

Jure Gašparič*

The Changing View of the 1917 Russian Revolution – Slovenia in the Global Perspective**

IZVLEČEK

SPREMINJAJOČ POGLED NA RUSKO REVOLUCIJO – SLOVENIJA V GLOBALNI PERSPEKTIVI

Letos mineva 100 let od ruskih revolucij leta 1917 (februarja in oktobra), ki so s svojimi daljnosežnimi posledicami pretresle svet. Del zgodovine revolucije je nedvomno tudi spreminjajoč pogled nanjo, zato si ga velja podrobneje pogledati, saj bomo le tako bolje razumeli njene globalne učinke in osmišljali današnja in prihodnja politična stališča. V prispevku je pregledno predstavljena spreminjajoča se globalna perspektiva ruskih revolucij v kratkem dvajsetem stoletju, v katero je umeščen slovenski prostor.

Ključne besede: Oktobrska revolucija, Rusija, stota obletnica, 20. stoletje, Slovenija

ABSTRACT

This year we celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Russian Revolutions (of February and October), which shook the world with their far-reaching consequences. The changing outlook on the Revolution by all means represents a part of its history, and therefore it has to be examined more closely, as this is the only way to understand the Revolution's global impact as well as give meaning to the current and future political standpoints. The contribution presents an overview of the changing global perspective of the Russian Revolutions in the short 20th century and the Slovenian space within it.

Keywords: October Revolution, Russia, 100th anniversary, 20th century, Slovenia

* Senior Researcher, PhD, Institute of Contemporary History, Kongresni trg 1, 1000 – Ljubljana, Slovenia, jure.gasparic@inz.si

** The author acknowledges the financial support from the Slovenian Research Agency (research core funding No. P6-0281).

In 1967 one of the most influential European weekly newspapers – the German *Spiegel* – published a lengthy article entitled *Ein halbes Jahrhundert nach Bronsteins Geburtstags-Putsch*.¹ The article opened in the *Spiegel's* characteristic style: “A German cavalry officer (*Rittmeister*) lined up the Russian emigrants at the border with Switzerland. They were counted at the railway platform in Gottmadingen. There were 32 men. In April 1917 they rode a special train through Germany to Sassnitz and through Sweden and Finland to Petrograd.” In the continuation the article also presented the now already legendary story of Lenin’s journey home as well as the subsequent events, which had already been put into words countless times by then (including in the literary form, for example by Stefan Zweig).² The *Spiegel* wrote: “This was the ‘Great Socialist October Revolution’. In the communist countries – today these amount to one third of humankind – this implies the birth of a new, better world and a new, better man... When the Red Army soldiers erected their flag among the ruins of the Berlin Reichstag, Russia became a global superpower, second to none other but the United States of America. Nobody followed Karl Marx’s teachings. The worker’s democracy was not established, and communism remained utopic. However, what did take shape was a self-confident and ideologically-convinced industrial nation. The illiteracy and mass poverty of the tsarist era were overcome. Millions of university graduates built the new state-founding elite.”

The revolution and the development of the Soviet empire at the time were upsetting...³ Fifty years later it was obvious all around the world that the symbolic embarking on the train in Switzerland had shaken the global political, economic, and cultural architecture. For the first time after the revolution broke out in the territory of the Soviet Union, at that time the American *New York Times* deployed a special group of journalists, who would travel around the enormous country for weeks and write about the consequences of October 1917.⁴

Simultaneously, the Slovenian historiography prepared a large-scale symposium entitled The 50th Anniversary of the October Revolution and the 30th Anniversary of the Inaugural Congress of the Communist Party of Slovenia. The event was prominent and prestigious in terms of its expert as well as political aspects, and the main lectures were given by Boris Zihlerl, Dušan Kermavner, and Janko Pleterski.⁵ Zihlerl, the “revolutionary-scientist” who was deemed as Zhdanov’s follower, underlined the

1 “Ein halbes Jahrhundert nach Bronsteins Geburtstags-Putsch,” *Spiegel*, No. 43 (1967), 153–56.

2 Stefan Zweig, “Plombirani vlak,” in: *Zvezdni trenutki človeštva* (Celovec: Mohorjeva, 2004), 187–96. Original: Stefan Zweig, “The Miniature Der Versiegelte Zug,” in: *Sternstunden der Menschheit*.

3 The celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Revolution in Moscow was attended by 1000 foreign journalists, and the event was broadcast by the Eurovision network. – “Za 50-letnico revolucije nad sto tujih delegacij,” *Delo*, 29 October 1967.

4 Edward Crankshaw, “The Coup That Changed the World (Cont.) Lenin had invoked the masses; now he brought them to heel,” *The New York Times*, 19 February 1967, 235.

5 The discussions and considerations were published in a special topical issue of the *Prispevki za zgodovino delavskega gibanja* publication [Contributions to the History of the Workers’ Movement] (today *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* [Contributions to Contemporary History]). *Prispevki za zgodovino delavskega gibanja* VII, No. 1-2 (1967): *Zbornik razprav in obravnav znanstvenega posvetovanja Ob 50. obletnici oktobrske revolucije in ob 30. obletnici ustanovnega kongresa Komunistične partije Slovenije v Ljubljani od 2. do 4. novembra 1967*.

following initial thoughts about the October in the introduction: first he established, as expected, that the October Revolution was, at the time, “the most important event of our century, a revolutionary act of the vast Russia’s working masses, which shook the world fifty years ago, gave rise to the general crisis of the capitalist social system, and announced the beginning of a new era in the history of all humankind: the era of socialism.” In the continuation, Zihelr reflected upon the Revolution’s heritage and immediately tackled the issue regarding the “model” of socialism – a question which had troubled him for a long time. Could the Russian October represent a model for all socialist revolutions around the world? Some people, especially in the West, argued against the revolutionary character of October, claiming that the economic landscape of the old Russia made it impossible as such, while others “absolutised” it and strove to implement it in the exact same manner, especially after 1945. Zihelr, referring to Lenin, believed that the Revolution could only be victorious as a dialectic thought and not as a solid model. Nevertheless, Zihelr remarked: „The Great October Revolution and the revolutionary turmoil in a number of European and non-European countries that accompanied and strengthened it also confirmed the international reaction in the conviction that stems from every revolutionary situation: that the old ways are *no longer feasible*.”⁶

On that occasion, one of the parks in the Slovenian capital of Ljubljana was named after Lenin, and special honour was paid to the 95 participants of the Russian Revolutions from Slovenia who were still alive at the time.⁷ The principal Slovenian newspaper *Delo* assessed the message of the October with the following humanist motto: striving for “a higher degree of prosperity and freedom”⁸

In 1967, the global outlook on the Russian October definitely varied greatly (understandably depending on the political and bloc structure of the world). However, it had a few important common points: nobody denied or disregarded the significance of the event that had taken place fifty years earlier. The Russian Revolution captured the attention of states, intellectuals, and the public. The conviction that Russia and a part of the world had no longer been the same after October 1917 prevailed: the “old ways” had in fact become untenable.

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Let us now first move (almost) fifty years back, to the time (immediately) after the revolution, and then fifty years forward, to today’s time. In these one hundred years the world has changed thoroughly, also because of the Revolution, and together with the world the outlook on the Revolution has changed as well. **As it is, the changing outlook on the October Revolution by all means represents a part of the history of**

6 Boris Zihelr, “Dve obletnici,” *Prispevki za zgodovino delavskega gibanja* VII, No. 1-2 (1967): 9–19.

7 “Ljubljana je počastila petdesetletnico Oktobra,” “Sprejem za udeležence Oktobra,” *Delo*, 7 November 1967.

8 Dušan Dolinar, “Pet desetletij Oktobra,” *Delo*, 7 November 1967.

the Revolution, and therefore it has to be examined more closely, as this is the only way to understand the Revolution's global impact as well as to give meaning to the current and future political standpoints.

In 1924 – in the year of Lenin's death – contributions, commentaries, essays, and discussions on the extraordinary role of this man and even more so on the global importance of the developments taking place well over six years earlier, which Lenin had famously organised, kept being published all around the world. The Viennese newspapers⁹ asked themselves who Lenin and his role had been, and assessed the historical importance of the events at the same time as the American press. "Lenin is dead and Trotsky is no longer at the head of the Red Army. Lenin had been away from the helm of Russian affairs for some time, while Trotsky was but recently eliminated from the inner councils of the Soviets. How will Soviet Russia fare without these master minds of the Bolshevik revolution?" one of newspapers wrote, and stated: "Communism Now Faces Its Greatest Crisis -- Leaders Struggle for the Mantle of Lenin".¹⁰ A few years earlier, in the period between 1917 and 1919, the New York Times search engine returns as many as 1979 hits for the query "Russian Revolution". Not even a single day passed in March 1917 that the events taking place in Russia were not reported on.¹¹ The press would mostly establish that "No statesman has ever had such an occasion to become a great benefactor of his country as Lenin had, yet he left Russia in far worse condition than she was when he became her absolute dictator."¹²

Numerous authors from the Slovenian territory contributed to the massive collection of assessments as well. None of the political camps (neither the liberal, Catholic, nor the Marxist side),¹³ political groups, or barely any newspapers could resist the urge to give their own assessments of the leading revolutionary (this is discussed in more detail in this volume by Jurij Perovšek, Vida Deželak-Barič, and Bojan Godeša).

Why this was the case was already explained in the 1920s by one of the most influential Yugoslav writers (and members of the forbidden Yugoslav Communist Party), the Croatian Miroslav Krleža, who visited Russia in 1924. As he deliberated on the importance of the Revolution, he pointed out a simple fact: "The significance of the Revolution stems from its invaluable practical importance. From numerous theoretical debates in the context of the First and Second International and the First of May philistine social democratic declamations that accompanied a mug of beer, and through the conflicts within the Party and its fractions, the path towards an organised state government has been long and hard." However, all these debates and theories suddenly had to face the USSR as the proof that socialism had transcended

9 "Der Tod Lenins," *Neue Freie Presse*, 23 January 1924, 1. "Lenin," *Arbeiterwille*, 23 January 1924, 1.

10 Herman Bernstein, "Russia after Lenin -- will soviet survive?," *The New York Times*, 27 January 1924, XX3.

11 *Newspapers.com*, accessed 5 July 2017, https://www.newspapers.com/search/#lnd=1&query=russian+revolution&dr_year=1917-1919&t=395.

12 Peter J. Popoff, "Lenin's Great Experiment; He Failed, and No One Else Is Likely to Try Again," *The New York Times*, 25 January 1924, 16.

13 See: Jurij Perovšek, "Ruski begunci in pogledi slovenske politike na Lenina ob njegovi smrti," *Monitor ISH XVIII*, No. 1 (2016): 7–31.

theory and had been put into practice. "On the basis of the speeches in the Assembly, the evening Marxist school, and the newspaper editorial ... a reality had emerged, consisting of coins, armoured warships, artillery, modern aviation, and international diplomatic relations."¹⁴

Of the Slovenian authors, Franc Terseglav, a representative of the Christian socialists, asserted himself with his insightfulness and the synthetic character of his reasoning. He wrote two lengthy texts about Lenin and the Revolution. In the conclusion of the second text he presented an assessment which can be deemed as an approximate common denominator of the Slovenian opinions about the Russian Revolution. In Terseglav's view, Lenin "hastened the end of the global massacre with the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty and motto War on War! ... as well as set the basic guidelines for the future global development by creating the will to achieve the future republic of all humankind, federation of free nations, and parliament of all humanity. Without Lenin's powerful thrust, Asia would never have come forward with the demand for self-determination of its subjugated nations; Kemal's Turkey would not have risen; and neither would the white man's slaves from the Pacific Ocean and Mongolian steppes to the African deserts and American prairies have stood up and demanded their freedom". He concluded his evaluation of Lenin and the Revolution extremely optimistically, as he wrote that Lenin's pivotal role was not "to bring about communism as a system – the embodiment of this German intellectualist theory is what is in fact the least important: it is the least durable and is purely experimental. Especially for Russia, Lenin has been most important as a teacher of an entirely new generation."¹⁵

At that time the Revolution had nothing to do with communism at all, they would write, but rather involved much more: the alteration (transformation) of humankind. It had opened unprecedented possibilities. In Slovenia, the Revolution was still seen as heralding a better future, while the American as well as many other media had already established that Lenin and his comrades had failed.

Such a position strengthened itself even further in the following decade. At the tenth anniversary of the Russian October, the *Time* magazine published a detailed and fair portrait of Russia, only to conclude it with Alexander Kerensky's offended words from his book *The Catastrophe*: „In the struggle for liberation Russia must inevitably return to the road of popular, national, democratic government, the road upon which the Russian people embarked – hesitatingly and with uncertain steps – in March, 1917.“¹⁶

In Slovenia, on the other hand, the following was established: „Under the ingenious leadership of the diplomat Chicherin, Russia expanded its former tsarist imperialism. Russia has introduced a novelty in the European diplomacy – its diplomats are not merely its official representatives, but also disseminators of Bolshevik ideas and

14 Miroslav Krleža, *Izlet u Rusiju* (Zagreb: Novi Liber, 2013), 260, 261.

15 Perovšek, "Ruski begunci in pogledi slovenske politike na Lenina," 28, 29.

16 "Russia," *Time*, 21 November 1927, 15–18.

protectors of local supporters. Through Bolshevism, Russia undermined the world and incited revolutions in Bulgaria, Hungary, Germany, Czechoslovakia, and partly also in Italy.¹⁷

However, only a decade later the assessment of the events taking place in Russia became much more critical – also in Slovenia. Towards the end of the 1930s, the press established that communism was “merely utopic” and that the Marxist doctrine was “unfeasible”.¹⁸ The Slovenian Catholic political camp, which was becoming increasingly radical, wrote the following: “What was built in blood is now maintained in blood, and it will be destroyed in blood as well. The red paradise on Earth is truly completely red – from all the bloodshed.”¹⁹

* * *

After World War II, the assessment of the Russian October in Slovenia and in the rest of Yugoslavia changed significantly. If before 1945 one could follow numerous critical as well as positive evaluations of the Revolution, the critical could no longer be found afterwards. The first period after the end of the war was characterised exclusively by panegyric praises and uncritical glorifications. A partial change quite understandably took place after the 1948 Cominform dispute, although this, in its essence, had nothing to do with the ideological aspects of the Russian October. Namely, the Yugoslav state and Party ideology did not renounce the October Revolution. Quite the opposite: it remained one of the fundamental elements of the system; it was presented in the brightest possible light in the school textbooks;²⁰ and the celebrations dedicated to October would be organised in some school facilities until as late as the 1980s (the author of this paper himself participated in a few of them).²¹

The Cominform dispute was perhaps most evidently reflected in historiography, which was not seriously interested in studying the 1917 events.²² In Slovenia and Yugoslavia in general, only a single historian dedicated himself to this topic: Professor

17 “7. XI. 1917 – 7. XI. 1927 (Editorial),” *Slovenec*, 8 November 1927.

18 “Dvajset let boljševiške Rusije,” *Jutro*, 9 November 1937.

19 “Dvajsetletnica sovjetov (Drin.),” *Slovenec*, 7 November 1937.

20 Pupils would often write essays and deliberations on the October, which reflect the spirit of the times and the perception of Russia and the Revolution. A student from the Poljane grammar school (at the time the Vida Janežič secondary school for social sciences and general culture) wrote elatedly about “the typical emotional-political or moral-political relations” between Slovenians and Russia.

21 At the time one could read many jokes on account of Russia and particularly Stalin in the satirical press. In one of the most famous jokes, Stalin wanted to know what the simple folk thought about him, so he disguised himself and stepped into a tavern in Moscow. There he started chatting with a worker: he asked him quietly what the man thought about comrade Stalin. The frightened worker looked around and whispered: “I have to admit that I still support him!” – *Toti list*, 1 March 1952, 2.

22 Janko Prunk, “Jugoslovanska historiografija o oktobrski revoluciji,” *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* XXVII, No. 1-2 (1987): 3–6.

Marjan Britovšek, whose work is explored in this volume by Avgust Lešnik.²³ In fact, the only significant exception with regard to the studying of the October Revolution was the 1967 symposium, mentioned in the introduction, and the memorial collection of texts, published by the Belgrade Institute of Contemporary History on the sixtieth anniversary of the Revolution. It contains memorial records of 152 Yugoslav citizens who participated in the October Revolution and the subsequent civil war. One of the texts was contributed by the legendary Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito.²⁴

Naturally, the Yugoslav and Slovenian optics were completely different from that in the West and in the United States of America, where the *Time* wrote in 1947: "Thirty years ago a stooped man with hollow cheeks and a potbelly came out from behind the bookstacks, where he had spent most of his life, and kidnapped a state. Never before or after did he fire a gun or throw a bomb or raise his slim-fingered hands to strike a blow. In his name, nevertheless, more men have been slaughtered than in Attila's. His name was Lenin."²⁵

We can only guess what opinion the Slovenian people had of the October Revolution, but judging from the fact that the basic elements of the Russian October were also ingrained in the narrative of the Yugoslav Revolution (which is discussed by Zdenko Čepič in this volume), we can safely claim that it was favourable. In the public opinion polls, carried out in Slovenia since 1968 (which was a unique case in the European East),²⁶ this question was not asked, but it is very telling that the Soviet Union as a state always ranked high (compared to other states) in terms of its characteristics and popularity.²⁷

23 Marjan Britovšek, *Revolucionarni idejni preobrat med prvo svetovno vojno. Lenin v boju za tretjo internacionalo* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1969). *Boj za Leninovo dediščino* (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 1976). *Carizem, revolucija, stalinizem. Družbeni razvoj v Rusiji in perspektive socializma* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1980). *Korenine stalinizma in negativne posledice kulta osebnosti* (Ljubljana: Zavod SR Slovenije za šolstvo, 1980). *Stalinov termidor* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1984).

24 Josip Broz Tito, "Moja doživetja v Rusiji med oktobrsko revolucijo in državljansko vojno," *Delo – Sobotna priloga*, 5 November 1977.

25 "Russia. The Root & the Flower," *Time*, 17 November 1947, 33.

26 About the public opinion pools in Slovenia in this period see: Jure Gašparič, "Slovensko dojetje druge Jugoslavije," in: *Slovenija v Jugoslaviji*, ed. Zdenko Čepič (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2015), 87–104.

27 Niko Toš et al., *Slovensko javno mnenje 1968*. [datoteka podatkov]. Ljubljana: Univerza v Ljubljani, Visoka šola za politične vede, Center za raziskovanje javnega mnenja in množičnih komunikacij [izdelava], 1968 (Ljubljana: Univerza v Ljubljani, Fakulteta za družbene vede, Arhiv družboslovnih podatkov [distribucija], 1999). Available at: *Podatki o raziskavi Slovensko javno mnenje 1991/2*, <http://www.adp.fdv.uni-lj.si/opisi/sjm912.xml>.

Which country has advantages in a specific field in comparison with the others?
(SJM 1968)

	Yugoslavia	Soviet Union	United States	Italy	Austria	Germany	Scandinavian countries	Switzerland	Other socialist countries	Other western countries	None	I don't know
1	47.1	2.3	4.6	0.5	0.7	4.2	1.9	1.5	0.3	1.3	1.1	34.4
2	56.7	7	1.5	0	0.2	1.3	1.1	0.5	0.2	1.6	0.6	29.9
3	36.3	4.6	1.9	2.1	0.5	2.2	1.3	0.4	0.4	4.7	1.1	44.4
4	56.9	1.5	1.7	0.4	0.8	1.3	3.4	0.7	0.3	1.4	2.3	29.3
5	48.3	0.1	1.8	12.7	1.7	1.2	0.2	0.3	0.1	1.4	1.1	31.1
6	24.8	3.6	9.4	1.1	0	13.5	5.2	3.8	0.2	4.3	1.1	32
7	75.6	1.1	0.3	0.2	0.1	0	0.8	2.1	0.4	0.8	0.7	17.8
8	23.9	24	8.6	0.5	0.1	9.6	0.9	0.4	0.2	4.1	0.5	27.1
9	68.5	0.1	0.1	2.4	0.4	0.5	0.4	5.7	0.2	2.0	0.2	19.6
10	48.5	0.9	0.5	0.5	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.2	1.5	2.6	43.9
11	51.4	3.1	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.7	1.1	0.3	0.5	0.4	6.3	35.5

1. advancement possibilities
2. education possibilities
3. highly developed culture life
4. care for the sick and unemployed
5. position of religion and relations between the Church and the state
6. good economy (country's economic progress)
7. pacifist policy and reputation in the world
8. swift development of science and technology
9. natural beauties
10. possibilities of the majority of the people to influence social decisions
11. camaraderie and equality between the people

Major changes in the attitude towards the Russian October on the global as well as the Slovenian level took place towards the end of the 1980s, when the bipolar global system became unstable. At the seventieth anniversary of the Revolution in 1987, a big parade was organised in Moscow, as always. On this occasion the first man in the state would traditionally speak, and this time it was the reformist Mikhail

Gorbachev who gave the speech. “The October Revolution is truly the shining hour of humanity, its radiant dawn,” Gorbachev said. “The October Revolution is a revolution of the people and for the people, for every individual, for his emancipation and development.” However, in the continuation he did not forget to add: “The changes taking place in the country today probably constitute the biggest step in developing socialist democracy since the October revolution.”²⁸ Not long after that – only three years later – almost all politicians and media worldwide agreed with this assessment.²⁹ 1990 was unanimously declared as The Year of the People – as the most pivotal year in the Russian or Soviet history after 1917.³⁰

It seems that this – the year 1990 – was the last year when the Russian October still enjoyed the reputation of a globally-important and epochal event. Afterwards its provocative power started waning. Today the Russian October thus appears to be “outdated”, an ancient event whose consequences have already dissipated. In Slovenia and in the former Yugoslav countries barely anyone researches this event or even has an opinion about it.

How about Russia? At the symposium, organised by the Institute of Contemporary History on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the October Revolution on 26 October 2017 in Ljubljana, Alexander Semyonov, the director of the Centre for Historical Research at St. Petersburg School of Social Sciences and Humanities, commented mischievously: “Russian Government today is anti-revolutionary”. Sam Greene, the director of the Russia Institute at King’s College London, expressed a similar opinion: “The Russian government won’t mark the 100th anniversary,” he said. “They are trying to construct a narrative of uninterrupted power and stability. So something like 1917 is an uncomfortable fact that doesn’t fit in with that.”³¹ Another historian stated for the *Guardian*: “There’s no official line from the Kremlin – they can’t identify themselves with Lenin, because he was a revolutionary, and they can’t identify with Nicholas II because he was a weak leader.”³²

While Europe was capable of coming together in order to commemorate the anniversary of World War II and the beginning of World War I, the 1917 events remain “forgotten”. We can establish that the attitude towards the events that took place a century ago is certainly overshadowed by the current political developments, as it has, after all, always been – yet with one crucial difference: until the 1990s, the Revolution was everywhere seen as the beginning of something important (and great). This says a lot about the times we live in – as if the great opportunities, provided by the Revolution in the opinion of many of its observers, were finally exhausted in 1990.

28 “Gorbachev on History; Revolution’s Road From 1917 to Now: The Leader Takes Stock,” *The New York Times*, 3 November 1987.

29 In 1987, after Gorbachev’s speech, the Slovenian newspaper *Komunist* saw Perestrojka as the continuation of the October. – Sava Živanov, “Perestrojka kot nadaljevanje Oktobra,” *Komunist*, 6 November 1987, 18, 19.

30 “Undoing Lenin’s Legacy,” *Time*, 19 February 1990.

31 Angela Dewan and Darya Tarasova, “Russian Revolution: An awkward moment for Putin 100 years on,” *CNN*, 18 January 2018, <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/03/08/europe/russian-revolution-100-years-putin/index.html>.

32 Shaun Walker, “Tragedy or triumph? Russians agonise over how to mark 1917 revolutions,” *The Guardian*, 17 December 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/17/russia-1917-revolutions-legacy-lenin-putin>.

If we were not historians but futurologists instead, we could assume that the time will come when the fascination with the 1989, 1990 and 1991 events will eventually disappear as well. All we have to wait for is the next Year of the People. After all, at the beginning of the 1990s the bipolar global system crumbled, which was something that many people in the West disliked; it was the time when the Soviet empire disintegrated, which was something that many people in the East disliked; and it was also when the Yugoslav socialist experiment came to an end, which is something that many people disliked (and still do) in Slovenia.

On the other hand, in Russia as well as in many places in the Western hemisphere, historians are still interested in the October Revolution,³³ with the only distinction that the focus of interest has changed along with the spatial and temporal context.³⁴ Nowadays not many people pay attention to the *Ten Days That Shook the World* (as the American journalist John Reed entitled his outstanding report on these events),³⁵ as it is necessary to study the late Russian empire at least from the end of the 19th century and the revolutionary echo until the present moment in order to understand the process. Thus, modern historiography currently focuses on the role of Duma, the national circumstances in the late Russian empire, the questions of autonomy and federalism... The term “Revolution” is progressively disappearing from the interpretative repertoire, and the expression “imperial breakup” or “transformation” is asserting itself instead.³⁶ Similarly, German historiography is expanding the range of topics, approaches and the temporal frame of studying the Red October (Andreas Schulz focuses on this subject more closely in his contribution to this volume). German historiographers are establishing that the Revolution had long-term consequences on at least three levels – the political, demographic, and socio-economic. Due to the massive relocations of the population and numerous refugees, the population structure changed significantly. The Russian experience stimulated the improvement of the social legislation, while the German industrial Soviets, organised in the factories, have survived until this very day and still represent the institutional pillar of the German social market economy system (the so-called *Paritätische Mitbestimmung*).³⁷

33 The collection of literature about the Russian Revolutions, published in the recent years, is truly vast. Even Slovenian translations of a few works have been published, including the following prominent works: Orlando Figes, *Tragedija ljudstva. Ruska revolucija 1891–1924* (Ljubljana: Modrijan, 2013). Original: *A People's Tragedy. The Russian Revolution 1891–1924*. Alexander Rabinowitch, *Boljševiki prihajajo na oblast* (Ljubljana: Sophia, 2017). Original: *The Bolsheviks Come to Power. The Revolution of 1917 in Petrograd*.

34 In this regard see the booklet of abstracts, published during the international conference at the Institute of Contemporary History: *Misliti o revoluciji: 100 let pozneje / Thinking About the Revolution: 100 Years Later. Povzetki / Abstracts*, ed. Mojca Šorn (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2017).

35 John Reed, *Deset dni, ki so pretresli svet* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1951). Original: *Ten Days That Shook the World*.

36 Alexander M. Semyonov, “Revolucija ali razpad imperija? Leto 1917 kot primer preoblikovanja imperijev / Revolution or Imperial Breakup? 1917 as a Case of Imperial Transformations,” in: *Misliti o revoluciji: 100 let pozneje / Thinking About the Revolution: 100 Years Later. Povzetki / Abstracts*, ed. Mojca Šorn (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2017), 7–10.

37 Andreas Schulz, “Vplivi ruske revolucije na weimarsko Nemčijo / Impacts of the Russian Revolution on Weimar Germany,” in: *Misliti o revoluciji: 100 let pozneje / Thinking About the Revolution: 100 Years Later. Povzetki / Abstracts*, ed. Mojca Šorn (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2017), 11–16.

The German constitution, adopted after World War I (the Weimar Constitution), contained a whole section dedicated to the socio-economic issues which was a great novelty at the time. Under the influence of this section of the Weimar Constitution, a few years later (in 1921) the Yugoslav Constitutional Assembly also adopted such a constitution (the St. Vitus' Day Constitution), which regulated the workers' rights in a very similar (sometimes literally identical) manner.³⁸ The indirect influence of the Russian Revolution definitely reached far across space as well as time.

* * *

I prepared this discussion in the early autumn of 2017 in the context of the preparations for the conference Thinking about the Revolution: 100 Years After, organised by the Institute of Contemporary History. At that time it appeared that the anniversary of the Revolution would slip unnoticed by the Slovenian public and (partly) also historiography, but as it turned out, numerous Slovenian media and institutions nevertheless brought the anniversary of the Revolution to the public attention. Quite a few academic events took place – conferences of various scopes and levels (including the ones organised by the Institute of Contemporary History on 24 October in Ljubljana; by the University Library of Maribor and the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts on 7 November 2017 in Maribor; and by Alma Mater Europaea – Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis in cooperation with the Russian Centre for Science and Culture on 19 October 2017 in Ljubljana).

Furthermore, in the autumn of 2017 a few discussions (for example by the Study Centre for National Reconciliation on 6 November 2017) and various round tables (for example by the Slovenia-Russia Society and the Miran Jarc library in Novo mesto on 8 November 2017) were organised. A new translation of Lenin's work *The State and Revolution*³⁹ was published, the Institute of Contemporary History digitised John Reed's book *Ten Days That Shook the World*,⁴⁰ and the Slovenian Cinematheque prepared a special Soviet film retrospective, which opened with the projection of Sergei Eisenstein's 1925 film *Battleship Potemkin*. The printed and electronic media published several interviews, discussions,⁴¹ commentaries and presentations. *Mladina*,⁴² a leftist weekly magazine, dedicated a special issue to the anniversary; *Slovenski čas* (a Catholic magazine and supplement of the *Družina* weekly)⁴³ wrote about the anniversary in various articles; and topical issues of the *Borec* magazine for

38 Jure Gašparič, "Od Sv. Jakoba do Lenina. Ustavodajni proces v Kraljevini SHS in njegov evropski kontekst," in: *Nečakov zbornik* (Ljubljana: Filozofska fakulteta, 2018), 115–30.

39 Vladimir Iljič Lenin, *Država in revolucija in drugi spisi iz leta 1917* (Ljubljana: Studia Humanitatis, 2017).

40 John Reed, *Deset dni, ki so pretresli svet*, available at: *Zgodovina Slovenije – Sistory*, 22 January 2018, <http://www.sistory.si/11686/37829>.

41 E.g., "Oktobrska revolucija, najpomembnejši dogodek 20. stoletja," *Oddaja Intelekt*, 7 November 2017. Available at: RTV SLO, *Radio Prvi*, <http://4d.rtvlo.si/arhiv/intelekt/174500787>.

42 *Mladina*, Oktobrska revolucija 1917–2017 (Special Issue, November 2017).

43 *Slovenski čas (Priloga tednika Družina)* 90, October 2017.

history, anthropology and literature (Oktober 1917–2017)⁴⁴ as well as of the *Časopis za kritiko znanosti* journal (*Mislimo revolucije*) were published.⁴⁵

Perhaps we can thus establish that the Russian October is still capable of attracting people's attention. The number of events and celebrations was actually not negligible at all, especially considering the fact that some anniversaries were completely overlooked in 2017 – for example the 110th anniversary of the universal suffrage in Austria (1907) and the anniversary of the strike in one of the largest Slovenian companies in the socialist period, Litostroj (1987), which played a pivotal role in the contemporaneous democratisation processes and led to the creation of a political party – the Social Democratic Party of Slovenia.

However, if we compare the public events and publications dedicated to the Russian October with other historiographic subjects, we can confidently claim that the anniversary was not one of the central historical topics in 2017. More importance was given to the topics from the recent national history, especially the 100th anniversary of the May Declaration (the declaration of the Yugoslav parliamentary group in the Vienna parliament, which contained a demand to establish an independent state body under the rule of the Habsburg dynasty). At the celebration that followed the symposium, President of the Republic Borut Pahor gave a speech and Cardinal Franc Rode held a mass. Furthermore, a documentary film was made about the declaration and the president of the Yugoslav parliamentary group Anton Korošec.⁴⁶

Other more publicly renowned historical events also included the 100th anniversary of the death of one of the most prominent Slovenian politicians, thinkers and public workers Janez Evangelist Krek, who was also called “the red socialist in a black robe” due to his social programme and actions (the national television dedicated a lengthy and partly live-action documentary film to him)⁴⁷; and – traditionally – the topics of World War II, collaboration, and the Slovenian revolution, which never cease to fascinate the media. None of the Slovenian museums organised an exhibition dedicated to the anniversary of the Revolution.⁴⁸

Nevertheless it seems that the October Revolution no longer represents such a socially-momentous event as it used to. This fact is confirmed by the contributions of the aforementioned media – some of them merely summarised the events of that period, while others simply emphasised certain selected issues, for example the revolutionary violence. Only academic journals and events were – as expected – capable of offering a more comprehensive reflexion. With a tinge of cynicism we could perhaps conclude that the October Revolution has become a completely ordinary historical topic in Slovenia.

44 *Borec* LXIX, No. 739-741 (2017) (Oktober 1917–2017).

45 *Časopis za kritiko znanosti* 269 (2017) (*Mislimo revolucije*).

46 “Majniška deklaracija 1917,” *Sledi časa*, 18 June 2017, available at: RTV SLO, <http://4d.rtvsl.si/arhiv/sledi/174477695>.

47 “Revolucionar v talarju: Janez Evangelist Krek,” *RTV SLO*, 8 October 2017, <http://4d.rtvsl.si/arhiv/dokumentarni-filmi-in-oddaje-kulturno-umetniški-program/174495515>.

48 On the other hand, the German Historical Museum (Deutsches Historisches Museum) in Berlin prepared an extensive exhibition, also described by Andreas Schulz in his discussion, published in this volume.

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Jure Gašparič

SPREMINJAJOČ POGLED NA RUSKO REVOLUCIJO – SLOVENIJA V GLOBALNI PERSPEKTIVI

POVZETEK

Med letoma 1917 in 1924 so po skoraj vsej zemeljski obli izhajali podlistki in komentarji o svetovnem pomenu dogajanja v Rusiji. Množičnemu ocenjevanju so se pridružili tudi številni pisci s slovenskega ozemlja. Želji, podati svojo oceno, se niso mogli upreti v nobenem političnem taboru (ne liberalnem, ne katoliškem, ne marksističnem), pri nobeni politični skupini. Tedaj sploh ni šlo za komunizem, so pisali, marveč za veliko več, za prekranje (preoblikovanje) človeka. Revolucija je odprla neslutene možnosti. Na Slovenskem so nanjo sprva zrl v pričakovanju boljšega (četudi zavedajoč se nevarnosti), konec tridesetih let pa se je ocena zaostрила. Časniki so ugotavljali, da je komunizem »le utopija«, v slovenskem katoliškem političnem taboru so zapisali: »Rdeči paradiz na zemlji je v resnici ves rdeč – od prelite človeške krvi.«

Po drugi svetovni vojni se je ocenjevanje ruskega oktobra v Sloveniji in nasploh v Jugoslaviji precej spremenilo. Če je pred letom 1945 opazovalec lahko spremljal številne kritične, a tudi pozitivne ocene revolucije, prvih odtlej ni bilo več najti. V prvem obdobju po koncu vojne so prevladovale le panegirične hvalnice in nekritični hvalospevi. Po sporu z Informbirojem leta 1948 je nato razumljivo prišlo do delnega preobrata, ki pa v bistvu ni zadeval idejnih prvin ruskega Oktobra. Jugoslovanska državna in partijska ideologija se namreč oktobrski revoluciji nista odrekli. Ta je ostajala eden od fundamentov sistema.

Do večjih sprememb v odnosu do ruskega Oktobra tako na globalni kot na slovenski ravni je prišlo konec osemdesetih let, ko se je zamajala bipolarna ureditev sveta.

Njegova izzivalna moč je nato začela zginevati. Ruski oktober danes tako deluje »včerajšnje«, kot daven dogodek, čigar posledice so se že razblinile. Kakor da so se velike možnosti, ki jih je po mnenju številnih opazovalcev odprla revolucija, z letom 1990 dokončno izčrpale.