\)](#), vol. 38, p. 98.

[385.](#) [Werth \(2007a\)](#), pp. viii and xiv.

[386.](#) [Tucker \(1990\)](#), p. 120; also cfr. [Cohen \(1986\)](#), pp. 54-5.

[387.](#) In [Cohen \(1975\)](#), pp. 204-5.

[388.](#) Ibid., p. 209.

[389.](#) Ibid., pp. 215 ff.

[390.](#) [Stalin \(1971-73\)](#), vol. 7, pp. 106, 309 and 292 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 7, pp. 143, 403 and 380-1).

[391.](#) Ibid., p. 110 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 7, p. 148).

[392.](#) Ibid., p. 76 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 7, p. 104).

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

[394.](#) Ibid., pp. 167-8 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 7, pp. 221-2).

- [395.](#) Ibid., pp. 109 and 147 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 7, pp. 147 and 195).
- [396.](#) Ibid., pp. 158-9 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 7, pp. 210-1).
- [397.](#) [Stalin \(1971-73\)](#), vol. 7, p. 108 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 7, p. 145).
- [398.](#) [Figes \(2000\)](#), p. 555.
- [399.](#) [Stalin \(1971-73\)](#), vol. 7, p. 139 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 7, p. 185).
- [400.](#) Ibid., pp. 139-40 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 7, p. 186).
- [401.](#) Ibid., pp. 139 and 160 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 7, pp. 185 and 212).
- [402.](#) Ibid., pp. 108-9 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 7, p. 146); cfr. [Marx, Engels \(1955-89\)](#), vol. 17, p. 341.
- [403.](#) [Stalin \(1971-73\)](#), vol. 7, p. 140 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 7, p. 187); italics in original.
- [404.](#) Ibid., pp. 137-8 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 7, p. 183).
- [405.](#) Ibid., p. 329 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 7, p. 428).
- [406.](#) [Stalin \(1971-73\)](#), vol. 11, pp. 219-20.
- [407.](#) [Taylor \(1996\)](#), p. 89.
- [408.](#) [Carr \(1968-69\)](#), vol. 2, pp. 265-6.
- [409.](#) [Jedrzejewicz \(1982\)](#), pp. 93-4 and 145-6.
- [410.](#) [Davies \(1989\)](#), pp. 441-2 and 462; [Schneider \(1994\)](#), pp. 197-206; [Mayer \(2000\)](#), pp. 619, 623 and 625.
- [411.](#) [Davies \(1989\)](#), pp. 443-7.
- [412.](#) [Cohen \(1975\)](#), pp. 263-4.
- [413.](#) Ibid., p. 190.

[414.](#) Ibid., p. 191.

[415.](#) [Stalin \(1971-73\)](#), vol. 4, pp. 104 and 131 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 4, pp. 135 and 167); on this cfr. [Schneider \(1994\)](#), pp. 234-7.

[416.](#) [Wolkogonow \(1989\)](#), pp. 506-7.

[417.](#) [Mayer \(2000\)](#), pp. 630-1.

[418.](#) In [Chlevnjuk \(1998\)](#), p. 174.

[419.](#) [Stalin \(1971-73\)](#), vol. 14, p. 68 (= Stalin, 1952, p. 624).

[420.](#) Ibid., p. 74 (= Stalin, 1952, p. 629).

[421.](#) Ibid., p. 88 (= Stalin, 1952, p. 642).

[422.](#) Ibid., pp. 87 and 89 (= Stalin, 1952, pp. 641 and 643).

[423.](#) [Trotsky \(1988\)](#), pp. 653 and 664.

[424.](#) [Stalin \(1971-73\)](#), vol. 13, pp. 61-2 and 69 = Stalin, 1952, pp. 427-8 and 434).

[425.](#) Ibid., pp. 51-5 (= Stalin, 1952, pp. 419-22).

[426.](#) [Trotsky \(1988\)](#), pp. 568 and 570-5.

[427.](#) [Trotsky \(1997-2001\)](#), vol. 3, p. 437.

[428.](#) [Trotsky \(1988\)](#), p. 569.

[429.](#) Ibid., pp. 930-1.

[430.](#) [Roberts \(2006\)](#), pp. 296 and 231 ff.

[431.](#) Ibid., pp. 247-9.

[432.](#) [MacDonogh \(2007\)](#), pp. 215-6.

[433.](#) [Werth \(2007a\)](#), p. xix.

- [434. Toynbee \(1992\)](#), pp. 18-20.
- [435. Medvedev, Medvedev \(2006\)](#), p. 174.
- [436. Sherry \(1995\)](#), p. 182.
- [437. Kirilina \(1995\)](#), pp. 51 and 192-3. 158
- [438. Ibid.](#), p. 192.
- [439. Medvedev, Medvedev \(2006\)](#), pp. 16-9.
- [440. Marcucci \(1997\)](#), pp. 151-2.
- [441. Montefiore \(2007\)](#), pp. 503-4.
- [442. Cohen \(1975\)](#), p. 336.
- [443. Kuromiya \(1988\)](#), p. 127.
- [444. Kennan \(2001\)](#).
- [445. Mayer \(2000\)](#), p. 633.
- [446. Losurdo \(1996\)](#), ch. v, § 9.
- [447. Cohen \(1975\)](#), pp. 348 and 301.
- [448. Tucker \(1990\)](#), pp. 331-2.
- [449. Medvedev \(1977\)](#), pp. 223-4.
- [450. Lewin \(2003\)](#), pp. 389-97.
- [451. Tucker \(1990\)](#), pp. 201, 102 and 324.
- [452. Cohen \(1975\)](#), p. 335.
- [453. Figs \(2000\)](#), p. 156.
- [454. Trotsky \(1988\)](#), pp. 694-5 (= Trotsky, 1968, pp. 7-8).

- [455.](#) Ibid., p. 863 (= Trotsky, 1968, p. 157).
- [456.](#) Ibid., pp. 862-3 (= Trotsky, 1968, p. 156).
- [457.](#) Ibid., p. 856 (= Trotsky, 1968, p. 151).
- [458.](#) [Cohen \(1986\)](#), pp. 68-9.
- [459.](#) [Medvedev \(1977\)](#), p. 404.
- [460.](#) [Schmidt \(1950\)](#), p. 446.
- [461.](#) [Zubkova \(2003\)](#), p. 42 and footnote 18.
- [462.](#) [Applebaum \(2004\)](#), p. 26 and 465.
- [463.](#) Ibid., p. 10.
- [464.](#) Ibid., pp. 45, 50-1 and 55.
- [465.](#) [Chlevnjuk \(2006\)](#), p. 57.
- [466.](#) Ibid., pp. 59-60, 53 and 64.
- [467.](#) [Applebaum \(2004\)](#), p. 113.
- [468.](#) Ibid., p. 119.
- [469.](#) Ibid., pp. 114-6.
- [470.](#) Ibid., p. 104.
- [471.](#) [Chlevnjuk \(2006\)](#), pp. 75-9.
- [472.](#) [Applebaum \(2004\)](#), p. 105 and 122.
- [473.](#) Ibid., pp. 95-6.
- [474.](#) Ibid., pp. 257 and 260-1.
- [475.](#) Ibid., p. 259.

- [476.](#) Ibid., p. 132.
- [477.](#) Ibid., p. 112.
- [478.](#) Ibid., pp. 122, 129 and 132.
- [479.](#) Ibid., p. 256.
- [480.](#) Ibid., pp. 263-4.
- [481.](#) Ibid., p. 264.
- [482.](#) Ibid., pp. 16 and 435.
- [483.](#) Ibid., p. 434.
- [484.](#) Ibid., pp. 467-8.
- [485.](#) [Chlevnjuk \(2006\)](#), pp. 29, 194-5 and 215.
- [486.](#) Ibid., pp. 212-3.
- [487.](#) Ibid., pp. 250-1 and 86.
- [488.](#) [Conquest \(2006\)](#), p. ix.
- [489.](#) In [Applebaum \(2004\)](#), p. 18.
- [490.](#) [Mayer \(2000\)](#), pp. 236-8.
- [491.](#) [Hughes \(1990\)](#), pp. 212, 226, 230, 244.
- [492.](#) Cfr. [Losurdo \(2005\)](#), especially chs. III, § 5 and VII, § 2.
- [493.](#) [Hughes \(1990\)](#), pp. 546-52.
- [494.](#) [Losurdo \(1996\)](#), ch. V, § 1.
- [495.](#) [Arendt \(1986a\)](#), pp. 39-40.
- [496.](#) [Losurdo \(1996\)](#), ch. IV, § 5; [MacDonogh \(2007\)](#), p. 406.

- [497. Scotti \(1991\)](#).
- [498. Chlevnjuk \(2006\)](#), p. 103.
- [499. Werth \(2007b\)](#), pp. 166-7.
- [500. Goldman \(2007\)](#), pp. 3-4, 80-1 and 252.
- [501. Ibid.](#), pp. 120, 127-8, 146 and 158-9.
- [502. Ibid.](#), pp. 128 and 240.
- [503. Ibid.](#), pp. 8, 28, 160 and 245.
- [504. Ibid.](#), pp. 240 and 243-4.
- [505. Furet, Richet \(1980\)](#), p. 93.
- [506. Marx, Engels \(1955-89\)](#), vol. 23, pp. 281-2.
- [507. Davis \(2001\)](#), pp. 50-1; [Di Boca \(2006\)](#), p. 121.
- [508. Annett \(2001\)](#), pp. 5-6, 12 and 16-7.
- [509. Woodward \(1963\)](#), pp. 206-7.
- [510. Friedman \(1993\)](#), p. 95.
- [511. Blackmon \(2008\)](#), p. 57.
- [512. Chlevnjuk \(2006\)](#), pp. 349 and 346-7.
- [513. Fletcher M. Green](#), in [Woodward \(1963\)](#), p. 207.
- [514. Washington \(2007\)](#).
- [515. Kotek, Rigoulot \(2000\)](#), p. 92.
- [516. E. R. \(1997\)](#); cfr. [Washington \(2007\)](#), p. 184.
- [517. Martin \(2001\)](#), p. 6.

[518. Stalin \(1971-73\)](#), vol. 5, pp. 31 and 42 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 5, pp. 47 and 63).

[519. Martin \(2001\)](#), pp. 1-2.

[520. Washburn \(1992\)](#), pp. 252-4; [Annett \(2001\)](#), p. 31. 188

[521. Graziosi \(2007\)](#), p. 202.

[522. Hitler \(1939\)](#), pp. 82 and 428-9.

[523. Hitler \(1961\)](#), pp. 131-2.

[524. Hitler \(1965\)](#), p. 1591 (2 de octubre 1940).

[525. Stalin \(1971-73\)](#), vol. 5, p. 32 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 5, p. 49).

[526. Hitler \(1939\)](#), p. 730.

[527. Tucker \(1990\)](#), chs. 1-3.

[528. Lenin \(1955-70\)](#), vol. 9, p. 22.

[529. Fitzpatrick \(1994\)](#), p. 248.

[530. Payne \(2001\)](#), pp. 16, 19 and 22.

[531. Goldman \(2007\)](#), pp. 14-6 and 19.

[532. Kuromiya \(1988\)](#), pp. 128-9.

[533. Payne \(2001\)](#), pp. 39-40, 5 and 7.

[534. Goldman \(2007\)](#), pp. 28, 160 and 245-6.

[535. Stalin \(1971-73\)](#), vol. 14, p. 36 (= Stalin, 1952, p. 604).

[536. Payne \(2001\)](#), pp. 39-40.

[537. Figes \(2000\)](#), pp. 155-6.

[538. Blackmon \(2008\)](#), p. 56.

[539. Ibid.](#), pp. 1 ff. and passim.

[540. Marx, Engels \(1955-89\)](#), vol. 4, p. 151.

[541. Payne \(2001\)](#), pp. 3-4 and 14.

* Along with other writers, the description almost literally matches what was recorded in the travel journal of the novelist André Gide. See *Regreso de la U.R.S.S.*, followed by *Retoques a mi regreso de la U.R.S.S.* Ed. Muchnik, Barcelona, 1982. [Translator's note]

[542. Sisci \(1994\)](#), pp. 102, 86 and 89.

[543. Ibid.](#), p. 107, note 3.

[544. Lukács \(1974\)](#), p. 772.

[545. Ibid.](#), p. 848.

[546. Ibid.](#), pp. 775, 784 and 786.

[547. Churchill \(1974\)](#), p. 7313.

[548. Arendt \(1989a\)](#), pp. 325 and passim; [Chamberlin \(1950\)](#), pp. 36-7; [Losurdo \(2007\)](#), ch. II, § 14 and ch. III, §§ 6-7 (regarding the theme in the American political tradition of the "chosen" nation).

[549. 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).

[550. Markusen, Kopf \(1995\)](#).

[551. Chamberlain \(1937\)](#), pp. 997 and 33.

[552. Cfr. Losurdo \(2005\)](#), ch. x, §§ 3-4.

[553. In Annett \(2001\)](#), p. 6.

[554. Bullock \(1992\)](#).

- [555. Gardner \(1993\)](#).
- [556. In Thomas \(1988\)](#), p. 296.
- [557. Schlesinger jr. \(1967\)](#), p. 338.
- [558. Roberts \(2006\)](#), pp. 38-45 and 55.
- [559. Ruge, Schumann \(1977\)](#), p. 50.
- [560. In Kupisch \(1965\)](#), pp. 256-8.
- [561. Losurdo \(2007\)](#), ch. v, § 1 and § 4.
- [562. Hitler \(1965\)](#), p. 238 (as expressed by the editor).
- [563. Shirer \(1974\)](#), p. 453.
- [564. Baumont \(1969\)](#), p. 161.
- [565. Quoted in Goebbels \(1992\)](#), p. 867 (editor's note 22).
- [566. Baumont \(1969\)](#), pp. 92-3 and 281.
- [567. Taylor \(1996\)](#), p. 259.
- [568. Wolkogonow \(1989\)](#), p. 468.
- [569. In Gardner \(1993\)](#), pp. 36 and 44.
- [570. Wolkogonow \(1989\)](#), pp. 465 and 460.
- [571. Brecher \(1965\)](#), pp. 89-90.
- [572. Gandhi \(1969-2001\)](#), vol. 80, p. 200 (Answers to Questions, 25 April 1941) and vol. 86, p. 223 (interview with Ralph Coniston, April 1945).
- [573. Gandhi \(1969-2001\)](#), vol. 98, p. 293.
- [574. Roberts \(2006\)](#), p. 5.

- [575. Mao Zedong \(1969-75\)](#), vol. 2, pp. 271 and 275.
- [576. Coox \(1990\)](#), pp. 898 and 900.
- [577. Romein \(1969\)](#), p. 261.
- [578. In Nolte \(1987\)](#), pp. 313-4.
- [579. In Montefiore \(2007\)](#), p. 354.
- [580. Hitler \(1965\)](#), p. 1423.
- [581. Ibid.](#), pp. 1653 and 1655.
- [582. Deutscher \(1969\)](#), pp. 633-4.
- [583. Dimitrov \(2002\)](#), p. 245.
- [584. Ibid.](#), p. 258.
- [585. Ibid.](#), p. 241.
- [586. Ibid.](#), p. 246.
- [587. Deutscher \(1969\)](#), p. 638.
- [588. Dimitrov \(2002\)](#), p. 300.
- [589. Ibid.](#), p. 309.
- [590. In Nolte \(1987\)](#), p. 313; [Goebbels \(1992\)](#), p. 1603 (16 June 1941).
- [591. Kershaw \(2001\)](#), pp. 596-7 and 625.
- [592. Arendt \(1989a\)](#), p. 429, note 13.
- [593. Stalin \(1971-73\)](#), vol. 13, pp. 260-1 and 263 (= Stalin, 1952, pp. 527-8 and 530).
- [594. Stalin \(1971-73\)](#), vol. 14, pp. 68-9 (= Stalin, 1952, pp. 624-5).

- [595.](#) Ibid., pp. 187 and 190 (= Stalin, 1952, pp. 683 and 685-6).
- [596.](#) [Arendt, 1985](#), p. 248.
- [597.](#) [Feuchtwanger \(1946\)](#), pp. 76-7.
- [598.](#) Cfr. [Roberts \(2006\)](#), p. 182 (includes the testimony of Charles Bohlen).
- [599.](#) [Kershaw \(2001\)](#), pp. 621-2.
- [600.](#) [Hitler \(1965\)](#), p. 2051 (statement of 8 November 1943) and p. 1064 (statement of 30 January 1939).
- [601.](#) In [Butler \(2005\)](#), p. 82 (message of 8 August 1942).
- [602.](#) [Arendt \(1989a\)](#), pp. 602-3 and 614-5.
- [603.](#) [Goldman \(2007\)](#), p. 5.
- [604.](#) [Conquest \(2004\)](#), pp. 11-4.
- [605.](#) [Tottle \(1987\)](#), p. 86.
- [606.](#) [Argentieri \(2004\)](#), pp. vii-viii.
- [607.](#) [Tottle \(1987\)](#), p. 86.
- [608.](#) Ibid., p. 15.
- [609.](#) [Losurdo \(1996\)](#), ch. v, § 9.
- [610.](#) [Wolkogonow \(1989\)](#), p. 484; [Mayer \(2000\)](#), pp. 670-1.
- [611.](#) [Trotsky \(1988\)](#), pp. 1173 ff.
- [612.](#) Ibid., pp. 1241 and 1243.
- [613.](#) Ibid., pp. 1174-5.
- [614.](#) [Hitler \(1989\)](#), p. 215.

[615.](#) In [Kershaw \(2001\)](#), p. 668.

[616.](#) [Lower \(2005\)](#), pp. 8 and passim; [Sabrin \(1991\)](#), pp. 3-13; [Tottle \(1987\)](#), pp. 75 ff.

[617.](#) [Stalin \(1971-73\)](#), vol. 4, p. 6 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 4, p. 17).

[618.](#) [Stalin \(1971-73\)](#), vol. 5, p. 42 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 5, p. 63).

[619.](#) [Graziosi \(2007\)](#), p. 205.

[620.](#) Ibid., pp. 311 and 202.

[621.](#) Ibid., pp. 203-4.

[622.](#) [Conquest \(2004\)](#), pp. 65 and 79-80.

[623.](#) [Figes \(2000\)](#), p. 815.

[624.](#) In [Baker \(2008\)](#), p. 411.

[625.](#) [Churchill \(1974\)](#), p. 7722.

[626.](#) [Davis \(2001\)](#), pp. 46-51.

[627.](#) In [MacDonogh \(2002\)](#), pp. 362-3.

[628.](#) Ibid., pp. 366, 363 and 369-70.

[629.](#) Cfr. [Losurdo \(1996\)](#), ch. v, § 10.

[630.](#) [Losurdo \(2005\)](#), ch. v, § 8; [Losurdo \(1996\)](#), ch. v, § 10. A comparison of the Nazi “Judeocide” to the Irish famine, rather than the Ukrainian, can also be found in [Mayer \(2000\)](#), p. 639.

[631.](#) In [Baker \(2008\)](#), pp. 2 and 6.

[632.](#) [Gramsci \(1984\)](#), pp. 443-4.

[633.](#) [Rothbard \(1974\)](#), pp. 96-7.

634. [Losurdo \(2007\)](#), ch. i, § 5.
635. [Kruschov \(1958\)](#), pp. 198-202.
636. [Medvedev \(1977\)](#), p. 629; [Hobsbawm \(1991\)](#), p. 204; [Naimark \(2002\)](#), p. 108; [Furet \(1995\)](#), p. 430.
637. [Conquest \(1992\)](#), p. 290.
638. [Goebbels \(1992\)](#), p. 247 (journal entry of 8 May 1926).
639. In [Fest \(1973\)](#), p. 259.
640. [Hitler \(1980\)](#), p. 224 (conversation of 24-25 January 1942).
641. [Poliakov \(1987\)](#), p. 365.
642. [Kautsky \(1972\)](#), pp. 473-4; cfr. [Stalin \(1971-73\)](#), vol. 2, p. 1 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 2, pp. 13 ff.).
643. [Lincoln \(1994\)](#), p. 141.
644. [Levin \(1990\)](#), vol. 1, pp. 28-29.
645. [Marx, Engels \(1955-89\)](#), vol. 8, p. 5.
646. [Lenin \(1955-70\)](#), vol. 29, pp. 229-30.
647. [Poliakov \(1974-90\)](#), vol. 4, p. 233.
648. [Mosse \(1990\)](#), p. 176.
649. [Cohn \(1967\)](#), p. 128; [Mayer \(1990\)](#), p. 7.
650. [Poliakov \(1974-90\)](#), vol. 4, pp. 234 and 240-1.
651. In [Schmid \(1974\)](#), p. 312.
652. In [Baker \(2008\)](#), pp. 70-1.
653. [Ford \(1933\)](#), pp. 128 ff. and 145.

- [654. Grant \(1971\)](#), p. xxxi; [Stoddard \(1984\)](#), p. 152.
- [655. Bendersky \(2000\)](#), pp. 58, 54 and 96.
- [656. Fest \(1973\)](#), p. 201; [Poliakov \(1974-90\)](#), vol. 4, p. 362.
- [657. Stalin \(1971-73\)](#), vol. 6, pp. 122-3 (= Stalin, 1952, pp. 59-60).
- [658. Stoddard \(1971\)](#).
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- [660. Churchill \(1974\)](#), pp. 7285-93.
- [661. Stalin \(1971-73\)](#), vol. 15, pp. 30-1 (= Stalin, 1953, p. 36).
- [662. Boyle \(1990\)](#), p. 34 (letter to American president Eisenhower of 5 April 1953).
- [663. Churchill \(1974\)](#), p. 7291.
- [664. Boyle \(1990\)](#), p. 25 (letter from Churchill to Eisenhower of 18 February 1953).
- [665. Churchill \(1974\)](#), p. 7835 (speech of 23 July 1949); my italics.
- [666. Ibid.](#), pp. 7288, 7293 (speech of 5 March 1946) and 7902 (speech of 1 December 1949).
- [667. Boyle \(1990\)](#), pp. 53-4.
- [668. In Freiburger \(1992\)](#), p. 164.
- [669. Chen Jian \(1994\)](#), pp. 50 and 170.
- [670. Trotsky \(1988\)](#), p. 1050.
- [671. Ibid.](#), pp. 1042-3.
- [672. Feuchtwanger \(1946\)](#), pp. 72 and 74.

- [673.](#) Quoted in [Rogowin \(1998\)](#), p. 198.
- [674.](#) [Klemperer \(2005\)](#), p. 214.
- [675.](#) [Kelley \(1990\)](#), pp. 16 and 29.
- [676.](#) [Herzstein \(1989\)](#), p. 123.
- [677.](#) [Trotsky \(1988\)](#), pp. 1043-4.
- [678.](#) [Stalin \(1971-73\)](#), vol. 1, p. 19 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 1, p. 41).
- [679.](#) Ibid., pp. 71 and 75 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 1, pp. 106 and 111).
- [680.](#) [Stalin \(1971-73\)](#), vol. 2, pp. 307 and 267 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 2, pp. 363 and 315).
- [681.](#) [Stalin \(1971-73\)](#), vol. 3, pp. 46-7 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 3, pp. 63-4).
- [682.](#) [Stalin \(1971-73\)](#), vol. 13, p. 26.
- [683.](#) In [Tucker \(1990\)](#), p. 258.
- [684.](#) [Stalin \(1971-73\)](#), vol. 14, p. 252.
- [685.](#) [Zinn \(2002\)](#), p. 464.
- [686.](#) In [Baker \(2008\)](#), p. 9.
- [687.](#) In [De Carolis \(2007\)](#).
- [688.](#) [Stalin \(1971-73\)](#), vol. 14, p. 330.
- [689.](#) Ibid., pp. 363-4.
- [690.](#) [Hitler \(1965\)](#), p. 1773.
- [691.](#) [Hitler \(1989\)](#), p. 448 (conversation of 21 July 1942).
- [692.](#) [Goebbels \(1996\)](#) (journal entry of 21 April 1938).

- [693. Hitler \(1965\)](#), p. 1773.
- [694. In Manoschek \(1995\)](#), pp. 31, 46, 59-61, 65 and 51.
- [695. Ignatieff \(1997\)](#), p. 33.
- [696. Arendt \(1989b\)](#), p. 193.
- [697. Hitler \(1965\)](#), p. 1773.
- [698. In Pauwels \(2003\)](#), p. 128.
- [699. Bendersky \(2000\)](#), pp. 356-8.
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- [701. Eschenazi, Nissim \(1995\)](#), p. 150.
- [702. Ibid.](#), p. 366.
- [703. MacDonogh \(2007\)](#), pp. 332 and 215-24.
- [704. Eschenazi, Nissim \(1995\)](#), p. 442.
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- [706. Taylor \(1993\)](#), pp. 336 and 346.
- [707. Mlecin \(2008\)](#), p. 9.
- [708. Roberts \(2006\)](#), p. 339.
- [709. De Felice \(1995\)](#), p. 133.
- [710. MacDonogh \(2007\)](#), p. 330.
- [711. Berner \(1976\)](#), pp. 625-6; [Eschenazi, Nissim \(1995\)](#), pp. 376-8.
- [712. Mlecin \(2008\)](#), pp. 130-8.
- [713. Berner \(1976\)](#), p. 626.

- [714. Rapoport \(1991\)](#), p. 193 (in “New Jerusalem”); [Conquest \(1996\)](#), p. 48.
- [715. Roberts \(2006\)](#), p. 339.
- [716. In Rogowin \(1998\)](#), pp. 198-9.
- [717. Loewen \(2006\)](#), pp. 125-7.
- [718. Sachar \(1993\)](#), p. 640.
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- [721. Ibid.](#), p. 635.
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- [724. Sachar \(1993\)](#), pp. 636-7.
- [725. Ibid.](#), p. 640.
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- [727. Adorno \(1997\)](#), p. 324.
- [728. Knight \(1997\)](#), p. 209.
- [729. Roccucci \(2001\)](#), p. 32.
- [730. Montefiore \(2007\)](#), p. 347.
- [731. Eschenazi, Nissim \(1995\)](#), p. 43.
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- [737. Ibid.](#)
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- [744. Conquest \(1996\)](#), pp. 46-7.
- [745. Ibid.](#), p. 47.
- [746. Eschenazi, Nissim \(1995\)](#), pp. 405 and 184.
- [747. Roberts \(2006\)](#), p. 342.
- [748. Elon \(2004\)](#), p. 15.
- [749. Flores \(1995\)](#).
- [750. Thomas \(1995\)](#), pp. 225-9, 233 and passim.
- [751. Rapoport \(1991\)](#), p. 181.
- [752. Brent, Naumov \(2004\)](#), p. 8.
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- [755. Trotsky \(1988\)](#), p. 1228.

- [756. Ibid.](#), p. 1283.
- [757. Robespierre \(1912-67\)](#), vol. 10, pp. 275 and 267.
- [758. Ibid.](#), vol. 8, p. 81 and vol. 10, p. 361.
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- [761. Gramsci \(1975\)](#), p. 1729.
- [762. Ibid.](#), pp. 325, 866 and 1729.
- [763. Sun Yat-Sen \(1976\)](#), pp. 53-4.
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- [766. Feuchtwanger \(1946\)](#), p. 96.
- [767. Trotsky \(1969a\)](#), p. 47.
- [768. Ibid.](#), pp. 21, 30 and 120.
- [769. Ibid.](#), pp. 108 and 126-7.
- [770. Karol \(2005\)](#), p. 12.
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- [772. Caretto \(1997\)](#).
- [773. Ibid.](#)
- [774. Agursky \(1989\)](#), p. 52.
- [775. Ibid.](#), pp. 158 and 161.
- [776. Ibid.](#), pp. 159 and 164.

[777. Ibid.](#), p. 159.

[778. Diamond \(1985\)](#), pp. 97-8.

[779. Poliakov \(1974-90\)](#), vol. 4, p. 200.

[780. Figes \(2000\)](#), p. 813.

[781.](#) Quoted in [Traverso \(2002\)](#), photo 17.

[782.](#) In [Reuth \(1991\)](#), p. 147.

[783. Arendt \(1989a\)](#), pp. 581-2. 270

[784. Arendt \(1951\)](#), pp. 400-2; [Arendt \(1966\)](#), pp. 422-4; [Arendt \(1989a\)](#), pp. 578-81.

[785. Churchill \(1963\)](#), p. 437.

[786. Costello \(1991\)](#), p. 158.

[787.](#) In [Hofstadter \(1982\)](#), vol. 3, pp. 387-8.

[788.](#) [Ibid.](#), pp. 387 and 390.

[789. Herzstein \(1989\)](#), pp. 284 and 334-5.

[790.](#) [Ibid.](#), photos between pp. 344 and 345.

[791.](#) [Ibid.](#), pp. 279-81.

[792.](#) [Ibid.](#), pp. 240, 327 and 332.

[793. Cole \(1971\)](#), pp. 55 and 104-9; [Herzstein \(1989\)](#), pp. 327, 332 and 336.

[794. Herzstein \(1989\)](#), pp. 338-9.

[795. Chamberlain \(1950\)](#), p. 10; [Herzstein \(1989\)](#), p. 333.

[796. Herzstein \(1989\)](#), commentary to the photos in pp. 344-5.

- [797.](#) See the posters transcribed in [Gregory \(1993\)](#), pp. 60-1 and 104.
- [798.](#) [Herzstein \(1989\)](#), pp. 240 and 327.
- [799.](#) [Stalin \(1971-73\)](#), vol. 17, p. 72.
- [800.](#) [Kerenskij \(1989\)](#), pp. 525 and 328 ff.
- [801.](#) In [Schmid \(1974\)](#), p. 17.
- [802.](#) [Agursky \(1989\)](#), pp. 84 and 90.
- [803.](#) Ibid., pp. 253-4 and 256.
- [804.](#) [Thomas \(1988\)](#), pp. 315 and 248.
- [805.](#) Ibid., p. 314; [Roberts \(2006\)](#), p. 338.
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- [807.](#) [Feuchtwanger \(1946\)](#), p. 40.
- [808.](#) [Furet \(1995\)](#), pp. 172-3.
- [809.](#) [Davis \(1982\)](#), pp. 5, 65 and passim.
- [810.](#) [Freud \(1995\)](#), pp. 35-7.
- [811.](#) [Losurdo \(2007\)](#), ch. vi, § 11.
- [812.](#) [Hitler \(1965\)](#), p. 1175 (speech of 28 April 1939); [Hitler \(1980\)](#), p. 178 (conversation of 4/5 January 1942).
- [813.](#) [Kennan \(1956\)](#), pp. 441-57; [Aptheker \(1977\)](#), pp. 367-70; [Filene \(1967\)](#), pp. 47-8.
- [814.](#) [Gramsci \(1984\)](#), p. 297.
- [815.](#) [Stalin \(1971-73\)](#), vol. 3, p. 34 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 3, p. 49).
- [816.](#) [Bujarin \(1984\)](#), p. 45.

817. [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.

818. [Trotsky \(1998\)](#), pp. 98-9, 139, 238-9 and 270.

819. [Trotsky \(1997-2001\)](#), vol. 3, p. 536.

820. In [Roberts \(2006\)](#), p. 34.

821. Quoted in [Hofstadter \(1960\)](#), p. 208.

822. In [Schmid \(1974\)](#), pp. 48-9.

823. [Losurdo \(1991\)](#), ch. i, §§ 1 and 3 (for Weber); [Croce \(1950\)](#), p. 22.

824. In [Rothbard \(1974\)](#), p. 89.

825. [Lenin \(1955-70\)](#), vol. 18, pp. 322-3.

826. [Lenin \(1955-70\)](#), vol. 24, p. 423.

827. [Lenin \(1955-70\)](#), vol. 39, pp. 492, 652 and 488-9.

828. *Ibid.*, p. 652.

829. In [Hofstadter \(1960\)](#), pp. 209 and 205.

830. Cfr. [Losurdo \(2005\)](#), ch. vii, § 6.

831. [Lenin \(1955-70\)](#), vol. 24, p. 329 and vol. 25, p. 363.

832. [Marx, Engels \(1955-89\)](#), vol. 21, p. 166; [Lenin \(1955-70\)](#), vol. 25, p. 370.

833. [Bujarin \(1984\)](#), pp. 137 and 141-2.

834. [Stalin \(1971-73\)](#), vol. 3, pp. 15 and 46 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 3, pp. 27-8 and 63).

835. [Hofstadter \(1960\)](#), p. 207.

836. [Lukács \(1967\)](#), p. 5.

- [837. Croce \(1950\)](#), pp. 251-3.
- [838. Stalin \(1971-73\)](#), vol. 14, p. 190 (= Stalin, 1952, p. 686).
- [839. Pareto \(1966\)](#), p. 940.
- [840. Stalin \(1971-73\)](#), vol. 3, p. 34 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 3, p. 49).
- [841. Ibid.](#), pp. 34-5 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 3, pp. 49-50).
- [842. Ibid.](#), pp. 54-5 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 3, p. 73).
- [843. Ibid.](#), pp. 75-6 (= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 3, p. 99).
- [844. Ponting \(1992\)](#).
- [845. Catherwood \(2004\)](#), pp. 89 and 85.
- [846. Torri \(2000\)](#), p. 598.
- [847. Leibowitz, Finkel \(2005\)](#), p. 21.
- [848. Dimitrov \(2002\)](#), p. 817.
- [849. In Markusen, Kopf \(1995\)](#), p. 151.
- [850. Friedrich \(2004\)](#), pp. 19 and 52-3.
- [851. Churchill \(1974\)](#), p. 6384 (speech of 27 April 1941); [Nolte \(1987\)](#), p. 503.
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- [853. Fontaine \(2005\)](#), pp. 72-3.
- [854. Cobain \(2005\); Cobain \(2006\)](#).
- [855. In Dower \(1986\)](#), p. 39.
- [856. In Butler \(2005\)](#), p. 99 (message of 25 November 1942).
- [857. Alperovitz \(1995\)](#).

[858. Fussell \(1991\)](#), pp. 151-4.

[859. Smith \(1995\)](#), p. 248.

[860. Loewen \(2006\)](#), p. 43.

[861.](#) In [Hofstadter \(1982\)](#), vol. 3, p. 391.

[862. Friedrich \(2004\)](#), p. 381.

[863. MacDonogh \(2007\)](#), p. 365.

[864. Johnson \(1991\)](#), pp. 425 and 427.

[865. Walzer \(1990\)](#), pp. 350 and 342.

[866.](#) Ibid., p. 332.

[867.](#) Ibid., pp. 333 and 340; [Lukács \(1967\)](#), pp. 6-11.

[868. Toynbee \(1992\)](#), p. 19.

[869. Mayer \(2000\)](#), p. 607; also cfr. [Tucker \(1990\)](#), pp. 50 and 98; [Bullock \(1992\)](#), pp. 279-80; [Schneider \(1994\)](#).

[870. Walzer \(1990\)](#), pp. 330-1.

[871.](#) In [Kissinger \(1994\)](#), p. 250.

[872. Fischer \(1965\)](#), pp. 33, 743-5 and 803.

** Poor and naked go you, philosophy.* Generally quoted as a reminder of the weakness and limits of philosophy. In the context of Petrarch's original poem, it describes the isolation and abandonment of philosophical meditation, rejected by a people who, guided by the temptations of profane life, prefer power and material wealth. [Translator's note]

[873. Friedrich \(2004\)](#), pp. 129-30, 135, 292 and 297.

[874. Roberts \(2006\)](#), pp. 47 and 170-1.

[875. Di Feo \(2004\); Di Feo \(2005\).](#)

[876. Hanley, Mendoza \(2007\).](#)

[877. Warner \(2000\).](#)

[878. Sang-Hun Choe \(2007\).](#)

[879. Ibid.](#)

[880. Así Pierre Pascal, citado en Furet \(1995\), p. 129.](#)

[881. Friedrich \(2004\), p. 287.](#)

[882. Especially Tucker \(1990\), pp. 13-24.](#)

[883. Graziosi \(2007\), p. 24.](#)

[884. Stalin \(1971-73\), vol. 2, pp. 107-8 and 114-5 \(= Stalin, 1952-56, vol. 2, pp. 134, 142 and 144\).](#)

[885. Stalin \(1971-73\), vol. 6, pp. 164-5 \(= Stalin, 1952, p. 95\); Stalin \(1971-73\), vol. 13, pp. 100-2.](#)

[886. Lenin \(1955-70\), vol. 27, p. 309; Stalin \(1971-73\), vol. 11, p. 221.](#)

[887. Trotsky \(1988\), p. 863 \(= Trotsky, 1968, pp. 156-7\).](#)

[888. Benjamin \(2007\), p. 45.](#)

[889. Marx, Engels \(1955-89\), vol. 12, p. 682.](#)

[890. Stalin \(1971-73\), vol. 14, p. 69 \(= Stalin, 1952, pp. 624-5\).](#)

[891. Kelley \(1990\), p. 100.](#)

[892. Ibid., pp. 94-6.](#)

[893. In Woodward \(19662\), pp. 131-4.](#)

[894. Stalin \(1971-73\), vol. 14, pp. 69-70 \(= Stalin, 1952, p. 625\).](#)

[895.](#) Ibid., pp. 74 and 89 (= Stalin, 1952, pp. 629 and 643).

[896.](#) [Hayek \(1986\)](#), p. 310.

[897.](#) [Marx, Engels \(1955-89\)](#), vol. 4, p. 140.

[898.](#) [Deutscher \(1969\)](#), p. 498 and [Deutscher \(1972c\)](#), p. 216.

[899.](#) [Deutscher \(1969\)](#), pp. 498-9.

[900.](#) [Chlevnjuk \(1998\)](#), pp. 23-7.

[901.](#) [White \(1980\)](#), p. 82.

[902.](#) [Trotsky \(1988\)](#), pp. 1256-9.

[903.](#) [Chlevnjuk \(1998\)](#), pp. 25-6; [Rogowin \(1998\)](#), pp. 531 ff.

[904.](#) [Deutscher \(1972c\)](#), pp. 221-2.

[905.](#) [De Gasperi \(1956\)](#), p. 17.

[906.](#) In [Broué \(1991\)](#), p. 578.

[907.](#) [Churchill \(1963\)](#), pp. 320-1.

[908.](#) [Taylor \(1996\)](#), p. 159.

[909.](#) [De Gasperi \(1956\)](#), p. 17.

* Members of Komsomol, youth organization of the CPSU. (Translator's note).

[910.](#) [Deutscher \(1969\)](#), pp. 508 and 510.

[911.](#) Ibid., pp. 540 and 542.

[912.](#) [Daniels \(1970\)](#), p. 144.

[913.](#) [Deutscher \(1972b\)](#), pp. 19 and 32-3.

[914.](#) [Deutscher \(1969\)](#), p. 12 (the preface, dated 11 October 1966, in the second

edition of the biography of Stalin).

[915. Payne \(2001\)](#), p. 8.

[916. Caryl \(2002\)](#), p. 29; [Arendt \(1989a\)](#), p. 442; [Zinoviev \(1988\)](#), p. 101.

[917. Chlevnjuk \(1998\)](#), p. 367.

[918. Medvedev, Medvedev \(2006\)](#), pp. 369-71 (likewise, N. Werth and R. H. McNeal, quoted in the editor's postface).

[919. Roberts \(2006\)](#), pp. 94 and 109.

[920. Graziosi \(2007\)](#), p. 78; [Medvedev, Medvedev \(2006\)](#), p. 242.

[921. Fontaine \(2005\)](#), p. 60.

[922. Medvedev, Medvedev \(2006\)](#), p. 30.

[923. Fontaine \(2005\)](#), p. 61.

[924. Roberts \(2006\)](#), p. 374.

[925. Arendt \(1989a\)](#), pp. 428-9 and note 14.

[926. Dimitrov \(2002\)](#), p. 310.

[927. Hoffmann \(1995\)](#).

[928. Irving \(2001\)](#), p. 457.

[929. Ibid.](#), p. 456.

[930. Strada \(1996\)](#).

[931. Chlevnjuk \(2006\)](#), pp. 263-77.

[932. Sack \(1993\)](#), pp. 53 and passim.

[933. Hoffmann \(1995\)](#), pp. 154-5.

- [934. Montefiore \(2007\)](#), pp. 370, 381 and 727 ff.
- [935. Deutscher \(1972b\)](#), p. 20. 322
- [936. Baczko \(1989\)](#), p. 23 and note 11.
- [937. Ibid.](#), pp. 10 ff.
- [938. Ibid.](#), pp. 15-6.
- [939. Ibid.](#), p. 245.
- [940. Ibid.](#), pp. 244-5.
- [941. Ibid.](#), pp. 210-1.
- [942. Babeuf \(1988\)](#), pp. 316-8.
- [943. Diamond \(1985\)](#), pp. 97-8.
- [944. Filene \(1967\)](#), pp. 46-7.
- [945. Roberts \(2006\)](#), p. 3 (for the persistent popularity of Stalin in Russia); [Zinoviev \(1994\)](#), pp. 11, 17, 54 and 133.
- [946. Franceschini \(1991\)](#).
- [947. Duverger \(1993\)](#).
- [948. In Baczko \(1989\)](#), p. 191.
- [949. Chang, Halliday \(2006\)](#).
- [950. Davis \(2001\)](#), p. 299.
- [951. Losurdo \(2005\)](#), chs. ix, § 6 and viii, § 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 fight against opium).
- [952. Gernet \(1978\)](#), p. 579; [Roux \(2007\)](#), p. 40.

- [953. Gernet \(1978\)](#), p. 580.
- [954. Roux \(2007\)](#), p. 41.
- [955. Ibid.](#), pp. 34-6.
- [956. Ibid.](#), pp. 39 and 37.
- [957. Ibid.](#), pp. 41 and 37.
- [958. Ibid.](#), p. 72.
- [959. Sun Yat-Sen \(1976\)](#), pp. 27 and 42-3.
- [960. Zhang \(2001\)](#), pp. 52 and 56.
- [961. Ibid.](#), pp. 20-1.
- [962. Ibid.](#), pp. 22, 25 and 27.
- [963. Ibid.](#), pp. 24, 32 and 71.
- [964. Ibid.](#), pp. 83, 179 and 198.
- [965. Ibid.](#), pp. 250 and 244.
- [966. Ibid.](#), pp. 249-52.
- [967. Ibid.](#), p. 22.
- [968. Dale \(1996\)](#).
- [969. Luttwak \(1999\)](#), p. 151.
- [970. Zhang \(2001\)](#), pp. 53 and 55.
- [971. Ibid.](#), pp. 218 and 235.
- [972. Chang, Halliday \(2006\)](#), p. 734.
- [973. Arrighi \(2008\)](#), pp. 406-7.

- [974. Johnson \(2001\)](#), p. 31.
- [975. Short \(2005\)](#), pp. 351, 287, 289-90, 334 and 361-2.
- [976. Ibid.](#), pp. 18 and 277-8.
- [977. Ibid.](#), p. 331; also cfr. the photo on p. 376 and p. 377.
- [978. Wikler \(1999\)](#).
- [979. Short \(2005\)](#), pp. 289 and 586.
- [980. Ibid.](#), p. 359.
- [981. Ibid.](#), pp. 380-1.
- [982. Ibid.](#), pp. 382 and 326.
- [983. Chomsky, Herman \(2005\)](#), p. 60.
- [984. Hauter \(2004\)](#).
- [985. Short \(2005\)](#), pp. 289 and 290, note.
- [986. Conquest \(1992\)](#), p. 174.
- [987. In Ruge, Schumann \(1977\)](#), p. 24.
- [988. Ibid.](#), pp. 32-3.
- [989. Goebbels \(1992\)](#), pp. 1585 and 1603 (24 May and 16 June 1941).
- [990. Roberts \(2006\)](#), p. 85.
- [991. Klemperer \(1996\)](#), vol. 2, p. 194.
- [992. Conquest \(1992\)](#), p. 174.
- [993. In Canfora \(2006\)](#), p. 232.
- [994. In Baker \(2008\)](#), p. 73.

- [995. Croce \(1993\)](#), vol. 2, p. 88.
- [996. Ibid.](#), p. 408.
- [997. Ibid.](#), p. 366.
- [998. Mises \(1927\)](#), p. 45.
- [999. In Baker \(2008\)](#), p. 70.
- [1000. In Kershaw \(2005\)](#), pp. 52 and 75 and 228.
- [1001. Gramsci \(1975\)](#), p. 2326.
- [1002. Conquest \(1992\)](#), p. 175.
- [1003. Losurdo \(2007\)](#), ch. iii, §§ 4-5.
- [1004. Gramsci \(1975\)](#), p. 199 (the reference is chiefly to Madison Grant).
- [1005. Conquest \(2001\)](#), pp. 275 ff. and 307.
- [1006. Short \(2005\)](#), pp. 289 and 290, note.
- [1007. McAllister Linn \(1989\)](#), p. 27.
- [1008. Chomsky, Herman \(2005\)](#), pp. 227-9.
- [1009. Woodward](#), in [Losurdo \(2005\)](#), ch. x, § 5.
- [1010. Ginzburg \(1988\)](#), pp. 221-2, 205 and 211.
- [1011. Ibid.](#), p. 220
- [1012. Ibid.](#), pp. 212, 219 and 232.
- [1013. Ibid.](#), p. 222.
- [1014. Ibid.](#), pp. 217-8.
- [1015. Kelley \(1990\)](#), pp. xii-xiii.

- [1016. Ginzburg \(1988\)](#), p. 203.
- [1017. Ascherson \(2005\)](#), p. 29.
- [1018. Navarro \(1999\)](#).
- [1019. Marx, Engels \(1955-89\)](#), vol. 17, p. 334.
- [1020. Bujarin, Preobrazhensky \(1920\)](#), p. 106.
- [1021. Werth \(2007b\)](#); [Galli Della Loggia \(2007\)](#).
- [1022. Souvarine \(2003\)](#), p. 401
- [1023. De Ruggiero \(1963\)](#), p. 437.
- [1024. Roux \(2007\)](#), p. 41.
- [1025. Ginzburg \(1988\)](#), p. 223.
- [1026. Conquest \(2001\)](#), p. 48.
- [1027.](#) In [Chamberlain \(1937\)](#), p. 997 and note 2; [Martineau \(1857\)](#), p. 297.
- [1028.](#) Above all, cfr. [Losurdo \(2005\)](#), chs. V, § 8; VI, § 3; III, § 2; X, § 1; VII, § 1; IX, § 2 and VII, § 6.
- [1029. James \(1968\)](#), p. 105.
- [1030.](#) Paul Johnson's praise is quoted on the flap of [Conquest \(2001\)](#).
- [1031. Grégoire \(1996\)](#), p. 75.
- [1032. Davis \(2000\)](#).
- [1033.](#) In [Blackmon \(2008\)](#), p. 358.
- [1034.](#) For nostalgia for the Southern tradition, cfr. [Weaver \(1987\)](#), pp. 78, 161, 160-70; in a critical sense, cfr. [Franklin \(1989\)](#), pp. 10-40 and [Davis \(2000\)](#).
- [1035. James \(1968\)](#), p. 117.

1036. In Weaver (1987), p. 168. 356

1037. Deschner (1988).

1038. Hegel (1969-79), vol. 12, p. 35.

1039. Gramsci (1975), p. 1417.

1040. Cfr. Losurdo (2005), chs. I, § 6 and vii, §§ 3 and 6.

1041. Baudy (1991), pp. 9-10 and 43.

* Expression used in reference to the last years of the resistance and the first postwar years in Italy, marked by the presence of the different Committees of Liberation (CLN), in which the bulk of opposition parties to fascism met, principally the PCI, the PSI, and the PA. [Translator's note]

1042. Ambler (2002).

1043. Loth (1994).

* See "Perché Stalin creó Israele", Leonid Mlecin (Luciano Canfora's preface), editorial Sandro Teti, Roma, 2009. An extensive article in Spanish recently appeared in the newspaper Público and can be seen here:

<http://lapizarradeyuri.blogspot.com/2010/03/la-region-autonoma-hebrea-el-israel-de.html> [Translator's note]

1044. Feuchtwanger (1946), p. 97.

1045. Deutscher (1954).

1046. Storia del Partito comunista (b) dell'urss, Edizioni l'Unità, Roma 1944, pp. 271-2.

1047. Trotsky (1976), passim.

1048. Deutscher (1954), p. 31.

1049. Trotsky (1976), p. 367.

1050. The quote also reappears in Enzo Biagi's interview with Averell

Harriman, printed in *La Repubblica*, 6 July 1983, p. 7.

[1051. Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin \(1957\).](#)

[1052.](#) Ibid., p. 13.

[1053. Gorbachov \(1993\).](#)

[1054.](#) La Stampa, 12 December 1993.

[1055.](#) La Repubblica, 28 July 1993.

[1056.](#) Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, II, 63.

[1057.](#) Xenophon, *Hellenica*, II, 1, 32; *Lysias*, XIV, 38.