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The Russian Revolution: Intellectuals, the Military, and the Politics of Modern Italy

The Russian Revolution of October 1917 was not a bolt from the blue. Foreseeable, long-awaited, inevitable, and overwhelming, it first affected a small group: the Bolsheviks. Then it spread like an oil slick due to the infiltration of those same Bolsheviks into the soviets of workers and peasants' deputies across the country. In the end, the revolution prevented the Constituent Assembly, democratically elected in December 1917, from meeting and beginning the transitional stage of a new course in Russian history.

This dictatorial drift undertaken by Lenin's party led not only to materially disastrous consequences, with the outbreak of the Civil War, but also to moral ones, since the revolution was guilty of the same sin as Tsarism itself, namely, the undermining of Russians' freedom. The impression of one observer traveling to Russia during the post-revolutionary months was that of a country barely hanging on—a place struggling with the day of reckoning between the few bourgeois and the many proletarians.

Over the last ten years, international historiography has been very interested in the Bolshevik Revolution. Various monographs have been produced in Europe regarding relations between the Bolsheviks, the “Whites,” and the European governments. Through their missions and expeditionary forces the latter governments had initially opposed the plans of Lenin and his allies and favored the Civil War that erupted in Russia after the Bolshevik coup.¹

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What happened in Italy during that same period? The Italian postwar reality was characterized by a political world of contrasts when, after the Russian-German agreement, it was decided to continue the Italian military mission in Russia. After General Romei Longhena's mission ended, he returned to Italy through Helsinki and London in late August 1918.² His attention then turned to new missions and expeditionary forces in the Russian areas where, inevitably, military-strategic and geo-economic interests overlapped.³ It was Trotsky himself who in March 1918 invited representatives of the French, English, American, and Italian missions to join and form a new army.

Officers of allied military missions attached to various general staffs, services, and troops would also take part in this job. These officers would have been counselors, assistants, and, especially, guarantors of the reliability and efficiency of the job to be carried out. France had arranged the disposition of about forty officers deriving from Romania, the United States about four hundred assigned to reorganize transportation on all rail systems, and England had hypothesized the use of Navy officers to fix the ports. General Romei, due to the scarce components of the Italian mission, appointed officers Achille Bassignano and Ruggeri-Laderchi.⁴ The Allies saw in Leon Trotsky's proposal a real possibility to keep the Russian front open against the Germans which, whilst moving forward, could also dissolve the soviets that had just come together and thereby threaten the Bolsheviks' program.

In Italy, in summer 1918, the massive Austrian offensive took place from Grappa to Piave. But the clear symptoms of a break-up of the Austrian army later brought on the quick victory of Vittorio Veneto in autumn 1918—something that gave the Italians a break after the enormous war effort. Meanwhile, the internal political debate, intensified by the internal divisions of the Socialist Party regarding the Bolshevik Revolution, took on a threatening tone and led almost to an actual cultural *querelle*.

The continuous contact with the Bolshevik leaders, as well as with certain Mensheviks like Martov, fueled a discussion between reformists and other socialist groups. The main question was whether Lenin had betrayed Marxist doctrine after the October Revolution. This was a bitter theme that initiated many confrontations among the most knowledgeable of Italian Socialist minds. Filippo Turati, for example, rejected it because Russia was undergoing an "anarchic and utopist deviation of socialism." Claudio Trèves, meanwhile, justified Lenin, stating he was motivated in light of "a chaotic state of historic contingent necessity."

The Bolshevik experiment was put to the attention of national public opinion, but it mainly animated intellectual and political circles with only superficial consequences for a civil society already dealing with the difficulties of post-war reconstruction. Ukrainian historian I. A. Khormach affirms that Russia's revolution did not have a noticeable impact on Italian public opinion for two reasons. First, "After the coincidental defeat of Caporetto (24 October 1917), the Italian retreat on all fronts was aggravated by a moral crisis and discord amongst military leaders." And, second, by having found government circles unprepared, "The Russian Revolution did not have more importance compared to the conclusion of the Balkan issues."⁵

Antonio Gramsci, meanwhile, came to the defense of the Bolshevik Revolution and the Russian revolutionaries by stipulating that they had liberated Marx's way of thinking "from those positivistic and naturalist encrustations that had largely depended

on the historical development of economic factors while limiting the creative contribution of man's will." "Thanks to Lenin and the Bolsheviks," he continued, "The human and voluntary factor has been reevaluated and evidence has also been provided that the will of the Russian people could have overcome obstacles considered insurmountable according to the canons of historical materialism."

Ignored by a great part of recent historiography is the activity of the Italian troops. Richard Pipes maintained this stance when he mentioned Peter Fleming's prior study, *The Fate of Admiral Kolchak*, according to which the American and Czech troops were "le sole unità alleate a combattere in Siberia" (the only Allied units to fight in Siberia).⁶ In fact, Italy had been playing a key role with its military and logistical support to the Siberian and Caucasus populations, at least until the Allied Powers pulled out of their missions because they considered the clash between Whites and Reds "una questione internazionale" (an international issue). Meanwhile, the permanent military members of the Supreme Council of War, located in Versailles, studied an Allied intervention in the ports of Murmansk and Arkhangelsk in June 1918.⁷ Soon after came Italian participation in the Allied expedition in the Far East that the French had been requesting since January. This was followed by another military task in Russia's northerly ports and in the Caucasus.⁸ This brings us to a point which deserves special attention: these various missions and expeditionary corps left behind important diplomatic-military testimonies about 1) the unstable political-institutional scene in Russia, and 2) the events that within a few years would allow Lenin's Reds to assume control over the entirety of Russian territory, the soon to be Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

As a matter of fact, after the conclusion of the German Armistice, international diplomacy mobilized to decide what attitude to adopt toward Lenin's Russia, which in the eyes of the Entente had become a "secret" ally of Berlin following the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Between 1918 and 1920, Italy embraced a cause that would soon be betrayed by the Allies in favor of a policy that recognized Lenin and his loyal allies as the only interlocutors of "all the Russias." There is hypocrisy here in justifying this act as the only one able to stabilize a fragmented institutional framework. Indeed, Admiral Kolchak had already been recognized as sole representative of the counter-revolutionary movement by the same White generals who initially had not wanted to support his coup during the Omsk government in November 1918.

The Red Army's military superiority must, however, be regarded as crucial in the analysis of the causes which helped it win the war against the Whites. This is a fact of unquestionable and fundamental importance. But apart from this reading of history, we must focus on other objective factors that we cannot neglect and through which we can discover the reasons for the defeat of the anti-Bolshevik armies. In doing so we must take into account the climate of terror implemented during those years by the Red and Whites, as well as peasant resistance in the countryside. Above all, we need to consider the disorientation of the Russian people to whom ideas and concepts were given regarding new social and cultural models without the former's being even able to discern their meaning. Tsarism, in the expression of all its historic boundaries, had been for more than three centuries the common denominator of every Russian man's life. Contemporarily to its historic function, it was a form of "protection" to which the Russian peasant had always been used to. The birth of a "proletarian question" proved

to not adequately meet the requirements of the Russian society during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The Bolsheviks' claims left everyone perplexed. The latter were pointing their finger at the failure of the Tsarist policy but could not see a valid reason to embrace the new revolutionary cause in the words of Lenin. One million people died of hunger between 1917 and 1920; hundreds of thousands lost their lives in the clashes and repressions that took place around the same time. These figures alone give an idea of the great chapter of Russian history that more generally goes by the name of the Russian Civil War.

The Russian events were perceived in Italy through the Bolshevik propaganda that reached the country's parliament. The large socialist group showed itself to be against sending missions to Russia to support counter-revolutionary groups. This took place on the eve of the final offensive against the Austro-Hungarian troops located on the Italian front of the Piave. The difficulties of the moment, the high costs of war, and long offensive actions against enemy troops and poor conditions of the Italian military did not allow the government to further concern itself with the Russian question until November 3, 1918, when the Villa Giusti Armistice was signed. A month earlier, after repeated defeats at the hands of Allied troops lead by General Foch, the German governments proposed an armistice to Wilson. This act lead to the German revolution, starting with the muting of the Hochsee Fleet at Wilhelmshaven in October and ending with the armistice of November 11 based on Wilson's Fourteen Points and that cancelled the Brest-Litovsk (March 1918)⁹ and Bucharest (May 1918)¹⁰ treaties.

After the war, in June 1919, the Italian government, led by Francesco Nitti, with Tommaso Tittoni in Foreign Affairs, together with Vittorio Scialoja, Guglielmo Marconi, Maggiorino Ferraris, and Marquis Imperiali formed the Italian delegation in Paris and addressed their attention to the commitment taken with the Allies regarding Russia. This was a commitment that was large in proportion to Italy's military capacity and caused many lives to be lost in a hostile land. It was also marred by ideological prejudices and faced anti-Italian propaganda supported by not only Austrian agents but also from new allies like the French. According to General Romei, such propaganda also manipulated anti-Italian feeling in Poland after the revolt which occurred in Upper Silesia.¹¹ But Russia also knew about this Italian Liberation War, the echoes of which could be felt in Moscow and St. Petersburg through characters like Vladimir Zabughin, a literature professor in Rome, who dealt with spreading Italian propaganda in Russia by showing in 1916 the movie *Adamello* there as well as slides about the Italian campaign.¹² Zabughin's mission took place from May-September 1917, and was something desired by Minister Vittorio Scialoja (1856–1933). Even so, the story of the Great War was mainly known in Russia thanks to France and England which sent films and brochures about the state of conflict.

When the Russian Revolution broke out, Europe was overwhelmed by events that presented it with an uncertain outcome and therefore Europeans did not immediately perceive the "revolutionary" character of the Bolshevik elite that had come to power. The effect would be ever more muffled by the Entente's policy that was inclined, up to the last minute, to give credibility to the new leadership so as to prevent it from concluding separate peace agreements with Germany. This would lead to serious damage to the powers engaged against Pan-Germanist expansion in Central and Eastern Europe as well as Asia.

In Italy, the “revolutionary” phenomenon was known from the early months of the Bolshevik coup in which prominent members of the Russian *intelligentsia*, after having abandoned the country, began to create committees abroad which took on different names but had the liberation of Russia from Bolshevism as their main purpose. Important documents about all this are contained in GARF in Moscow.¹³ Some of these files were also given by the Prague Archives to complete base material. Three major anti-Bolshevik organizations formed around that period, with many political and *intelligentsia* personalities gathered together, such as Pavel Melyukov, Eugenio de Miller, and many others.¹⁴

The main interest was to persuade the Allies to support forces that were fighting the Bolsheviks, by urging an intervention alongside the Volunteer Army of General Denikin. The effect of such propaganda soon triggered solidarity in Italian public opinion by those who saw the Bolshevik dictatorship as a betrayal of socialist-revolutionary ideals. The “League for the Russian Renaissance” had its bases in England, France, Switzerland, and Italy and was very active during the Conference of Versailles. It was conscious, like other emigrant organizations, that it represented a fundamental moment for the fate of the country.

In an editorial presented to President Wilson on January 4, 1919—the eve of the opening session at Versailles—on behalf of the delegates of the Russian organizations of Rome united under the slogan “Pro-Russian democracy,” they recalled the sixth of the fourteen points proclaimed by the American President. They demanded that the Russian units be respected, that the Pan-Germanist danger be put down, that the Russian government fighting for reunification be recognized, that they be given the right to participate in the inter-Allied Peace Conference, and that they be allowed to advocate for an Allied intervention against the Bolsheviks.¹⁵

The organic unity of Russia was considered a fundamental postulate of the equilibrium and peace in Europe and the world. By plunging back into a political state comparable to that of the seventeenth century, Russia was going to find “the same obstacles as then and would have to attempt again to overcome them by being forced to repeat the wars of Ivan the Terrible for Livonia and of Tsar Aleksey for Ukraine. Europe’s east was set to become an endless ‘Balkania,’ filled to saturation with explosive elements that Germany would certainly and wisely take advantage of. The latter would win over the area without dominating it, and would certainly return to the old Prussian policy of intensive cultivating animosity between Russia and Poland.”¹⁶ Such a forecast has never been truer.

There had been many debates over the “Russian Question” in Italy. They seem to keep the interest of conversations in intellectual circles (especially that trend towards the left among a great part of the Italian cultural world at the beginning of the twentieth century). Interesting, in this regard, is the exchange of letters (also found in GARF) from the summer of 1918 between General Eugenio De Miller, president of the Russian League in Rome, and the historian Gaetano Salvemini. Here, the former Russian officer did not want to take credit for a statement of his which appeared in the newspaper *La Russia Nuova* under the headline “The authoritative opinion of Professor Salvemini on the Russian Question.” There he supposedly stated, “We would almost prefer a hundred years of Bolsheviks to the return of the ancient régime.”¹⁷

Miller wrote, “Je me refuse absolument de croire que Vous ayez pu dire cela [...] Vous comme italien ‘Ami de la Russie’ [...] Entre nous il ne peut exister d’équivoques sur

une question aussi capitale comme l'appréciation du régime bolschevik. Des comparaisons pareilles sont toujours à éviter à mon avis, car si nous connaissons bien les bons et les mauvais côtés de l'ancien régime, l'imagination la plus fantasque ne pourrait nous donner le tableau que représenterait la Russie après cent ans de régime bolschevik tel que nous le connaissons [...]".¹⁸

But, Miller added, once the above comparison was made, one should recognize the good done by the *ancien régime*, despite numerous errors, for Russia: from a role of power capable of counterbalancing itself by the growing German power, to the great reform of serfdom which happened in a peaceful manner while at the same time "flôts de sang a du être payé l'abolissement de l'esclavage dans la démocratique République des Etats Unis d'Amérique."

From the liberation war of the Slavs in the Balkans, Serbs, Montenegrins, and Bulgarians of Turkish domination (in an era in which Gladstone raised his voice in vain, in favor of the massacred Christian people, against the almighty Lord Beaconsfield, friend and protector of the Sultan), to Stolypin's agrarian reform which in five years created more than seven million landowners and, last but not least, the abolition of alcohol sales in Russia (which in other countries had to undergo long debates), Miller ended by saying, "Tout cela n'étaient que des questions intérieures qui ne concernaient que les russes" and invited Salvemini to read the correspondence of 'Il Messaggero', the Bourtzef brochure '*Maledetti siate Bolscevichi*' published by 'La Nuova Russia' and the article by Harkevitch on 'Il nuovo giornale'."

From San Marcello Pistoiese, where he lived at the time, Gaetano Salvemini responded to General Miller, claiming that the phrase was correctly attributed to him and that it was said within a conversation during an interview and reported in good faith by the journalist. But, it was also, "A *boutade* used in a friendly conversation, which when printed can have another effect, but nothing more or less a *boutade*."¹⁹ Salvemini also addressed an issue raised by Miller, claiming that if the Russians ask for involvement in a propagandistic endeavor which solicits the Entente's intervention in Russia, such intervention could take place only if it was not directed at restoring the old regime. In fact, major concerns came because many anti-Bolshevik exponents were of the Monarchist faith. The Italian historian then attacked despotic Tsarism, saying that it had, "For half a century filled Europe with political exiles in the likeness of the ancient Italian regimes prior to 1860." "A constitutional Tsar was needed," he added, "One surrounded by many liberal elements, perhaps a conservative who did not change the election laws according to what suited the court clique and the reactionary Right. If Russia could not choose between Tsarist absolutism and Bolshevism [...] the only choice would be to declare oneself supporters of the Bolsheviks—even if in having to acknowledge all the damage they have provoked...one is choosing between the lesser of two evils?"

In his analysis, Salvemini did not ignore the parallelism with the French Revolution which brought the regime of Robespierre to power and which resisted less than Bolshevism in Russia. What mattered in France in 1794, as in Russia during that delicate moment in history, was that the monarchy did not return to power and it was necessary to prevent that in any way and at any cost.

When it came to Tsarism, Salvemini put it side by side with the glorious French monarchy. Despite its greatness, the latter was also demolished and swept away by

revolution. As a historian he acknowledged that function by writing, "Today I would gun down without hesitation in a minute both Donedet and Mauricar. If Izvolsky worked at the return of the old regime in Russia I would applaud the Russian that shoots him, even if that Russian were a Bolshevik, because if forced to choose between the two extreme cases, I would always consider as a minor evil, for Russia and for humanity, a Lenin compared to a Raupadin."²⁰

The Italian historian also justified the Italian alliance with Tsarist Russia as "a moral passivity" to which the Italians had submitted, because the help of the Tsarist armies was indispensable to Italy. There he wrote, "If you are about to drown, you will grab a snake if need be—for me absolutist Tsarism was such a snake. In March 1917 we had a great joy, moral passivity had disappeared. The Russian Revolution was for us the first gain for humanity caused by war."²¹

Despite the fact that the Russian Revolution made any Italian victory problematic due to the collapse of the Tsarist army, or better yet, the end of the ancient regime, good still exceeded evil here due to the paralysis of the Russian military and the prolongation of the war. At the conclusion of this long response, Salvemini admitted that hatred towards the old regime did not depend on the war, because it had been hated even before 1914.

The letter leaves no doubt that the position adopted by a majority of Italian academics aligned in favor of the revolution of February 1917. They would have liked then to see Marxist principles realized so as to avoid any risk of restoration. Miller's response was aimed at demonstrating the constitutional character of the League he represented (along with the one headed by Izvolsky, who was a partisan of constitutional ideas), and at forming a Cabinet of "cadets" composed of members of the Constitutional-Democratic Party. To assume that Izvolsky was working on the return of the *ancien régime* "c'est se créer des fantôme."²²

Concerning the "snake" matter, the General rhetorically asked if this role were not being played by the Germans in Ukraine and Finland. To this end, we must remember the important position adopted by the Whites against those states which, taking advantage of the revolutionary storm, detached themselves from the Tsarist Empire and declared themselves independent. No kind of autonomy or independence was intended to be given to them and the hostile attitude of the White generals toward the people who showed secessionist ambitions was crucial in the final outcome of the Civil War.

The debate in Italy was very much alive and often involved authoritative characters of the national *intelligentsia*. Newspapers, as always in times of political uncertainty, assumed positions dictated mainly by the need to reflect the ideological positions of editors when possible. They were also silent regarding any involvement of the Italian military in Russian territory. It was indeed the government's concern to prevent Bolshevik revolutionary ideas penetrating Italy while it was still shaken by the after effects of the war.

But this Italian military intervention in Russia was an historic event of great magnitude and it deserves to be analyzed. It is distinguished by its geographical location and for the manner the intervention itself. In the North, there were the logistical and structural contributions to defend the ports of Murmansk and Arkangelsk as well as to support the troops of General Nikolai Iudenich. In Siberia and the Far East there was the effort to secure the Trans-Siberian Railway between Krasnoyarsk and Irkutsk and the monitoring

of the area against sabotage or Bolshevik uprisings. And, in the Caucasus and southern Russia, there was trade and logistical support to the Volunteer Army of Denikin.

Without forgetting the military value of such acts, the moral support the Allied mission found in the Russian military fighting Bolshevism was incalculable. A population on its last leg needed officers who were able to rearrange the frontline, maintain discipline, prevent desertions or rebellions, and give courage and dignity to men who had to fight against opponents who were previously neighbors, friends, or, even, relatives.

To analyze these events in light of the Russian Civil War's outcome, the works of Fassini-Camossi, Bassignano or Gabba are important. The withdrawal of Italian troops—along with all the Allies—coincided with the defeat of the White army. This was no means by chance if we consider the Reds' objectives. This act was one of the decisive points in determining Lenin's victory. As long as Fassini Camossi's expedition held its position, Kolchak's army was protected from behind and could concentrate on the western Offensive. When it withdrew in the summer 1919, due to "superior orders," the Siberian army of Omsk would collapse the following autumn thanks to the strong push by Bolshevik agents and local uprisings.

It was a defeat determined by choices, which, in light of twentieth century events, might today be considered "unhappy." This came as western governments abandoned the Russians to their destiny convinced it was in the interest of that people, at least according to Wilson's plans. Even Poland was responsible for the Whites' defeat falling onto Russia, because the Poles allowed Lenin to turn his troops against Denikin. The Poles had hoped to profit from the talks and under the table agreements with the Bolsheviks without imagining the political implications.

Those bearing responsibility for the Whites' defeat are many. But the analysis of such factors allows us to conclude that the missions on Russian territory slowed down the preplanned fate for Russia. The efforts by the military Allies and the high commands in Russia (and surely this includes the Italians) should be appreciated here. This was an endeavor which for its size diverges enormously from the poverty of ideas demonstrated by the Allied delegations in Versailles.

In the months following the October Revolution, the former Tsarist Empire was divided into numerous states with features and goals that differed from one another. The first political-military analysis, made by various foreign delegations present in the territory and after the creation of the two main blocks noted that in the so-called European Russia and the so-called Asian Russia, diverse traits amongst "separatists" and "unionists" existed (particularly in the former). The first group tended to establish autonomous and independent States, well defined by territory, culture and ethnicity. The second group was headed by Soviet power—under the "leadership" (yet to be named the dictatorship) of the "Troika" consisting of Lenin-Trotsky-Chicherin²³—which radiated massive political propaganda from Petrograd to Moscow.²⁴

The Italian Military Mission in Siberia fits into this context. Established on September 2, 1918 in Vladivostok, it had special tasks. These included: working with other Allied missions for the maintenance of law and order in Siberia without "interference" in Russian domestic politics, morally and materially helping the Russians to protect Siberia from possible German invasions, and collaborating in the work of social reconstruction of Siberia.

In addition to these tasks there were other secondary ones. These included measures to be taken to ensure the safety of troops, especially those who went through Siberia and flowed into China. A number of Italian irredentists who were former Russian prisoners of war were also rescued by a mission sent specifically in European Russia from the Italian government. The head of the latter mission was Major of the Royal Carabinieri Corps, Manera Cosma, who was already part of General Bassignano's mission from Kirsanov. The latter had escaped from the Bolsheviks with numerous other irredentists and then crossed all of Siberia to reach China.

On all this, Federico Peirone writes as premise to the diary compiled by his father Dominic (a member of the Italian Expedition in Eastern Siberia in 1918): "Krasnoyarsk, Irkutsk, Yenissey: geografia priva di epopea mitologica, di risonanze emotive, al cospetto di Monte Cimone, Dente del Pasubio, Passo del Tonale, Cima Undici. Eppure anche qui v'è storia che ci appartiene."²⁵ There would end up being two missions in Vladivostok: that of the irredentists, dependent on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the military one which depended on the Ministry of War.

With the overthrow of the monarchy in Russia, there had been a modest attempt to open a constitutional phase and the establishment of a temporary government which should have interpreted the people's will. But the abdication of the Tsar, an extreme and vain attempt to save autocracy from the brink, released forces that up until then were compelled to have a marginal role in the life of the country. These forces came to power primarily as a result of the First World War which was not only a test for the Russian Army but also a national catastrophe. The Russian Prime Minister Pyotr Stolypin, author of an agrarian reform of great historic importance, had alleged, in the first part of the twentieth century, that Russia would need decades of peace without wars to emerge as a world power.

The Great War had broken this utopia and sent the monarchy into crisis. In the years before it had largely saturated its "enlightened" features once manifested *in nuce* after the granting of the Constitution of October 1905. Thereafter an incredible escalation of events brought the focus back to the social question—the "*cavallo di battaglia*" of the majority parties in the first two Dumas as well as that of the minorities in the following two Dumas.

These requests did not coincide with the Tsarist authoritarian program and therefore the conflict was left to simmer between the revolutionaries, socialists, liberals and anarchists on one side, and the nobility and government on the other. This situation was radicalized in political circles of the empire until Lenin and the Bolsheviks started the proletarian dictatorship with the revolution of 1917. The subsequent civil war unleashed between Reds and Whites (or better yet the troops loyal to the Tsarist generals who did not accept the change of guard at the power) brought Russia to its knees. After all, it had already been put to the test by the tough war effort against the Germans and the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk of March 1918, signed by the Reds with Germany in the face of a heavy domestic commitment by Lenin to transform peasant Russia into a proletarian state, placed the French and British allies in a difficult military situation. The eastern front would now no longer keep the German troops engaged and therefore they were now ready to be deployed to other theaters of war. The sudden fall of Germany in

November and the beginning of peace negotiations in Versailles in early 1919 completely changed the European scenario. Russia now found itself out of a system of alliances and off the table of winners even though its absence greatly influenced negotiations as seen in Margaret McMillan's *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World*. Until May 1919, the allies would keep stalling their intervention into Russian internal affairs and helped neither the Reds nor the Whites. The two factions had been called to a confrontation on the Island of Prinkipo but the possibility of an agreement failed miserably. Nothing else remained but to side with the Whites and therefore it was decided to send military missions in support of former Tsarist generals without imagining that they soon would fall victim to a strong Bolshevik reaction.

For six long months, from January to June 1919, Paris was the capital of the world. It was the center of world attention where major post-war political protagonists met with diplomats, bankers, military, economists, and lawyers—from the American President Woodrow Wilson to Georges Clemenceau, from the Prime Minister of Italy Vittorio Emanuele Orlando to the British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George. Along with legions of diplomats and politicians of all kinds, the former men prepared talks to achieve positive results in terms of the territorial claims that each state advanced to the conference. It was precisely such a disharmony of intentions which caused the failure of the dream of a more cohesive and united Europe.

Today, a part of historiography tends to talk of a coup and not of revolution, of civil resistance and not of civil war. Whatever value can be given to these concepts, the sense of tragedy that the image of the 1917 revolution carries with it remains unavoidable. This was a tragedy due to the dictatorial drift that the Communist movement took in the aftermath of the Bolshevik takeover in October of the 1917. Justifying the dictatorship with the need to maintain order, and to prevent the return of the monarchy, and to avoid the outbreak of a further European war could appear today, as then, as a reckless dialectic. The latter then led to a collapse of human values, to the isolation of the religious, and to the persecution of men and peoples who would have liked to live according to their own customs, their traditions and their values.

And if Russian literature, in contrast to certain European literature, is disinclined to sing the praises of the war, Blok and Bely, two poets linked to the social-revolutionary Left, did sing in favor of the purifying power of the Revolution and its destruction of material wealth. This was something far from Lenin's optimistic atheism but very close to the "Scythian" theory of Ivanov-Razumnik, who believed in the religious essence of the Bolshevik revolution. We then move away from the doctrinal works of Lenin towards the satire of Mayakovsky and on to the school of the proletarian poets of the following years. Meanwhile, a Russian intellectual diaspora formed in many European and overseas capitals: Stockholm, Berlin, Paris, Prague, Belgrade, Warsaw, Harbin, and New York to name but a few. However, they did not have the strength to create a literature of great depth.

The Civil War had devastated Russian society and had put its values in crisis. Breaking the Bolshevik regime did not mean the return of the *ancien régime* but represented for the Whites the only possible solution for the country. This was the only way to return to a state of normality, even if the fragmentation of the counter-revolutionary front did not presage an easy transition to a parliamentary and democratic regime.

But in fact, point six of the “Fourteen Points” reads: “The evacuation of all Russian territories and the regulation of all matters concerning Russia without obstacles and without embarrassment, for the independent determination of its political and social development and to assure friendship, whatever form of government, it has chosen. The treatment granted to Russia by the sister nations over the next months will also be the touchstone of goodwill, of the understanding of Russia’s needs, of the abstraction of its own interests, and of the proof of their intelligent and generous sympathy.” It is as if they were proclaiming: Communism, full speed ahead!

¹ See: Randazzo F. *Alle Origini dello Stato Sovietico. Missioni Militari e Corpi di Spedizione Italiani in Russia durante la Guerra Civile 1917–1922* (Rome, 2008); Randazzo F. *Russia. Momenti di Storia Nazionale XIX–XX Secolo* (Rome, 2012).

² General Armando Diaz, Army Chief of Staff, on August 6, 1919 sent a letter to Albricci, then Minister of War, describing Romei as a general to whom, “per le sue qualità e per la lunga esperienza acquisita nella trattazione delle questioni internazionali, potrebbe affidarsi anche una Missione di esclusivo carattere politico” (due to his qualities and long experience acquired in treating International matters, he could be given a mission with a political character). *A. Diaz’s letter to Albricci* in Archivio dell’Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell’Esercito (AUSSME), File E-11, envelope 63, f. 2.

³ Such a convergence of interests would soon become a “program of action.” For example, some industrial and financial groups, including Pirelli, Nogara, Senigaglia, and Della Torre, were planning to create an enormous Italian enterprise in Transcaucasia. This was an ambitious idea. Great Britain through a policy of high customs tariffs, had implied already that it would enter the Caucasus by itself.

⁴ A good military man and long an excellent observer, Romei Longhena admired the qualities of Colonel Paolo Ruggeri Laderchi, the military attaché in Petersburg in 1901–1919, as well as those of Colonel Achille Bassignano, who was already engaged in Russia during the recovery of the irredentists. Due to the virtues he demonstrated and his knowledge of the Russian world, Bassignano would soon be put in command of the Italian military mission to White general Anton Denikin.

⁵ Khormach I. A. *Otnosheniia mezhdru sovietiskim gosudarstvom i Italei, 1917–1924 gg.* (Moscow, 1993). P. 8–12.

⁶ Fleming P. *The Fate of Admiral Kolchak* (New York, 1963). P. 99–103.

⁷ The activity of the Supreme Council of War would be very intense. It represented the military authority through which, often in union with the Inter-Allied Naval Council, the possibility arose of intervention and deployment of corps in Russia. In the summer of 1918, it consisted of the following representatives: one French, Belin; one British, Sackville-West; an Italian, Robilant, and an American, Bliss.

⁸ These were the Far East corps of the previously mentioned Colonel Edoardo Fassini-Camossi in Krasnoyarsk and of Lt. Col. Augusto Sifola in Murmansk, during summer-autumn 1918; the Missions of Lt. Col. Achille Bassignano in Taganrog with the troops of the “White” General Anton Ivanovich Denikin, another in Vladivostok led by Lt. Col. Vittorio Filippi di Baldissero and lastly that of Col. Melchiade Gabba in Caucasus in April 1919.

⁹ The main cause of the Allies’ hostile attitude towards Bolshevik Russia was the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918, which deprived Russia of many territories, including those in the Baltics and Poland, and recognized Finland and Ukraine as independent states. This initiated a colossal amount of historical research, as evidenced by numerous international contributions on the topic, including work by Pier Leo Raghianti and John Wheeler-Bennet. See: Raghianti P. L. *Brest-Litovsk. Una pace per una politica di transizione* (Milan, 1978); Wheeler-Bennet J. *Brest-Litovsk. The Forgotten Peace, March 1918* (London, 1956).

¹⁰ As signed on May 7, 1918, the peace between the Central Powers and Romania foresaw the sale of Dobrugia to Bulgaria and the exploitation of the oil wells there by Germany.

¹¹ Notes from General Romei in 1921 in AUSSME, file E-11,b. 63, f. 13.

¹² Vladimir Nikolaevich Zabughin (1880–1923) was born in St. Petersburg and, with a degree in History, obtained a lectureship in humanistic literature in Rome in 1911. For a long time he dealt with Italian propaganda in Russia. He was among the first to speak to the Russians about the irreconcilable contrasts between “Croatism” and “Serbianism.” He affirmed that the Croats had been against the annexation of Dalmatia since 1866.

¹³ In the Moscow archives there are several files that deal with organizations created to defend Russia from the Bolsheviks (thanks to allies in Italy), which were also in contact with committees organized in other major western European capitals (File 5806, inventory 1, folders 23–26; file 4644, inv. I, folder 32).

¹⁴ The State Council for the Reunification of Russia, the National Center (part of the Cadet group formed in June 1918) and Council of the Rebirth of Russia included the Constitutional-Democratic Party, the popular Socialist one, the “Unità” group heirs of Plekhanov, the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the Social-Democrats.

¹⁵ The following were part of the “pro-democratic Russia” Committee: The League for the Russian regeneration together with the Allies, the Italian-Russian Society for cultural approach, the Commission for Italian-Russian Cultural rapprochement, the Russian Institute in Rome, the editors of the weekly newspaper *La Russia Nuova*, editors of the monthly magazine *La Russia Democratica*, and the rescue committee for Russians residing in Italy. GARF, Fondo sulla storia del movimento bianco e dell'emigrazione, 4644, f. P-5806 (Organizatsionnoe bjuro v Rime), inv. 1, folder 24, p. 51.

¹⁶ The author of the editorial from which these considerations are taken showed keen political acumen and foresaw what would later happen in Europe: The German renaissance, Russian “ideological expansionism,” the “strangulation” of Poland up to its fourth partition and, last but not least, the creation of a “Great Balkania” exploited in 1989. The editorial is especially interesting when it highlights the future setup of the Russian state on a simple party basis. It says in part, “The lack of a strong, stable and free Russia in the East of Europe would prevent equilibrium of the Polish state, even of a Poland that is wisely free from Imperialistic goals and inclined for an agreement with its Slav sisters. Poland would find a threat on the West and on the East a mere dangerous void, worse than any threat. Bohemia, surrounded on almost all sides by Germany, would also suffer the consequences of a growing mutual state of political discomfort of Russia and Poland, finding itself without its natural allies [...] Ukraine, abandoned to its harsh fate already experienced towards the mid-seventeenth century, would be a continuous source of complications for Europe and of Russian-Polish-German disputes [as will happen soon]. The present state of Russia’s disunity, especially if made stable and legally recognized, would lead to the total disappearance of intermediate political trends in Russia...]. Russia would find itself again a victim of a bad undemocratic government, an enemy by institution of all democratic populations of the Entente and United States, a natural ally of every militarist and absolutist state, and a fatal ally of Germany, no matter if imperial or socialist, if the latter had disagreeable intentions. The death of Russian democracy would be a very serious disease for the world. It would be the source of new appalling carnage and of dreadful sorrow that, unfortunately, would fade the memories of those most appalling atrocities of a war won by the Entente and the United States (January 1919).” GARF, “Documents on the history of the White movement and emigration,” P-5806, inv. 1, folder 24, pg. 51.

¹⁷ The exchange of letters is in GARF “Documents on the history of the White movement and emigration,” P-5806, inv. 1, folder. 23, pgs. 48–50.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹ GARF, P-5806, inv. 1, folder 23, pgs. 61–68. The following quotes are from these letters.

²⁰ “Raupadin” might be a transcription error. It would be appropriate to think that here Salvemini is referring to Grigorii Rasputin, the monk and advisor of Tsar Nicholas II.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² Miller argues that once this point is clarified, the discussion on what is best for Russia becomes a purely academic question. Which regime is preferable for Russia and Italy, provided what Tsarist Russia did for Italy and what, on the contrary, the Bolshevik regime would have never done? The Russian officer believed that Salvemini wrote under the impulse of a deep hatred towards the monarchy, but “the day will come when the professor of history, the man of history will win over

the politician, the man of the party (of the picked party) and then you'll see my letter with better understanding." Miller's letter to Salvemini of August 30, 1918. GARF, file on the history of the White movement and emigration, P-5806, inv. 1, folder 23, pgs. 69–73.

²³ Vladimir Ilych Ulyanov (Lenin) born in Simbirsk in 1870. Lejba Bronstejn (Lev Davidovich Trotsky) was born in the Kherson in 1879 and Georgy Vasilevich Chicherin was born in Tambov in 1872.

²⁴ At the second Congress of Soviets on October 25-26 (7-8 November), 1917, Lenin proposed a strange peace to countries at war. He said at the time that it would be, "Democratic and fair [and] which draws the overwhelming majority of workers and working classes of all belligerent countries, exhausted, worn-out and tormented by the war (a clear solicitation for lifting all European working classes against the régime under which they stand at the moment), and immediate peace without annexations (without conquering foreign lands, without forced annexation of other peoples) and without compensation." This "Soviet peace," even if declaring officially that it did not want to subordinate other populations, did not at all exclude the possibility of their annexation: V. I. Lenin, *On the Foreign Policy of the Soviet State* (Moscow, 1976), p. 5.

²⁵ "Krasnoyarsk, Irkutsk, Yenisei: this a geography lacking the mythological epic, or the emotional appeal of Monte Cimone, Dente del Pasubio, Passo del Tonale, or Peak Eleven. Yet even here there is a history that belongs to us." Federico Peirone, Reserve Medical Capitan, directs on November 13, 1980 a service reminder to the Chief of the Historic Office of the Army in which he attaches his father's diary proceeded by an interesting premise regarding the facts of which his father, Domenico, speaks of in his memoirs.

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Abstract: The Italian postwar reality was characterized by a political world of contrasts when, after the Russian-German agreement, it was decided to continue the Italian military mission in Russia. In Italy, the "revolutionary" phenomenon was known from the early months of the Bolshevik coup, and there had been many debates over the "Russian Question." This debate was very much alive and often involved authoritative members of the national *intelligentsia*. Italy, involved in its first world conflict, intervened in the Russian civil war with military personnel supporting the White generals against the Red armed troops. Such action, determined by the high-alliance commands, took place in different areas of Russia, in the north of Arkhangelsk and Murmansk's regions, Transcaucasia and Siberia. The Russian civil war was atrocious and bloody but, with their humanity, Italians brought hope to the Russian people, hope that died with the choice made in Versailles in 1919 of withdrawing the missions leaving Russia to its fate. Ignored by a great part of recent historiography is the activity of the Italian troops. In fact, Italy had been playing a key role with its military and logistical support to the Siberian and Caucasus population, at least until the Allied Powers pulled out of their missions because they considered the clash between Whites and Reds "una questione internazionale" (an international issue).

Keywords: Italy, Russia, Civil War, Revolution, Versailles, Italians Missions, Arkhangelsk, Murmansk, Transcaucasia, Siberia

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