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“Democracy” in the Political Consciousness of the February Revolution

Boris Ivanovich Kolonitskii

Historians of quite diverging orientations have interpreted the February revolution of 1917 in Russia as a “democratic” revolution. Several generations of Marxists of various stripes (*tolk*) have called it a “bourgeois-democratic revolution.” In the years of perestroika, the contrast between democratic February and Bolshevik October became an important part of the historical argument of the anticommunist movement. The February revolution was regarded as a dramatic, unsuccessful attempt at the modernization and westernization of Russia, as its democratization. Such a point of view was expressed even earlier in some historical works and in the memoirs of participants in the events—liberals and moderate socialists. For example, just such a description of the revolution is given by Aleksandr Kerenskii, whose last reminiscences are especially significant. Kerenskii thought that “the overwhelming majority of the Russian population . . . were wholeheartedly democratic in their beliefs.”¹

In many respects, this viewpoint is correct. For the most part, both the legislation of the February revolution and the practical activity of the Provisional Government were directed toward creating democratic, elected institutions, toward securing human rights and democratic freedoms. Democratization was seen as a universal means to solve any kind of problem. After February, people strove to democratize the theater, church, and schools (in the latter case one might mean labor education and the creation of self-management). During the revolution a unique experiment was conducted in the democratization of the army, which Kerenskii himself called “the freest in the world” (*samaia svobodnaia v mire*) (soldiers of the 12th army, for example, were proud of the fact that it was “the most democratic” of the Russian armed forces). Troop committees of elected representatives were created in the army and were able to exercise significant rights; soldiers of many units and subdivisions chose their commanders; even the decision to initiate an attack was occasionally subject to a vote.²

Democratic ideology and phraseology influenced the language of revolution. The term *democracy* (*demokratiia*), which gave way in popularity to the concepts of “the people” (*narod*), “freedom” (*svoboda*), and “socialism” (*sotsializm*), was absolutely “politically correct,” ideologi-

1. A. F. Kerensky, *Russia and History's Turning Point* (New York, 1965), 326.

2. V. V. Shul'gin claims, with reference to the testimony of German officers, that soldiers sometimes voted in the middle of an attack, before each charge. It is difficult to believe this, but the very existence of anecdotes on the theme of “democratized battles” is symptomatic. V. V. Shul'gin, “1917–1919,” in A. V. Lavrov, ed., *Litsa: Biograficheskii almanakh* (Moscow, 1994), 5:143.

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cally fashionable, and emotionally attractive. The guberniia diocese congress in Kursk concluded that the republican democratic structure “corresponded most closely” to evangelical law. The battleship *Imperator Nikolai I* was to take the name *Democracy*. But ships were not the only things changing names. On 8 (21) April 1917, one soldier, Sergei Romanov, made a special request: like many who shared his surname, he wanted to be rid of the Romanov name because it was considered “monarchist” and “unpleasant” (some Rasputins and Sukhomlinovs also aspired to change their surnames). Romanov wrote, “A wounded soldier, I consider it shameful at the present time to bear the surname Romanov, and therefore request that you permit me to change my name from Romanov to Demokratov” (his request was denied).³ If the renaming of military ships testifies to the inclusion of a political term in the new government ideology, then the anthroponymic reaction to the revolution (changes in surnames and the decline in popularity of the name Nikolai were unusually widespread after February) indicates a distinctive politicization of private life. For neophytes of political life the term *democracy* had a positive meaning; one must suppose that the soldier Romanov (he was never allowed to change his name) thought that he, his family, and his descendants would be proud of the new name.

Including the term *democracy* in one’s own political lexicon became a must for practically all political forces—from Bolsheviks to Kornilovites. Thus, Nikolai Berdiaev called Lavr Kornilov an “indubitable democrat” and Boris Savinkov considered the general “a true democrat and unwavering republican.”⁴ To combat German propaganda in Russia, British and French missions, in cooperation with Kornilov’s entourage, created a special publishing house in Petrograd, turning out no fewer than 12 million leaflets. Significantly, the publisher was called Demokraticheskaia Rossiia (Democratic Russia). Evidently, it was assumed that printed matter from such a source would be in demand.⁵

On the other hand, even the leader of the Bolsheviks was seen by his supporters as “the leader of democracy.” In May 1917 front-line soldiers wrote to the editorial office of a Bolshevik newspaper: “We send a warm greeting to the leader of Russian democracy and the defender of our interests, comrade Lenin.” A Bolshevik-poet proclaimed on the pages of *Pravda*:

3. *Russkaia volia*, 1 (14) June 1917; *Russkoe slovo*, 21 April (4 May) 1917; Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv, f. 1412, op. 16, d. 532. On changing surnames, see Andrew M. Verner, “What’s in a Name? Of Dog-Killers, Jews and Rasputin,” *Slavic Review* 53, no. 4 (1994): 1046–70.

4. N. A. Berdiaev, “O svobode i dostoinstve slova,” *Narodopravstvo: Ezhniedielnyi zhurnal*, 1917, no. 11:6; House of Lords Record Office, Historical Collection, no. 206: The Stow Hill Papers, DS 2/1 (G).

5. B. I. Kolonitskii, “Izdatel’stvo ‘Demokraticheskaia Rossiia,’ inostrannye missii i okruzhenie L. G. Kornilova,” in I. L. Afanas’ev, A. U. Davydov, V. I. Startsev, eds., *Rossiia v 1917 godu: Novye podkhody i vzgliady. Sbornik nauchnykh trudov*, 2d ed. (St. Petersburg, 1994), 28–31.

Я пою семью народную,
Что зовется демократией,
За ее борьбу природную
С темнотою и апатией.

(I sing the family of my people,
Which is called democracy,
For her instinctive battle
With darkness and apathy.)⁶

And so, representatives of nearly the entire political spectrum thought they should call themselves "democrats." This facilitated the multiple meanings of the term *democracy* and lent the advantages of political mimicry to those who used it. The satirist D. N. Semenovskii had good reason to describe the situation in the following way:

Вся Русь по-новому одета,
Чертовски пестрый маскарад!
Погромщик принял вид кадета,
А кто теперь не демократ?

(All of Russia is newly decked out,
A devilishly motley masquerade!
A thug pretends to be a Kadet,
And who's not a democrat now?)⁷

One distinctive piece of evidence concerning the popularity of the term *democracy* in revolutionary Russia was the emotional statement made by Lord Charles Hardinge, the permanent undersecretary of state for foreign affairs of Great Britain. On 13 (26) April, Hardinge wrote to Sir George Buchanan, the British ambassador in Petrograd: "How I hate the word democracy at the present time: if we do not win the war, as it should be won, it will be thanks to the Russian revolution and the absurd nonsense talked about the democracies of the world."⁸ An official of conservative convictions, Hardinge questioned, not without foundation, the battle readiness of the Russian revolutionary army, at the same time that many of his compatriot liberals wrote enthusiastically of a unified battle pitting the "democratic countries" against Prussian militarism and absolutism.

The Most Democratic Country

Active participants in the Russian revolution not only strove toward democratic transformations in their country, they thirsted to make Russia "the most democratic" government in the world: "We won't create some kind of English or German structure, rather a democratic republic in the full sense of the word," Kerenskii declared on 15 (28)

6. *Pravda*, 11 (24) May and 19 May (1 June) 1917.

7. *Russkaia stikhotvornaia satira 1908–1917-x godov* (Leningrad, 1974), 568.

8. Cambridge University Library, Hardinge Papers, vol. 31, p. 311.

May in Helsinki. He called Russia “the freest country in the world,” “the avant-garde of the democratic socialist movement in Europe,” “the most democratic government in Europe” and declared that Russia “had become the leader of the democratic governments.” Russian politicians sometimes even infected foreigners with their enthusiasm. After a meeting with Kerenskii, Harold Williams, an influential British journalist, wrote, “If all went well Russia might actually prove to be an even freer country than England.”⁹

Kerenskii turned out to be emotionally similar in one respect to his political opponent V. I. Lenin, who called post-February Russia “the freest” country. A comparable point of view was expressed in agitational brochures: “If the Russian republic will be the youngest in the family of nations, then, we hope, it will be the best, the most perfect.”¹⁰ Concerning belief in the miracle “of the transformation of a half-Asian despotic state into nearly the freest country in the world,” the Menshevik-defensist A. N. Potresov wrote with sarcasm: “As if even a backward country that until recently aroused mixed feelings of apprehension and pity in a foreigner, even a country with a dispersed populace that was submissive to the Cossack’s whip, might actually be able, not only to jump in one bound across the abyss that has separated it from the cultural level of the European west since time immemorial, but also to disgrace that west and reveal heretofore unknown patterns of democratism and unseen forms of citizenship.” P. A. Sorokin called these attitudes “inside-out slavophilism.” Revolutionary messianism was inherent to both the radicalized masses and the liberal members of the Provisional Government: “By its very nature, the soul of the Russian people turned out to be a democratic soul of the world. This soul is prepared not only to unify with democracy all over the world, to stand before it, but also to lead democracy along the path of the development of humanity toward the beginnings of freedom, equality, and brotherhood”—declared the prime minister–chairman Prince G. E. L’vov, expressing a worldview strongly influenced by the Slavophiles.¹¹

Ideas of Russian messianism, inherited next by the Bolsheviks, were intrinsic even to some leaders of democratic February. Occasionally “revolutionary-democratic” messianism was already combining at that time with ideas about “exporting the revolution.” So, for example, I. G. Tsereteli, the leader of the Mensheviks and minister of the Provisional Government, stated that the task of revolution—“is the final victory of democracy inside the country and beyond its borders.” Kerenskii expressed similar ideas. In April 1917, he announced: “We can

9. A. F. Kerenskii *ob armii i voine* (Odessa, 1917), 10, 32; *Rech'* A. F. Kerenskogo, *voennogo i morskogo ministra, tovarishcha predsedatel'ia Petrogradskogo Soveta rabochikh i sol'datskikh deputatov, proiznesennaia im 29 aprelia, v soveshchanii delegatov fronta* (Moscow, 1917), 3; H. Pitcher, *Witnesses of the Russian Revolution* (London, 1994), 61.

10. R. Grigor'ev [R. G. Lemberg], *Demokraticheskaia respublika* (Petrograd, 1917), 19.

11. A. N. Potresov, *Posmertnyi sbornik proizvedenii* (Paris, 1937), 230; *Volia naroda*, 17 (30) September and 25 September (8 October) 1917; *Rech'*, 27 April (10 May) 1917.

play a colossal role in world history if we manage to cause other nations to travel our path, if we make our friends and enemies respect freedom. But for that they must see the impossibility of fighting the ideas of Russian democracy."¹²

Of course, such statements above all provided the ideological basis for the need to continue the war against German militarism—"the bulwark of monarchism in Europe." Correspondingly, in their propaganda leaflets, Russian soldiers called on their opponents to follow their example and overthrow their ruling dynasties. Allies could also become the target of the export of revolution, however, and calls to bring about an antimonarchist revolution in Romania were widely circulated among Russian soldiers deployed in that country. Anti-Shah and antifeudal sentiments were spread in the north of Persia by Russian soldiers who wanted to "democratize" that country.

Legislative practice also reflected attempts to become the "most advanced democracy." For example, a law on elections to the Constituent Assembly put into place electoral norms that appeared only a decade later in countries with more developed legal rights.

"Democracy" as Identification

The term *democracy* was understood in various ways in 1917. Different interpretations of the idea are given by numerous dictionaries that were intended to facilitate the acquisition of the language of contemporary mass politics. (Contemporaries spoke of the need for a corresponding "translation" of the newspapers and leaflets.) In many cases "democracy" was understood as "people's power" (*narodovlastie*).¹³ Sometimes the real target was not existing governments, however, but rather some kind of sociopolitical ideal. Thus, a dictionary published by the Moscow publishing house *Narodnaia mysl'* (People's thought) stated that the United States and France "are entirely bourgeois republics; tiny Switzerland is drawing much nearer to the model of a democratic republic, but it is still far from a fully unconstrained democracy." Such a formulation seemed to suppose that a "bourgeois republic" could not be democratic. Sometimes the arming of the populace as a replacement for a standing army was considered the most important indication of a democratic republic.¹⁴ The legal understand-

12. I. G. Tsereteli, *Vospominaniia o Fevral'skoi revoliutsii*, bk. 1 (Paris, 1963), 147, see also 119; *Rech'i A. F. Kerenskogo* (Kiev, 1917), 8.

13. See *Narodnyi slovar'* (Petrograd, 1917), 11; *Narodnyi tolkovyi slovar'* (Petrograd, 1917), 8; *Politicheskii slovar': Obshchedostupnoe izlozhenie inostrannykh i drugikh slov, voshedshikh v russkii iazyk* (Petrograd, 1917), 8ff.; *Politicheskii slovar'*, comp. V. I. (Piriatin, 1917), 14; *Kratkii politicheskii slovar' s prilozheniem svedenii o glavneishikh russkikh politicheskikh partiakh: Posobie pri chtenii gazet i knig po obshchim voprosam*, comp. I. Vladislavlev (Moscow, 1917), 14.

14. *Politicheskii slovar'*, comp. Pr. Zvenigorodtsev (Moscow, 1917), [column 6] 16; *Tolkovatel' neponiatnykh slov v gazetakh i knigakh* (Odessa, 1917), 8.

ing of the term *democracy* could also harbor antibourgeois sentiments—a democratic “people’s” republic was seen as a way to limit the power of the “upper classes” (*vysshie klassy*).¹⁵

But the concept of democracy as “people’s power” was not the only one. P. Volkov, the author of a dictionary issued by the Moscow publishing house Ideia aptly noted: “The word *democracy* is now used either in the sense of ‘rule by the people’ [*pravlenie naroda*] or ‘power of the people’ [*vlast' narodu*] or denotes the broad masses of people, the aggregate of democratic parties, or a government based on a democratic foundation.”¹⁶ And so, in some cases “democracy” was understood as a synonym for the concept of the “people” (*narod*) and, correspondingly, a “democrat” was defined as a “populist” (*narodnik*).¹⁷ However, sometimes not the entire people but only the “democratic strata” (*demokraticheskie sloi*) and the “laboring classes” (*trudiashchiesia klassy*) were given this name. Polemizing from a similar point of view, N. A. Arsen'ev, the author of a dictionary published by the Moscow publishing house D. Ia. Makovskii, wrote: “Democracy is the whole people, the poor and the rich, men and women, and so on. Presently democracy refers only to the poor, to people without resources, that is, workers and peasants; but this is incorrect.” The opposite position was taken, for example, by the authors of a *Guide to Political Terms and Politicians* who distinguished between the terms *democratic republic* and *democracy*: “Democracy is all classes in a country who live by their own labor: workers, peasants, servants, intelligentsia.”¹⁸ It is significant that this last dictionary was issued by an extremely moderate liberal publishing house, Osvobozhdennaia Rossiia (Liberated Russia), which was created by the Provisional Committee of the State Duma.

As we see, the term *democracy* had quite specific connotations in 1917; it often expressed a certain type of self-identification. “Democracy” was opposed, not to “dictatorship” (*diktatura*), “police state” (*politseiskoe gosudarstvo*), and the like, but rather to “privileged elements” (*tsenzovye elementy*), “the ruling classes” (*praviashchie klassy*), and, quite often, “the bourgeoisie” (*burzhuaiziia*).¹⁹ The terms *democracy* and, especially *revolutionary democracy* often served as synonyms for the ideas of “democratic classes,” “democratic strata” (“people”), “democratic organizations” (as Soviets and committees were considered in 1917), and “democratic forces” (here the socialists considered only themselves to be democrats). In the minds of the socialists (especially in the first months of 1917), the terms *democracy* and *democratic camp* (*demokratiches-*

15. Grigor'ev, *Demokraticheskaiia respublika*, 8–9.

16. P. Volkov, *Revoliutsionnyi katekhizis (Karmannaia politicheskaiia entsiklopediia)* (Moscow, 1917), 7.

17. *Politicheskii slovar'* (Piriatin, 1917), 14.

18. N. A. Arsen'ev, *Kratkii politicheskii slovar' dlia vsekh* (Moscow, 1917), 9; *Tolkovnik politicheskikh slov i politicheskikh deiatelei* (Petrograd, 1917), 22.

19. For example, on 19 August, I. G. Tsereteli announced: “At the Moscow Conference, organized democracy resisted privileged Russia for the first time,” *Mensheviks v 1917 g.*, vol. 2, *Ot iul'skikh sobytii do kornilovskogo miatezha* (Moscow, 1995), 337.

kii lager') meant the aggregate of the working masses and the socialist intelligentsia supporting the Soviets.²⁰

The position of the socialists sometimes influenced even the language of liberal publications. Thus *Birzhevye vedomosti* called the Executive Committee of the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies "the managing organ of democracy." The equating of "democracy" with the socialists could be found also in I. G. Tsereteli's speeches to the Constituent Assembly. He said that "the internecine civil war of democracy, which with the hands of one part destroys the achievements of all of democracy, even surrenders it trussed by the arms and legs of the bourgeoisie." As we see, "democracy" was contrasted to the "bourgeoisie," and even at this time and in this situation he unconditionally included the Bolsheviks in the camp with "democracy": "The part of democracy represented by you," Tsereteli would say to the Bolsheviks.²¹

So deeply rooted was this interpretation that one finds similar use of the term, not only in texts from 1917, but also in memoirs by émigrés. And in I. G. Tsereteli's memoirs we find echoes of a similar approach, although they were written many years later. He uses the term in various meanings. In some cases he writes about "socialist" democracy and "purely bourgeois" democracy. In this way, he points to the components of "democracy," which included a "bourgeois" element. And in other places he writes about the "united front of all democratic forces." In this case he does not talk exclusively about socialists. However, additionally, he sometimes contrasts "democracy" and "bourgeoisie." Sometimes he examines Bolshevism, "left maximalism" as the opponent of "democracy," and sometimes, describing the conflict of the Bolsheviks with the moderate socialists, he speaks about "internecine strife in the ranks of democracy," that is, he includes Bolsheviks in the "camp of democracy."²² In this case, Tsereteli as a memoirist uses the socialist jargon of 1917.

Even such a staunch advocate of cooperation with the "bourgeoisie" as A. N. Potresov grouped the Bolsheviks in the "camp of democracy": "Lenin's furious ideology is only a concentrated and perhaps exaggerated expression of those thoughts and feelings that partially ferment in the heads of a significant portion of democracy," he wrote in 1917.²³

For Tsereteli, Potresov, and many other moderate socialists of 1917, "democracy" meant the forces represented in the Soviets, in the committees, and by socialists of various types. This understanding of "de-

20. Z. Galili, *Lidery men'shevikov v russkoi revoliutsii: Sotsial'nye realii i politicheskaiia strategiiia* (Moscow, 1993), 421.

21. *Birzhevye vedomosti*, 22 April (5 May) 1917; *Pervyi den' Vserossiiskogo Uchreditel'nogo sobraniia* (Petrograd, 1918), 36, 45.

22. I. G. Tsereteli, *Vospominaniia*, bk. 1, pp. 61, 121; bk. 2, pp. 194, 394, 402.

23. Potresov, *Posmertnyi sbornik proizvedenii*, 229. Potresov linked Bolshevism to "revolutionary democracy" even in 1926; see S. Ivanov, A. N. Potresov: *Opyt kul'turno-psikhologicheskogo portreta* (Paris, 1938), 211.

mocracy” also had an effect, for example, on the composition of the Democratic Conference 14–22 September (27 September–5 October)—representatives of the “bourgeoisie” were not invited to participate. Activists did not let the families of landowners take their places for the elections for the new zemstvo—it would have been “undemocratic.”²⁴

In his memoirs, Kerenskii criticized the language of the Russian socialists and contrasted it to his own supposedly purely democratic western position. Kerenskii the memoirist often distorts the true picture of Kerenskii the politician of 1917, however; his formal self-portrait is modernized and westernized. In actuality such socialist language was also his own, at least he used it in many of his important speaking appearances. In his famous speech of 2 (15) March at the Soviet he announced: “I am a representative of democracy, and the Provisional Government must see me as someone expressing the demands of democracy and must especially take account of the opinions that I will uphold as a representative of democracy, by whose efforts the old regime was overthrown.” In other words, he considered only himself a representative of “democracy.” In another speech he proclaimed: “In the name of the Provisional Government of the country, I can convey greetings and a bow to all democracy: to workers, soldiers, and peasants.”²⁵ The “minister-democrat” (and this is exactly how Kerenskii presented himself) gave the impression that he did not consider other members of the government—representatives of the Constitutional Democratic Party and other liberals—as “democrats.” Even in Kerenskii’s early émigré works one sees the oppositions between “bourgeoisie” and “democracy” and between “Russian bourgeoisie” (*rusaskaia burzhuaziia*) and “laboring democracy” (*trudovaia demokratiia*).²⁶

The opposition between “bourgeoisie” and “democracy” became an important instrument for classifying political forces. The language of the Russian revolution also influenced reports by foreigners. Thus, for example, the famous English journalist Arthur Ransome also wrote about the conflict between the Bolsheviks and the “other part of democracy,” indicating a split among the socialists. In a survey put together for the War Ministry of Great Britain, there was talk of a compromise between the “bourgeois” and “democratic” parties in Russia. Even the British ambassador, George Buchanan, used the concepts of the “bourgeoisie” and “democracy” to describe the opposing camps.²⁷

24. S. E. Trubetskoi, *Minuvshee* (Moscow, 1991), 172–73.

25. Kerensky, *Russia and History's Turning Point*, 411; *Petrogradskii Sovet rabochikh i soldatskikh deputatov v 1917 godu: Protokoly, stenogrammy i otchety, rezoliutsii, postanovleniia obshchikh sobranii, sobranii seksii, zasedanii Iсполnitel'nogo komiteta i fraktsii 27 fevralia–25 oktiabria 1917 goda* (St. Petersburg, 1993), 77–78.

26. *Vserossiiskoe soveshchanie Sovetov rabochikh i soldatskikh deputatov: Stenograficheskii otchet* (Moscow, 1927), 68; A. F. Kerenskii, *Izdaleka: Sbornik statei (1920–1921)* (Paris, 1922), 93, 164, 165.

27. Pitcher, *Witnesses of the Russian Revolution*, 117; Public Record Office, War Office, 158/964; G. Buchanan, *My Mission to Russia and Other Diplomatic Memories* (London, 1923), 2:128.

Throughout history, the concepts "democracy," "democrat," and "true democrat" have been used fairly often for self-identification; correspondingly, political opponents are thereby as if excluded from the political process. In this connection the Russian revolution of 1917 was no exception. A special aspect of this revolution was the contrast between "democracy" and "bourgeoisie" proposed by socialists of various tendencies. Not everyone, of course, agreed with this approach; there were even attempts to contrast democracy and socialism. However, in Russia's political life the language of class dominated; the concept of "democracy" was included in this language and subjected to specific changes. We find a distinctive confirmation of this in reports by the British vice-consul in Khar'kov: "Class hatred had been intensified by ill use of foreign terminology, such as 'bourgeois,' 'proletariat,' 'democrat,' 'citizen,' and 'comrade.'"²⁸ And N. A. Berdiaev wrote: "A new creation of idols has begun, many idols and earthly gods have appeared—'revolution,' 'socialism,' 'democracy,' 'internationalism,' and 'proletariat.'"²⁹ It is significant that both authors place the term *democracy* among the concepts of a socialist vocabulary.

Mass Democratic Consciousness and the Cult of the Leader

The interpretation of "democracy" proposed by the socialists was reflected in mass consciousness; "democracy" was equated with the "people"—"We are democracy" (*demokratiia—eto my*). The people, however, developed the ideas of "democracy" and "the republic" according to their own traditional conceptions of power (mass consciousness also gave its interpretations to other concepts borrowed from the language of contemporary politics—"socialism," "bourgeoisie," and "Bolsheviks," and so on). Here we encounter the problem of the translation from the bookish language of the February revolution by the less educated and sometimes illiterate activists. Research into this little studied borderland between oral and printed culture is a complex task.

Buchanan recalled that in the first days of the revolution one Russian soldier noted: "Oh, yes, we must have a republic, but we must have a good tsar at the head." Such an example could serve to corroborate the ambassador's own views with respect to the Russians' low level of political culture: "Russia is not ripe for a purely democratic form of government," he stated. And we see echoes of similar sentiments in other sources: "We want the Republic, . . . but with a good Tsar,"—wrote a French diplomat, de Robien, on the views of Russian soldiers. An American historian and Slavist, Frank Golder, who was in Petrograd in 1917, also noted: "Stories are being told of soldiers who say they wish a republic like England, or a republic with a Tsar. One soldier said he wanted to elect a President and when asked 'whom would you elect?' he replied, 'The Tsar.' From all accounts many of

28. Public Record Office, Foreign Office, section 371, box 3015, N 225904, p. 250.

29. N. A. Berdiaev, "Pravda i lozh' v obshchestvennoi zhizni," *Narodopravstvo* 4 (1917): 7; Berdiaev, "Kontrevoliutsiia," *Russkaia svoboda*, 1917, no. 10–11:6.

the soldiers do not grasp and do not understand what the Revolution means.”³⁰

One may, of course, suppose that these authors wrote about the same soldiers—foreigners often socialized together, met regularly at gatherings, told each other new anecdotes and political news. Yet even in reports by the Russian military censorship office we encounter analogous excerpts from soldiers’ letters: “We want a democratic republic and a tsar-father for three years”; “it would be good if they gave us a republic with a tsar who can get things done.” One of the censors reported, “in nearly all letters, the peasants express the desire to see a tsar as the leader of Russia. Obviously, monarchy is the only method of governance compatible with peasant conceptions.”³¹

It is possible that officials of the military censorship office were of a conservative disposition and chose examples that reflected their political biases. But it is unlikely that all peasants and soldier-peasants that made such statements in March and April about the tsar were convinced monarchists (as we see, some of the soldiers wanted to limit the tsar’s term in office). Rather, they saw the concepts of “state” (*gosudarstvo*) and “tsardom” (*tsarstvo*) as synonyms; they could not imagine a state without a “sovereign” (*gosudar’*). It is well known that soldiers often refused to swear allegiance to the Provisional Government; the mention of the word *state* in the text of the oath was seen as a counterrevolutionary advocacy of monarchism. The soldiers shouted, “We do not have a state, but we do have a republic.”³²

A striking example of the combination of antimonarchist sentiment and monarchist mentality was given in the memoirs of a Menshevik, a deputy of the Moscow Soviet of Workers’ Deputies. He described his speech at a rally of reserve regiments near Vladimir at the beginning of March 1917: “in the middle of a field stood a podium with two or three soldiers on it, and all around stood a crowd of thousands—it was black from all the people. I spoke, of course, about war and peace, about land—‘land to the people’—and about the advantages of the republic over the monarchy. But when I had finished and the excited ‘hurrahs’ and applause had ceased, a powerful voice shouted ‘We want you as tsar,’ which brought more applause. I declined the crown of the Romanovs and left with a grave feeling from the realization of how easy it would be for any adventurer or demagogue to take control of this simple and naive people.”³³ In this case there was an interesting relationship between the “enlightened western” so-

30. Buchanan, *My Mission to Russia*, 2:86, 114, see also 2:111, 128, 216–17; L. de Robien, *The Diary of a Diplomat in Russia, 1917–1918* (London, 1969), 24; Terence Emmons and Bertrand M. Patenaude, comps. and eds., *War, Revolution and Peace in Russia: The Passages of Frank Golder, 1914–1927* (Stanford, 1992), 46.

31. Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi voenno-istoricheskii arkhiv, f. 2003, op. 1, d. 1494, l. 14; Otdel rukopisei Rossiiskoi Natsional’noi biblioteki (formerly Gosudarstvennaia Publichnaia biblioteka im. M. E. Saltykova-Shchedrina), f. 152, op. 1, d. 98, l. 34.

32. See D. P. Os’kin, *Zapiski praporshchika* (Moscow, 1931), 110–11.

33. St. Antony’s College (Oxford), Russian and East European Centre, G. Katkov’s Papers; *Moskovskii Sovet rabochikh deputatov (1917–1922)*, 10.

cialist, speaking the language of contemporary politics, and the "dark," uneducated soldier-peasants, who did not understand the "correct" language of the democratic socialists. Yet this incident also clearly testifies to the fact that the adherents of democracy and "the people" often spoke in different political languages. The use of the same words—*democracy*, *republic*, *tsar*, *socialism*, and so on—created only an illusion of mutual understanding.³⁴

As we see, from the beginning the concepts of "democracy" (which could serve as a synonym for "new life"—"bright future") and "good tsar" could peacefully coexist in mass consciousness. However, this was evidently characteristic only in the first months of revolution. The "Rasputiniad," the destruction of the symbols of the empire, the mass antimonarchist propaganda—these all led to the words *tsar* and *monarchy* becoming taboo to the point where they were almost completely excluded from the political lexicon (although in the fall of 1917 one can note some rebirth of monarchist sympathies, reflected, for example, in the views of individual peasants).

Even an attempt to distribute brochures describing the state structure of England led to unrest in one regiment—even the mention of the term *constitutional monarchy* was taken as malicious monarchist propaganda. However, mass consciousness, having stopped using some of the concepts of the language of monarchy, preserved a monarchic mentality; democratic ideology could be superimposed on traditional authoritarian-patriarchal culture—the place of the tsar or the "sovereign" comes to be occupied by the "true fighters for freedom," by the "true leaders of democracy."

The chief "leader of democracy" became Kerenskii, the most popular leader in February. In 1917 a real cult of the "leader of the people" (*vozhd' naroda*—precisely this term was used) developed that in many ways exceeded the corresponding cults of the Soviet period. Resolutions called him "the true leader of Russian democracy," "a symbol of democracy," and so on. The Russian intelligentsia played a large role in creating the cult of Kerenskii.³⁵ The leader's name itself became an important political symbol. Kerenskii the "minister-democrat" was also called "a symbol of democracy": "For us, Kerenskii is not a minister, not a people's tribune; he is even simply no longer a human being. Kerenskii is a symbol of the revolution," wrote admirers of the "people's minister" in 1917, subjectively considering themselves supporters

34. The testimony of the eminent historian N. I. Kareev is significant in this regard. He spent the summer in the countryside, where a local blacksmith told him: "I would like . . . our republic to be socialist." It turned out that the blacksmith, who had separated his farm from the commune, was in favor of a guarantee of private property and against a presidential form of governance. N. I. Kareev, *Prozhitoe i perezhitoe* (Leningrad, 1990), 268.

35. Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi federatsii, f. 1778, op. 1, d. 83, l. 92; d. 85, l. 7; d. 90, l. 50; on the cult of Kerenskii, see A. G. Golikov, "Fenomen Kerenskogo," *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, 1992, no. 5; on the relationship between Kerenskii and the intelligentsia, see B. I. Kolonitskii, "A. F. Kerenskii i Merezhkovskie," *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, 1991, no. 3.

of democracy.³⁶ The atmosphere at the meetings with the “democratic minister” is significant: after his speeches, many soldiers kissed his clothing, cried, prayed, and knelt.³⁷

Kerenskii may have been correct when he stated that the absolute majority of the population of Russia were supporters of democracy. Nevertheless, the various admirers of “democracy” pursued completely different goals. As we have seen, the word *democracy* itself was understood in completely different ways. The mention of this term in the 1917 sources constantly demands a qualified translation by historians (and admittedly a translation cannot always be given). From our contemporary point of view, the understanding of “democracy” exhibited by many socialists, soldiers, and peasants was often “incorrect.” However, such a judgment can hardly be considered historical (by this standard even the understanding of democracy in Aristotle’s *Politics* would be “incorrect”). Indeed, the very fact that several different political languages were functioning simultaneously objectively impeded the country’s democratic development.

The language of democracy in 1917 was strongly influenced by the language of class, by the language of the socialists, which dominated during the revolution.³⁸ On the other hand, the deep authoritarian-patriarchal tradition often facilitated the creation of a new style of ideological construct, but sometimes also deformed the existing constructs, endowing them with new meaning. Thus, mass “democratism” of the 1917 type could be combined with the cult of the leader who was “of the people” and “democratic.” One must then state that during the creation of the model of “Soviet” democracy, the Bolsheviks used several ideological structures created after February. In this sense their politics represented a radical continuation of the past, and not a revolutionary break with it.³⁹ Obviously the influence of radical political upheavals on mass consciousness should not be exaggerated—a dramatic change in political symbolism need not be accompanied by the overthrow of deep-seated mental structures.

Translated by Christopher K. Cosner

36. Gosudarstvennyi muzei politicheskoi istorii Rossii (Sankt-Peterburg), f. 2, N. 10964; see also A. Kulegin and V. Bobrov, “Istoriia bez kupiur,” *Sovetskie muzei*, 1990, no. 3:5–6.

37. Richard Abraham, *Alexander Kerensky: The First Love of the Revolution* (London, 1987), 200. It is interesting that Kerenskii himself gradually changed his image. At first he emphasized his democratism—handshakes, black jacket. As “the people’s minister,” however, he demonstrated an imperial style—moving into the tsar’s apartments, using the imperial automobiles, assuming the pose of Napoleon. This created the basis for many rumors connecting Kerenskii to the tsar’s family.

38. On the “language of class,” see Diane P. Koenker, “Moscow in 1917: The View from Below,” in Daniel H. Kaiser, ed., *The Workers’ Revolution in Russia, 1917: The View from Below* (Cambridge, Eng., 1987), 91–92.

39. A similar conclusion was reached by William Rosenberg after studying another problem with different sources. See Rosenberg, “Sozdanie novogo gosudarstva v 1917 g.: Predstavleniia i deistvitel’nost’,” *Anatomiia revoliutsii: 1917 god v Rossii: Massy, partii, vlast’* (St. Petersburg, 1994), 97.