

*T. N. Krasavchenko*

## **The Myth of *homo soveticus*: Perspectives from Russian and Foreign Scholars**

... it only seems from above <...> that below is the mass, but in fact individual people live below, and they have their own predilections, and each is smarter than the other...

*Andrey Platonov*

*Homo soveticus* studies conducted in the West (up to the collapse of the Soviet Union) were based mainly on the fundamental and influential “totalitarian model” developed in the 1950s by American political scientists Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski<sup>1</sup>. They believed that the context of a one-party monopoly in the USSR, its “only true” ideology, the omnipotence of state security forces, and the use of state terror resulted in an “archetypal” *homo soveticus* — a terrified person who avoided any personal responsibility.

The well-known satirical book *Homo soveticus* (1982), written by writer and philosopher Alexander Zinoviev, who emigrated from the USSR in 1978, was not an academic study, but a “sociological novel”. Zinoviev rejected the Soviet system, even though he was formed by it and was himself a kind of a *homo soveticus*, whose feelings towards that system became increasingly ambivalent, oscillating between love and hate.

Different approaches to understanding Soviet society emerged in the USSR and later in post-Soviet Russia. The theory of Yuri Levada (1930–2006), one of the originators of sociology in the country, was based on a monolithic idea of the Soviet man as a product of the totalitarian system, which was seen as the basic model of Soviet society. This concept was historically motivated, given that, from the 1960s

**Krasavchenko  
Tatiana Nikolaevna**  
Dr. Sci. in Philology,  
Leading Research  
Fellow, Institute of  
Scientific Information  
for Social Sciences of  
the Russian Academy  
of Sciences (Moscow,  
Russia)

onwards, the most educated part of society was fed up with the imposition of the official Marxist-Leninist ideology from cradle to grave, not to mention the repressive nature of the Soviet system, and its associated *nomenklatura*, bureaucracy, pseudo-elections, and lack of common sense. From the end of the 1980s, Levada and his group of sociologists worked on the “Soviet person” project, interviewing 2770 respondents across the country, and eventually they concluded that the Soviet person was a conformist, «sly» (*lukavyi*), devoid of choice, and used to state paternalism, deception and self-deception for the sake of self-preservation, while preferring not to be different from others and holding shifty principles and imperial ambitions, democratic norms were alien to him<sup>2</sup>. This view is still relevant today. Famous Russian sociologist Lev Gudkov considers the Soviet person, with his moral impotency and ability to adapt to violence, to be the main obstacle to the modernization of Russia<sup>3</sup>.

By the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Soviet past no longer seemed so monolithic (even during Stalin’s primacy). The Russian socio-cultural anthropologist, Natalia Kozlova (1946–2002), studied contemporary letters, diaries, memories, and biographical notes (initially in the “People’s Archive,” which was created in 1988 during *perestroika*) and developed a research project centered on Soviet daily life. Kozlova found that Soviet society had been diverse, multifaceted, and based not only on institutional interactions<sup>4</sup>; the history of its rise and fall was a phenomenon incorporated primarily in a person. This approach to Soviet society substantially differed from that of the political model of totalitarianism. Kozlova was aware of severe regulations of Soviet life, nevertheless she perceived Soviet people not as “victims of inevitability” but as people with “their own intent”<sup>5</sup>: their goal was to survive, and people circumvented the rules of the system, disobeyed them, or interpreted them creatively. Kozlova came to the conclusion that the main trend of social processes was determined by daily activities and decisions of many ordinary people, “otherwise society simply couldn’t exist”<sup>6</sup>. In fact, after many years of the dominance of the Marxist-Leninist theory of an objective course of history in Russia, Kozlova appreciated its subjective factor: «the problem of entering modernity” is connected for her not so much with “objective prerequisites of production”, as with people who reject the existing order of things and want to change their life circumstances and themselves<sup>7</sup>. The researcher used the metaphor of a “game” (according to formal and informal rules), frequent in twentieth-century philosophical and social thought (N. Elias, P. Bourdieu, J. Huizinga, L. Wittgenstein, A. Radcliffe-Brown). In her opinion, the main thing in a social game is participants’ consent to it: «While they played in the Party and Komsomol meetings, Soviet society existed”<sup>8</sup>, but the center of daily life should not be viewed only as “an emanation of power.” After all, the exercise of power is “impossible without the consent and complicity of those over whom they rule”<sup>9</sup>. Kozlova took into account the system of state violence as an extremely important component of Soviet civilization. And yet she believed that 70 years of Soviet history had not been “a black hole” or a complete anomaly in the socio-historical development of Russia: “we entered modernity”, even if it was “without civil society.”<sup>10</sup>

Kozlova was not alone in her research and conclusions. The “totalitarian model” of Soviet society, where there were only executioners and victims, was also replaced by a more varied picture in American socio-cultural studies<sup>11</sup>. From



The cover of the “Homo soveticus: pro et contra” (2021)

the second half of the 1990s, this trend became dominant in Russia and abroad, and since the 2000s has taken center stage. Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of California (Berkeley), Alexei Yurchak, in his book, *Everything was Forever, Until it was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (2005, translated into Russian in 2014), described how people lived in the late Soviet period and, despite the political system and official ideology, they had an indubitable creative potential. Through this, they created new meanings and values, and, thus, prepared the transition of society to the post-Soviet era.

The monograph “Homo soveticus: pro et contra” (2021)<sup>12</sup>, prepared by a group of literary critics and historians, headed by Ural Federation University (UrFU) scholars Yulia Matveeva and Yulia Rusina, fits into this mainstream and takes an additional step forward. Its sources are historical

documents, letters, periodical press, and fiction. The research focuses on Soviet society as a social order in which a verbal code was key: the “spoken”, the “written word”, and the “printed word” was the basis of the Bolsheviks’ educational policy and projection of an official view of that society.

All the chapters in the book are interconnected — they “call to one another” — and the result is a panorama of Soviet society, from its origins to its collapse, from the perspective of contemporary scholars in Russia, and the former socialist countries of Hungary and Poland. Importantly, all the authors are able to draw on their own experience, or the experience of their parents, when reflecting on “Soviet society”.

The chapter by Olga Porshneva of Ural Federal University (UrFU), “The formation of homo soveticus...”, reveals the decisive role of Vladimir Lenin in developing basic elements and mechanisms for the embodiment of the idea of a “new person.” Porshneva traces how this idea originated in the ideology of the Enlightenment, was visible in socialist thought of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and became central to Marxism. Lenin applied it to Russia and in his articles, books, and speeches based the morality of a “new man” on an apology for class violence, hatred, and mercilessness towards enemies, self-sacrifice, implacability, and toughness. Thus, from the very beginning, unsuitable methods were chosen “to implement the ideal.” The Bolsheviks were characterized by a low appreciation of human life, by intransigence, and by cruelty combined with a low level of education. A “new person” was originally formed not only by conviction; there was institutionalization of forced labor camps, surveillance, censorship, coercion as permanent methods of management. Legal mechanisms had been developed for this (e. g. the 1918 Labor code, and the 1924, 1933 Corrective labor codes, etc.). In 1930, the Gulag system (Main camp administration) was officially established. From 1917 to the end of the 1920s, the search for ways to form a “new man” extended to the transformation of everyday life (forced relocations,

seizure of surplus housing space and emergence of communal flats, organization of communal houses). In the period of the “great leap forward”, the rapid development of industry, the anthropological ideal of the state no longer focused on the collective, but on the individual (will, heroism): Soviet man had to acquire the traits of a superman, do the impossible, accelerate the course of history. The cult of heroes in labor and in the military sphere was promoted by mass media, fiction and art. In 1936, according to the new Constitution of the USSR, “socially alien elements” were to have their electoral and civil rights restored and it seemed that a system of political and social rights was introduced. However, large-scale repressions soon followed, which affected all social strata, and outlined the strict limits and conditions for the self-realization of a Soviet person.

The gap between rhetoric and reality, contradictions between politics, ideology, and economics, as demonstrated by Alexey Kilin (UrFU) in the chapter “Homo economicus & Homo soveticus,” led people to doublethink or even “triplethink”: we think one thing, say another, and do a third. The ideas of socialism were declared, but adaptation to conditions of chronic deficits of common consumption goods gave rise to a system of privileged distribution. Over time, underground business arose. Thus, two economies in the USSR existed — the official, planned economy and the “shadow” one. Participation of many people in the sphere of the “shadow” economy led them to a split consciousness and the erosion of ethical norms, which largely determined the character of the post-Soviet market economy<sup>13</sup>.

Soviet people were constantly taught that the country was surrounded by enemies, as shown by Valery Amirov (URFU) in the chapter, “The ‘military’ consciousness of a Soviet man and its reflection in pre-war newspaper discourse”.

The model of rejecting personal, “bourgeois” happiness for the sake of a social happiness, based on love for an idea, namely communism, was promoted in fiction, cinema, painting and architecture from the mid-1930s. It was believed that if people did not “understand their happiness” they needed to be forced towards it (the chapter “Homo soveticus and Homo postsoveticus: models of happiness in Russian literature” by Tatiana Snigireva and Alexey Podchinenov, UrFU).

To what extent the “common Soviet man” was new and specific is addressed by Elena Serebriakova (Voronezh), author of the chapter, “Correlation of the concepts ‘Russian’ and ‘Soviet’ in the consciousness and axiology of Soviet nonconformists.” She reveals common properties in the Soviet archetype and European “mass man,” described by Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset in *The Revolt of the Masses* (1930): lack of critical thinking, lack of independent decision-making, mythologizing of history, susceptibility to social phobias, low creativity. The socio-historical specifics of Soviet society determined what differences persisted. Political models of totalitarian (1930–1950) and authoritarian (1960–1970) governance generated conformism in the mass consciousness. The standard of living was much lower in the USSR than in Europe and the struggle for survival prevailed in the country, therefore, the main incentive for career growth was primarily the need to reduce “the pressure of poverty,” and traditional values became basic — family, friends, work — everything that helped one to survive.

Yulia Podlubnova (UrFU) examines the formation of the Soviet writer (“Formation of cultural identity of a Soviet person: 1920s youth literary groups of Ekaterinburg/Sverdlovsk”). By decree of the Politburo, “On the Party policy in the field of literature” (1925), “party control” was introduced into the realm of fiction. In the second half of the 1920s, the “Ural Association of Proletarian Writers” became the only literary authority in the region. All Ural authors, published after 1925, willingly or unwillingly, were forced to express a Soviet worldview. Similar processes took place in Siberia. Elena Proskurina (Novosibirsk), in the chapter “Soviet everyday life in a short story by Vladimir Zazubrin, ‘Married Families Hostel’”, writes of a “real Soviet man,” loyal to the ideals of the Revolution, a Civil war veteran, who was the author of the “first Soviet novel”, *Two Worlds* (1921). Nevertheless, his talent and honesty were not compatible with the Soviet regime. In a short story, “Married Families Hostel” (1923), published in the magazine *Sibirskiye Ognii* (*Siberian Lights*), he truthfully, with sarcasm, portrayed the poor, squalid nature of Soviet daily life and no less miserable leisure of high ranking Party officials, thereby debunking the “sacred” image of a communist. The writer ended up among those “Soviet people” who perished in the basements of the Lubyanka in 1937.

There seemed to be no field of a human activity that was not controlled by Soviet authorities. Even urban place names were incorporated into the Soviet revision of history — this is the subject of the chapter “‘Soviet man’ in the new names of Sverdlovsk streets: propaganda practices of the 1930s” (author Viktor Szabó, Budapest).

The Soviet regime, as Lena Igari (Budapest) writes in the chapter “The Struggle of Soviet State and Church for a Human Being”, was not successful in turning Soviet people into atheists, though from its first decrees it pursued the policy of secularization, deprived the Orthodox Church of its status, material base and physically destroyed its priests and monks. Despite this persecution, the Church lived, religiosity revived during the Great Patriotic War, in the early 1970s (which witnessed a Christian renaissance among the Soviet intelligentsia), and at the end of the 1980s, during the period of glasnost and perestroika.

Did the Soviet government succeed in shaping a person indifferent to things, to the material side of life, to private property? Irina Tazhidinova (Krasnodar) in the chapter “The Value of Things in the Extreme Daily Life of the Great Patriotic War: Personal Testimonies of Red Army Servicemen”, analyzes letters of front-line soldiers, who at the end of the war entered Germany, and discovered for themselves a higher standard of living abroad and opportunity to exercise their winner’s right to trophies. Some officers considered it unworthy of a Soviet man to take trophies, but many could not resist “temptations”.

It seemed Stalin’s rule froze all social life in the country, but at the first signs of the “thaw” it became clear that people were alive, as is well shown in the chapter “‘Even One Man in the Field is a Force’: ‘Thaw’ Wave Resistance”, written by Yulia Rusina (UrFU). Stalin’s death drew an invisible demarcation line between people — those who mourned him and those who felt relief. Khrushchev’s report of Stalin’s personality cult, given at the XX Party Congress in February 1956, was officially available only to Party and Komsomol activists, but it spread across the country, as people copied it at night. It affected the whole of Soviet society, especially the youth.

In addition, “dissent that has always been latent in the public mind, despite its harsh indoctrination, burst out as if through an opened window”<sup>14</sup>. This was evidenced by the shorthand records of Komsomol meetings. Kursk pedagogical, Briansk agricultural, Sverdlovsk mining and Taganrog radiotechnical institutes, Ural and Gorky state universities are mentioned in the chapter. Yu. Rusina focuses on the speech of Arthur Nemelkov, a fourth-year student, deputy secretary of Komsomol committee of the physics and technical faculty of the Ural Polytechnical Institute, at the XVIII-th election Komsomol conference in October 1956. He said what many had thought: “any elections in the country are a mockery of the voters”, “the Soviet constitution is wonderful, but it exists only on paper”; Stalin’s henchmen, who initiated and took part in massive repressions, “are still sitting in the presidiums of Party congresses”, “Stalin died but left his ugly brainchild,” “we need to get rid of the fear of the state machine”<sup>15</sup>. Conference delegates applauded him; he was called a “hero of our time”<sup>16</sup>, but on the initiative of the Party committee, Nemelkov was expelled from Komsomol and the Institute. Nevertheless, he did not “break down” and his life later was successful.

The “thaw” period is perceived in the book as a milestone, which marked the beginning of the next, post-Stalin period of national history. E. Serebriakova in the above-mentioned chapter “Correlation of the Concepts ‘Russian’ and ‘Soviet’...” explores the non-conformist personality type, which emerged in Soviet society in the 1960–1970s. Non-conformists — liberals, “nationalists”, “religious” — treated “Soviet” as false, ideologized, historically hopeless and inhuman. A special type of personality within the framework of non-conformism in its extreme forms are dissidents of the 1960–1980s. E. Serebriakova rightly believes that the role of dissidents in national history is still underestimated: actually, they, by their sharp criticism and self-sacrifice, devalued the Soviet model of society and prepared public opinion for the inevitability of fundamental social changes.

The type of person who lived in Soviet society but did not become *homo soveticus* is the subject of the chapter “Phenomenology of Soviet Man in M. Prishvin’s ‘Diary’ of 1930s.” Its author, Alexander Medvedev (Tiumen), defines Michael Prishvin’s personality as humanistic, *above*-ideological, formed by the culture of the Silver Age, “which unlike the ‘vertical’ monologism of Stalin’s system, was imbued with the spirit of personalism, dialogue and discussion”; the “main creative principle” of the writer was the direct contemplation of life, opposed to any ideocracy<sup>17</sup>. From 1905 to 1954, he kept the diary (it was published in St Petersburg in 18 volumes in 1991–2017), where he called the revolution “a robbery of a person’s individual destiny” (November 24, 1930)<sup>18</sup> and defined the typical traits of a Soviet person: the total dictate of the state over an individual, depersonalization in a team, utilitarian attitude to a person, worship of the leader, denial of the present for the sake of utopian future, intolerance, dogmatism, narrow class ethics, messianism, based on the belief that the USSR is the best country in the world, substitution of philosophy and art by ideology, destruction of a living language, replaced by ideological clichés.

Were there any virtues in Soviet life? Tamás Krausz (Budapest) in the chapter “Thinking of the Soviet Man” writes of the USSR peoples’ “cultural blossom”, of science achievements, of mass interest in Russian and foreign literature. One may also



call internationalism a Soviet virtue (at least on the surface) but, as time has shown, the nationalism in the USSR did not disappear and, immediately after collapse of the country, burst to the surface. This is evidenced in the chapter “Soviet Daily Life, Ukrainian-Russian Bilingualism and the Problem of Identity: Eugene Vodolazkin’s View”. Its author, Natalia Kupina (URFU), dwells upon the novel *Brisbane* (2019), written by a famous writer, who was born in Kiev in 1964. The autobiographical hero of the novel speaks Ukrainian and Russian and feels that he organically belongs to both peoples, to both cultures. However, not even all the members of his family share his feeling. The hero’s father calls him up from Kiev to Leningrad on the day of the coup in August 19, 1991, and informs him that the paths of Russia and Ukraine diverge. It is obvious that the writer, as well as his hero, is traumatized by the fact that the idea of the unity of two kindred peoples turned out to be illusory, like a dream of a beautiful Australian city of Brisbane. Vodolazkin said in one of his interviews: “Russian and Ukrainian branches have one trunk. <...> If you look from one branch to another one, they are different. If you look at the tree as a whole, they are parts of it. So it was seen, for example, by Gogol, who united Ukrainian patriotism with an all-Russian view of the world. I respect both points of view, but the idea of Russian-Ukrainian unity is closer to me”<sup>19</sup>.

Another important subject of the monograph is the Russian émigrés’ image of a “Soviet person.” Marina Khatyamova (Tomsk) in the chapter “Homecoming Plot and Images of Soviet People in the Prose by N. N. Berberova” examines the book “The Case of Kravchenko. The Story of the Trial” (1949), which introduces one more type of *homo soveticus*: Victor Kravchenko, an engineer, and member of the CPSU since 1929, who worked for a Soviet trade procurement mission in 1943–1944, was evidently a trusted and verified “Soviet man,” but became a defector and in a book *I Chose Freedom: The Personal and Political Life of a Soviet Official* (New York, 1946) he told of the world of Stalinist terror, of concentration camps, and of forced collectivization. His fate confirms to Berberova that the craving for freedom in a human soul is ineradicable.

Many émigrés kept the faith that Russian people had not given in to the Soviet regime. Alexey Antoshin (URFU), in the chapter “Soviet Person of the Late Stalin Epoch in the Perception of the Contemporaries — Russian Political Émigrés,” cites the opinions of ideologists from among the most active anticommunist émigré organization — National Labor Union (*Natsional’no-trudovoy soiuz* — NTS). One of them — philosopher Roman Redlich saw the late-Stalinist Soviet Union as the world of fictions, myths, pseudo-religions, where only employees, devoid of convictions, were the mainstay of the regime.

The population of the USSR was not homogenously Soviet, as evidenced by Yulia Matveeva (URFU), in the chapter “‘Homo soveticus’ in the Perception of Émigré Writers — Displaced Persons: The Case of Boris N. Shiryayev”. A son of a Russian landlord, Shiryayev, who studied at Moscow and Göttingen universities, at the Imperial military academy, took part in the first World war, and later, as a supporter of “the whites”, was repressed (sent to the Solovetsky concentration camp), did not and could not become a Soviet man. When the Germans occupied the south of Russia, where he lived in 1935–1942, he collaborated with them and published anti-Soviet

newspapers. From the end of 1944, he settled in Italy. The writer ironically and wittily denounced poor daily Soviet life, all-pervading fear, ruthlessness to people, but his excessive anticommunist pathos was, paradoxically, reminiscent of the Bolshevik's own politicized, hate-ridden literature<sup>20</sup>.

The monograph deals not only with the USSR, but also with Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic. Erzsébet Schiller (Szombathely, Hungary), in the chapter "Two Letters: Episode from the Biography of B. L. Pasternak and Hungarian Writer-communist Balázs as 1930s Soviet Human Life Indicator," introduces a European communist literary man — Béla Balázs, who was close to the "Soviet person" archetype. Since 1932, Balázs lived in the USSR and wrote in his poem "My House" (1938) that there existed "a real happiness." He was obviously far from understanding the Soviet reality: his "joyful," inartistic poem was written in the midst of repressions in the country and he asked Boris Pasternak to translate his "propaganda" poem, evidently not realizing that he was addressing a poet of a different worldview and level of talent.

Iwona Anna Ndiaye (Olsztyn, Poland) describes another type of a left-wing literary man in the chapter "'Soviet person' through the Eyes of a Polish Writer A. Słonimsky: 'My Journey to Russia'". She refers to the late works of the Polish philosopher, Leszek Kołakowski (1927–2009), who considered *homo soveticus*, as formed by the Marxist-Leninist ideology, a weak-willed, dishonest, cruel, conformist and opportunistic person. This is exactly the "Soviet person" described in the book of essays by Antoni Słonimski, who visited the USSR in June–August 1932; the writer noted in dismay at the end of the book that he still did not understand where he had been: in a socialist country or in a country of terror and fanatical ideology.

Anna Grasko (Moscow), in the chapter "Czech Variant of *Homo soveticus*", treats literature as a barometer of social life. Her analysis of the novel, "The Wonderful Years that Sucked" (1992), written by a well-known writer Michal Viewegh, brings out the ephemerality of the Czech version of "Soviet man". For Viewegh, "to play Soviet" was typical for Czechoslovakia. "Soviet" was something alien, imposed and it became especially lucid after the suppression of "Prague Spring" in 1968, following the attempt to democratize socialism in the country.

The monograph, as a whole, is characterized by an objective, impartial tone, which distinguishes scientific research from publicist texts. The chapter written by Tamás Krausz (b. 1948), a Hungarian social activist, and former ideologist of the Hungarian Socialist party, stands out in this context given its conclusions and rhetoric. He views "the forcible collectivization and industrialization with a huge number of victims" as "accomplishments" of the "new state endowed with a world-historical mission"<sup>21</sup>. He perceives the USSR as "a society without exploitation" and considers "forced universal labor service and the fight against illiteracy to be important steps towards creating such a society"<sup>22</sup>. The fight against illiteracy, certainly, was a positive phenomenon, but the approval of "universal labor service" seems dubious: one immediately recalls forced labor camps, which appeared in the country in 1919. T. Krausz writes: "For seven decades up to 1991 a Soviet man <...> always understood that <...> factories, land, hospitals and schools belonged to him and were the property of the 'workers' and 'peasants'. Moreover, propaganda has always



proclaimed the fight against bureaucracy, patronage and bribery”<sup>23</sup>. It is clear that the author believes in the official “Soviet myth” and is unaware of the discrepancy between verbal declarations and reality in the USSR: bureaucracy, patronage and bribery flourished in the country, “plants and factories” never belonged to “workers and peasants”; the actual owner and manager was the party and state nomenclature<sup>24</sup>. It is surprising that among “Soviet writers and poets” T. Krausz mentions Russian poets Marina Tsvetaeva and Anna Akhmatova. As we well remember, Tsvetaeva lived in exile (Prague, Paris) from 1922 to 1939 and, when she came back to the USSR, she committed suicide in 1941. Tsvetaeva and Akhmatova were *different*, non-Soviet, as well as Prishvin. There are also some other strange statements in the chapter: “...there was no Soviet censorship though it existed”<sup>25</sup>. And what about *Glavlit*? From 1922 to 1991, the special state office (it had different names during different periods) severely censored mass media, books, publishing houses, theatre, cinema, libraries, etc. The inconsistencies in the chapter may be explained by “mental and soul searching”, characteristic of many left European intellectuals. T. Krausz is the author of *Lenin. Social-theoretical reconstruction* (Moscow, 2011), where his plan is to restore the genuine doctrine of Lenin, allegedly distorted by Stalin. Apparently, the author of the book believes in the illusion of the realization of a Socialist utopia in Russia after the October Revolution of 1917. But it was already in 1917–1918 that Maxim Gorky, in a series of essays entitled “Untimely thoughts” and published in the Petrograd newspaper, *Novaya zhizn* (*New Life*), wrote that the Bolsheviks were carrying out the most severe experiment on the living body of Russia, the Russian people and the Russian proletariat. The purpose of this experiment was to reshape “living human matter”<sup>26</sup>.

\* \* \*

Soviet civilization is in the past, but, of course, people who grew up and were formed by its environment did not magically change, and many of them still retain the traits of the Soviet genotype, which (let us not forget) also contains a lot of the international “mass genotype.”

Russia (not without reason) is considered an avant-garde country, but as history has shown, “a complete break” with the past is impossible. Soviet society was founded on an avant-garde project — to produce a new society, and a new history on a “blank page”. But in spite of that intention, despite all the Bolsheviks’ efforts, all their repressions and all censorship much of the culture of the past was preserved and there was a variety of types of people living in that society. Despite all the forms of ideological and physical pressure and control, a powerful Soviet state could not cope with an individual person. The collapse of this state is explained, first of all, “in a Marxist way” — by economic and financial factors, however, back in the early 1930s, the great Russian writer, Mikhail Prishvin, presciently states in his diaries that Soviet ideology was socially doomed because it “ousted life itself”<sup>27</sup>. Thus, paraphrasing T. S. Eliot, we might say that the end of Soviet civilization was laid at its beginning and matured gradually. The idea of a “new man” turned out to be a failure and contemporary scholars convincingly prove it.

- <sup>1</sup> Friedrich C. J., Brzezinski Z. Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy. Cambridge, 1956.
- <sup>2</sup> Soviet Common Man. A Version of Social Portrait at the Turn of the 1990s, ed. Yu. Levada. Moscow, 1993; Levada Yu. Sly Man: Russian Doublethink // Monitoring obshchestvennogo mneniia: ekonomicheskie i sotsialnye peremeny. 2000. No. 1 (45). P. 19–27; Levada Yu. Soviet Man: Original Shape Reconstruction Problem // Monitoring obshchestvennogo mneniia: ekonomicheskie i sotsialnye peremeny. 2001. Vol. 52 (2). P. 7–16.
- <sup>3</sup> Gudkov L. Abortive Modernization. Moscow, 2011. P. 7–12.
- <sup>4</sup> Kozlova N. “Soviet People”: Scenes from History. Moscow, 2005.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid. P. 45.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid. P. 21–22.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid. P. 83.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid. P. 63–64.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid. P. 361.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid. P. 476, 487.
- <sup>11</sup> See: Fitzpatrick S. Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s. Oxford, 1999.
- <sup>12</sup> Homo soveticus: pro et contra, eds Yu. V. Matveeva, Yu. A. Rusina. Yekaterinburg: 2021.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid. P. 57, 62, 67. On the beginning of this process see: Kilin A. He Who Does Not Trade, Does Not Eat’: Trade Practices in the Everyday Lives of Ural Workers in the 1920s // Quaestio Rossica. 2017. Vol. 5 (4). P. 1047–1062. <https://doi.org/10.15826/qr.2017.4.266>
- <sup>14</sup> Homo soveticus: pro et contra. P. 189.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid. P. 176.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid. P. 176, 177.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid. P. 331–332.
- <sup>18</sup> Prishvin M. Diaries, 1930–1931 (St Petersburg, 2006). P. 287–288.
- <sup>19</sup> Homo soveticus: pro et contra. P. 204.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid. P. 262.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid. P. 25.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid. P. 21.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid. P. 22.
- <sup>24</sup> See: Zaslavskaya T., Rivkina R. Sociology of Economical Life. Theory Essays. Novosibirsk, 1991.
- <sup>25</sup> Homo soveticus: pro et contra. P. 31.
- <sup>26</sup> Gorky M. Untimely Thoughts. URL: <https://ilibrary.ru/text/2378/p.1/index.html> (accessed: 21.12.2021).
- <sup>27</sup> Homo soveticus: pro et contra. P. 331.

## FOR CITATION:

Krasavchenko T. N. ‘The Myth of *homo soveticus*: Perspectives from Russian and Foreign Scholars’, *Modern History of Russia*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2022, pp. 774–784. <https://doi.org/10.21638/11701/spbu24.2022.316>

*Abstract:* The subject of this article is the study of the phenomenon *homo soveticus* in the West (C. Friedrich, Z. Brzezinski, S. Fitzpatrick, S. Kotkin, A. Yurchak and others) and in Russia by sociologist Yuri Levada since the 1980s; by social anthropologist Natalia Kozlova in the late 1990s, and from the early 2000s to the present by historians and literary scholars from Russian cities (Yekaterinburg, Voronezh, Novosibirsk, Tomsk, Tiumen, Krasnodar, Moscow) and from Hungary and Poland, whose work is published in an interdisciplinary collective monograph by Ural Federal University (Ekaterinburg) in 2021. The authors of the monograph belong to different generations and national humanities’ schools, but they are united by a common historical memory, by an approach to *homo soveticus* as a multiform, not monolithic phenomenon. The personality typology of the 1930s is not identical to that of the 1960s, 1970s, or 1980s, and Soviet rule, despite all its might, could not completely control and subjugate people of the USSR — not only because the country was very large and diverse, but mainly because the

ideology and politics of this rule contradicted *life*. The monograph opens new perspectives on an original, holistic approach to the study of the *homo soveticus* phenomenon, which includes its versions in the countries of Eastern Europe, as well as its perception by Russian emigrants.

**Keywords:** Soviet society, USSR, cultural studies, social anthropology, historiography.

**Author:** *Krasavchenko T. N.* — Dr. Sci. in Philology, Leading Research Fellow, Institute of Scientific Information for Social Sciences of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Moscow, Russia); tatianakras@mail.ru

Institute of Scientific Information for Social Sciences of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 51/21, Nakhimovskiy pr., Moscow, 117997, Russia

**References:**

- Fitzpatrick S. *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (Oxford, 1999).
- Friedrich C. J., Brzezinski Z. *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (Cambridge, 1956).
- Gorky M. *Untimely Thoughts*. (Moscow, 1990). (In Russian)
- Gudkov L. *Abortive Modernization* (Moscow, 2011). (In Russian)
- Homo soveticus: pro et contra*, eds Yu. V. Matveeva, Yu. A. Rusina (Yekaterinburg, 2021). (In Russian)
- Kilin A. 'He Who Does Not Trade, Does Not Eat': Trade Practices in the Everyday Lives of Ural Workers in the 1920s, *Quaestio Rossica*. Vol. 5 (4), 2017. <https://doi.org/10.15826/qr.2017.4.266> (In Russian)
- Kozlova N. "Soviet People": *Scenes from History* (Moscow, 2005). (In Russian)
- Levada Yu. 'Sly Man: Russian Doublethink', *Monitoring obshchestvennogo mneniia: ekonomicheskie i sotsialnye peremeny*, vol. 45 (1), 2000. (In Russian)
- Levada Yu. 'Soviet Man: Original Shape Reconstruction Problem', *Monitoring obshchestvennogo mneniia: ekonomicheskie i sotsialnye peremeny*, vol. 52 (2), 2001. (In Russian)
- Prishvin M. *Diaries, 1930–1931* (St Petersburg, 2006). (In Russian)
- Soviet Common Man. A Version of Social Portrait at the Turn of the 1990s*, ed. Yu. Levada (Moscow, 1993). (In Russian)
- Yurchak A. *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More. The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, 2005).
- Zaslavskaya T., Rivkina R. *Sociology of Economical Life. Theory Essays* (Novosibirsk, 1991). (In Russian)

Received: December 25, 2021

Accepted: May 8, 2022