

WAS THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION A FAILURE? REFLECTIONS ON THE CENTENARY

Keynote for Santiago, October 2017

Introduction

For the British Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm the Russian Revolution was *the* event that shaped the twentieth century, and the dichotomy between capitalism and socialism its dominant paradigm. “The October revolution had far more profound and global repercussions than its ancestor [the French Revolution]. For, if the ideas of the French revolution have, as is now evident, outlasted Bolshevism, the practical consequences of 1917 were far greater and more lasting than those of 1789.... A mere thirty to forty years after Lenin’s arrival at the Finland Station in Petrograd, one third of humanity [from the Elbe to the Adriatic, China, Korea, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Cuba, and parts of Africa as well as the Soviet Union] itself found itself living under regimes directly derived from the [the Soviet one].”¹

Yet for Hobsbawm, writing in the mid 1990s, this was already a picture of the past. The “short twentieth century” had ended, and chaos and confusion lay ahead. In an ironic twist, it now appeared “that the most lasting results of the October revolution, whose object was the global overthrow of capitalism, was to save its antagonist” by providing it with “the incentive, fear, to reform itself after the Second World War.”²

In his 2000 biography of Lenin, Robert Service had already ventured the prediction that “perhaps in a few years hence [Lenin] will be seen to have thrust his country and, under Stalin’s leadership, a third of the world down a cul-de-sac.”³ In 1996, Orlando Figes entitled his popular and influential history of the revolution A People’s Tragedy.⁴ In a centenary volume focussing on the question of historical inevitability, Tony Brenton reiterated the “tragic” characterization,⁵ and turned the volume on the “cul de sac” image up a notch, suggesting that while the 1917 revolution might be seen as “profoundly important in the events it gave rise to,” it increasingly looked like “one of history’s great dead ends, like the Inca Empire.”⁶

What we have learnt from this revolution, Brenton concluded, is

what does not work. It is hard to see Marxism making any sort of comeback. As a theory of history the revolution tested it, and it failed. The dictatorship of the proletariat did not lead to the communist Utopia, but to more dictatorship. It also failed as a prescription for economic governance. No serious economist today is advocating total state ownership as the route to prosperity...not the least of the lessons of the Russian Revolution is that for most economic purposes the market works much better than the state. The rush away from socialism since 1991 has been Gadarene.

Even more historians more sympathetic to the revolution than Brenton were talking in terms of failure as the centenary approached. The British social historian S. A. Smith wrote in a 2015 symposium that “Historians today are more likely to see the revolution as the initiation of a cycle of violence that led inexorably to the horrors of Stalinism and Nazism rather than as a flawed attempt to create a better world. They are more likely to see the mass mobilization as motivated by irrationalism and aggression than by outrage at injustice or a yearning to be free. Such a view derives.. from the correct sense that the Russian Revolution was a failure and from a sense that 20th-century revolutions in general tended to produce regimes worse than the ones they overthrew.”⁷ To be sure, Smith was uneasy about this - “We see the violence and bloodshed easily enough, but it is harder for us to descry the idealism, hope, and self-sacrifice that were also the revolution’s key constituents...”⁸ and thought that in “in key respects, our ability to understand - certainly to empathize with - the aspirations of 1917” had been diminished.⁹ In the same symposium, the American social historian Don Raleigh, evidently trying to make a case a partly positive view of the Russian Revolution, could only suggest that “the ideals of failed revolutions, if we may call the Russian Revolution that, remain vital even today.”¹⁰

Nature of revolutionary success/failure

Before we embrace the idea of failure too wholeheartedly, however, it is necessary to pause to consider what exactly we mean by it.

Does failure mean non-achievement of revolutionary goals? If so – since all revolutions have a range of (often incompatible) goals, and consequently a range of outcomes – how do we judge exactly what the revolution’s “real” goals are? What percentage of non-achieved goals would equal failure? e.g. in concrete terms with regard to the Russian Revolution, would failure to reach the egalitarian goal trump success in implementing the industrialization one?

Or does failure mean a revolutionary outcome that, while it may or may not deliver on what the revolutionaries stated to be their goals, is morally unacceptable regardless? Here the obvious concrete example is large-scale repression (“terror”), acceptable to the Bolsheviks as a revolutionary method, though presumably not as a revolutionary outcome, but unacceptable in its Stalinist dimensions to almost all contemporary commentators.

It will already be obvious that any posing of the question of failure involves a huge amount of subjective judgement and is very often politically loaded. Disappointed early supporters of the revolution may call it a failure, implying that there could have been a success if things had not been mismanaged (e.g. Trotsky, Revolution Betrayed, contra Stalin). But that means something different from the similar claims of those who in principle disapprove of revolution (or this revolution), and are generally quick to point out “failure” as confirmation of their opinion, regardless of the fact that in their terms there could have been no revolutionary success.

This brings us to the question of what revolutionary success would look like. Would it mean a legacy of ideas that continue to be discussed down the centuries? (On that Hobsbawm gave preference to the French Revolution.) Is it a matter of the scope and significance of political/social/economic/cultural change effected, and if so, in what timespan? Is a revolution successful if it gives birth to a nation, like the American Revolution? In that case, was the Russian Revolution a success until 1991, at which point it became a failure?

Trotsky and others have written of “permanent revolution”, but this is an oxymoron. Revolution is by definition a transient state, although revolutionary must believe otherwise, at least for a while. Revolutions are “moments of madness,” in Aristide Zolberg’s phrase. Crane Brinton saw

revolution as a pathological state – a bout of illness which rises to a climax, at which point the patient either dies or recovers.¹¹ Unless the state is to collapse into anarchy, someone at some point has to restore order and, in effect, end the revolution. Or, to put it another way, if the revolutionaries succeed in establishing a new order, they must at some point stop being revolutionaries (interested primarily in upheaval and destruction) and become rulers (interested in making things work in order to realise revolutionary goals, in the sympathetic interpretation, or just in keeping power, in the critical one).

The problems of ending the revolution were first noted with regard to the French Revolution by the French/Polish historian Bronislaw Baczko.¹² There will never be agreement among revolutionaries about the moment when the necessary work of destruction has been accomplished and they can move on to the task of rebuilding according to their desired model. Hence the process of transition is always highly fraught. If we consider the Russian case, the “retreat” of the New Economic Policy at the beginning of the 1920s could be seen as an initial effort to end the revolution (depending how one interprets the justification Lenin offered) that failed because party activists, eager for more violent action against enemies, were not ready to end the revolution and/or because of the new “revolution from above” launched by Stalin at the end of the 1920s. A second and more successful effort, the émigré sociologist Timasheff suggested, was made in the mid 1930s with the new social and cultural policies that he labelled “the Great Retreat”.¹³

This brings us to the *historians*’ problem about ending the revolution. How simple it would be if revolution was like a university term, whose beginning and end are clearly established in the statutes. But unfortunately revolutions are not things-in-the-world but mental constructs: within some constraints, historians can define their beginnings and ends as they please, i.e. in the way that suits their (partly à priori) understanding of what a revolution is. So we have historians ending their studies of revolution at quite different times: with the October seizure of power, the Red victory in the Civil War, the death of Lenin, the end of NEP (perplexing as a climax, until you see that the point is to separate “the revolution” from “Stalinism”), and the conclusion of the First Five-Year Plan. In my Russian Revolution (1st edition, 1982), after some initial hesitation, I treated the Great Purges as the

last act of the revolution.¹⁴ But if I were to write the book again, I might take the Second World as the “end of the revolution”, for the simple reason that the country and the party went into the war with October as the foundational event and came out of it with a new foundational event, victory in the Great Patriotic War, and the revolution silently reassigned to history. Of course, all these judgements are subjective too, depending on what you think is the “right” story to tell. When the Soviet Union collapsed, a lot of people started to reconfigure the revolution as a 74-year-old nation-building experiment that ended (of course) in failure.¹⁵

Interpretations of the significance of Russian Revolution

Historiographically, success or failure has often been related to a particular (stated or implied) revolutionary goal deemed by particular writers to be the crucial one. These include international overthrow of capitalism and, domestically, freedom; equality; end of exploitation; proletarian rule (at least in the transitional period); and general improvement in the condition of the people. On all of these, the verdict is likely to be negative, though with various nuances depending on the timeline involved.

But there are other revolutionary goals on which the verdict is less clear. In Marxist terms, ***replacement of capitalism with socialism*** was what the proletarian revolution was meant to achieve, via the transitional process of proletarian (party) dictatorship. Stalin defined his rapid industrialization programme of the 1930s as “the building of socialism”. This involved a contraction of the understanding of “socialism” to a particular set of economic-institutional arrangements (nationalization of large industry, centrally planned economy etc) designed to further socialist-modernization goals (collectivization, industrialization, as well as popular education, literacy, public health etc, devised and implemented from above by the state. Success in these aims, quantitatively measured, was a basic Soviet claim that made sense to many, especially after the unexpected Soviet victory in the Second World War. For E.H.Carr, “the foundation of a planned economy” in the early 1930s was *the* revolutionary achievement.¹⁶ While this judgement was often disputed by

Sovietologists, Carr's sense of the importance of economic planning, and its possible status as a portent of the global future, was nevertheless shared by many economists in the 1930s and '40s.¹⁷

For non-Marxist, the Soviet/revolutionary goal of socialism was often treated as the functional equivalent of *modernization*. In the 1950s and '60s, while the totalitarian model of the Soviet political system held sway among Sovietologists, specialists on the Third World (and some sociologically-minded Sovietologists) were more likely to apply a modernization model, and their view of Soviet achievements was a lot more generous.¹⁸ Hobsbawm, writing in the mid 1990s, was not alone in concluding that, in the longer perspective, the main message and example of the Russian Revolution turned out not to be about effecting a transition from capitalism to socialism but rather about modernizing in the wake of liberation from colonial rule: "Soviet-based communism became primarily a programme for transforming backward countries into advanced ones."¹⁹

For quite a while, those who considered modernization the basic revolutionary goal were inclined to judge it a success. But then came the "information revolution," widely discussed by the 1970s, in which the Soviets missed the boat, and bureaucratic state socialism was judged to lack the innovation technological potential of capitalism. The smokestack industry that had been the triumphant symbol of Soviet achievement came to look quite different – more like environmental blight than economic progress. This brought another twist to the "success or failure" argument. Was it still success if the (more or less reached) industrialization goal now looked not modern in a contemporary sense, but yesterday's notion of modernity?

After the fall: the revolution revalued post-1991

Nothing fails like failure, and it's clear that in international scholarly and popular assessment the revolution suffered a major loss of status with the collapse of the regime it had given birth to. This may not be entirely logical, since nation-building was not, strictly speaking, a revolutionary goal. The Bolsheviks were, after all, internationalists; and Stalin's socialism-in-one-country formulation was in effect a rationalization of the unfortunate fact that everywhere but the former Russian empire, revolution had failed. Nevertheless, while it may not have been a goal, it became nevertheless an

achievement much touted by Stalin and his successors - and felt as such by much of the population, particularly after the winning of the Second world War.

As has been widely remarked, Putin's regime holds Stalin in high regards as a nation-builder on the Peter the Great model. Apart from that, which is clearly in Putin's eyes Stalin's outstanding achievement and the thing that makes Putin want to be part of the same tradition, there are other things that Putin says he valued in the Soviet system: planned economy, public health and education, industrialization of '30s making possible war victory,²⁰ He does not mention public order and discipline, but almost certainly values that too. Yet the relationship of Putin's regime to the Soviet one is profoundly ambiguous – not one of clear succession, but not one of outright repudiation either.

Lenin and the revolution have much less appeal to Putin than Stalin. Putin's grandfather may have worked as Lenin's cook, but the grandson has always seemed to prefer Stalin the nation-builder to Lenin the revolutionary. He has expressed uneasiness about repressions of the Lenin period, particularly the execution of the whole royal family and entourage, and the terror against the clergy, which he notes Lenin personally endorsed. He dislikes the divisive, sectarian aspect of revolutions. And he particularly holds against Lenin his insistence (in an early 1920s argument with Stalin) on the federal nature of the USSR, giving republics the possibility of secession – the equivalent to laying a "time bomb" under Russia that went off in 1991.²¹

Putin's Minister of Culture, Vladimir Medinsky likes revolution still less. Revolutions, in Medinsky's opinion, are always bad and bloody, making things worse not better, leading to injustice and 'moral degradation', destroying society's 'best people' and giving opportunities to its worst.²² True, there were idealists (as well as "war criminals") among both Red and White protagonists in the Revolution and Civil War, but the Russian Revolution should be seen as a "tragedy", albeit with "heroic elements." "The worst thing that could happen to Russia with the 2017 celebrations would be a revival of old sectarian passions... *Raskol*, the acrimonious splitting of society, must be avoided at all costs.²³ Putin made a similar point at the end of 2016;²⁴ and the monument to reconciliation

favoured by Medinsky, to be erected in Kerch in the Crimea supposedly in time for November 2017, may or may not have proceeded on schedule – publicity has been minimal, and the web contains no report on progress later than May of this year.²⁵

Putin's preference, already stated in 2015, was that responses to the centenary take the form of "deep, objective *professional*" (my emphasis) evaluation by historians.²⁶ This implied a disinclination to organize celebrations involving broader publics. This same point was made in March 2016 by foreign minister Lavrov, but his call for a "balanced and objective assessment" of the Russian Revolution suggested that his personal evaluation was more positive than Medinsky's, and perhaps than Putin's too: he deplored, in anticipation, the desire of Western commentators "to use this date [the centenary] to mount even more information attacks on Russia, and to portray the 1917 Revolution as a barbaric coup that dragged down all of European history."²⁷

The Russian demographer Anatoly Vishnevsky, interviewed in Novaia gazeta on 26 May 2015, described the current state of planning for the upcoming centenary as "completely incompatible with the scale and the nature of the event" (*совершенно не сомасштабно событию и не созвучно ему*), noting indignantly that "You can't mark the centenary of the revolution by pretending it didn't happen." But it turns out that you can.²⁸ Despite a very belated and bland official order from Putin on 19 December 2016 on the formation of an Organizing Committee for centenary celebrations,²⁹ his government then decided not to have public celebrations or issue any kind of official position paper on the revolution – but this even this decision was not made public in a Russian context, but rather conveyed to the New York Times by a Putin spokesman in March 2017.³⁰

That decision did not exclude an international conference on the Revolution, held in Moscow, last month, focussing on the "global impact" of the revolution rather than its significance in Russian history, and with a program outline so lacking in (Russian) political spin that it would not have been out of place in a grant application to an American foundation.³¹ Nor did it exclude the organization of local exhibitions and discussions of the centenary in libraries and cultural centres around the country, where, to judge by those listed on the web, a variety of assessments and

opinions are on display. But the Russian government as such has indeed been “sitting out” the centenary – a position that could either be hailed as an improvement on Russia’s past practices of dictating historical interpretations or deplored as an attempt to bury the memory of a traumatic event.

There are, in fact, no official celebrations of the centenary of the Russian Revolution announced in any of the former Soviet republics except Belarus, Kyrgyzstan and the would-be independent region of Transdnistria (a generally unrecognized split-off from Moldova, between Ukraine and Romania). In Ukraine, Poroshenko had earlier promised a counter-celebration of *Ukrainian* Revolution (1917-21), but that seems to have been taken off the table, perhaps because of the failure of Russia’s failure to provide a celebration to counter.

In Russia, the celebration of Revolution Day on 7th of November was abolished in 2005, being replaced by a Day of National Unity on November 4th (a revival of a minor Imperial holiday celebrating end of Time of Troubles with 1612 expulsion of Polish occupiers from Moscow). November 4th falls this year on a Saturday, with the actual holiday on Monday the 6th, which perhaps introduces an involuntary note of ambiguity about what is being celebrated. The Communist Party of the Russian Federation – now, of course, no longer the ruling party but relatively insignificant minority party - promises “festive rallies” in major cities, complete with Pokemon-type game called “Catch a counter-revolutionary” for young enthusiasts.

Conclusion

Should we be celebrating? Commentators from the Left say yes, but in a remarkably qualified way.

Tariq Ali,³² China Miéville,³³ Tamas Krausz³⁴ and Slavoj Žižek³⁵ all suggest that what needs to be celebrated/remembered about the Russian Revolution is that it demonstrated that things can be changed as a result of human will to change. Ali and Miéville have perhaps the most optimistic

(though still very low-key) conclusions about the actual achievements of the Revolution. . . “The world’s first socialist revolution deserves celebration,” he writes, because “things changed once, and they might to do so again”³⁶ (how’s that for a really minimal claim?). “Liberty’s dim light” shone briefly, even if “what might have been a sunrise [turned out to be] a sunset.”³⁷ But it could have been otherwise with the Russian Revolution, and “if its sentences are still unfinished, it is up to us to finish them.”³⁸

Ali’s book ends with a Lenin text from 1922, “On climbing a high mountain,” reflecting on the necessity of temporary retreat (as in NEP) which, however, does not mean abandonment of the ultimate revolutionary aim; he thinks that “had Lenin lived another five years, the country and the party would have moved forward differently. The New Economic Policy would have been dismantled with greater care, and the brutal leap to industrialisation might not have transpired. Nor would Lenin have killed off the bulk of Old Bolsheviks on the Central Committee and the country as a whole.” However, he leaves in a caveat about the unknowability of how much of Lenin’s goals would have been achieved had he lived. For Ali, celebrating the revolution is, in any case, a necessary “act of resistance given how hostile the current ideological climate is to anything associated with “the social and liberation struggles of the last century” makes recovering Lenin’s “an act of resistance”.³⁹

At the end of his sober and scholarly critical study of Lenin, Krausz argues that Lenin has not become irrelevant as long as socialism matters; and socialism is still the only alternative to capitalism. His book ends with a quotation from Žižek’s 2007 dictum that “to repeat Lenin does not mean that we must repeat what he achieved, but rather what he was not able to achieve.”

Žižek, unusually for a commentator from the Left, acknowledges essential continuity between Lenin and Stalin, writing that the tragedy of the Old Bolsheviks who perished in Stalinist purges was “that they were not able to perceive in the Stalinist terror the ultimate offspring of their own acts.” While the possibility exists that things might have gone somewhat better had Lenin survived in good health another ten years, Žižek suggests that the likely outcome was “nothing essentially different: the same Stalinism, just without its worst excesses” .⁴⁰ “Let’s face it,” Žižek

writes: “today, Lenin and his legacy are perceived as hopelessly dated, belonging to a defunct ‘paradigm’ Not only was Lenin understandably blind to many of the problems that are now central to contemporary life (ecology, struggles for emancipated sexuality, etc.), his brutal political practice is totally out of sync with current democratic sensitivities his vision of the new society as a centralized industrial system run by the state is simply irrelevant.”⁴¹ We have to “accept that ‘Lenin is dead’, that his particular solution failed, even failed monstrously.”⁴² Still, for Žižek, ever the contrarian and provocateur, that doesn’t mean abandoning Lenin. Lenin is at his “Beckettian best,” he writes approvingly, as he teaches us the lesson “Fail again. Fail better.”⁴³ Who but Žižek would offer us, approvingly, a Lenin “at his Beckettian best” whose true lesson (like Samuel Beckett’s in Worstward Ho) is how to “Fail again. Fail better”? (Žižek, xxviii)

From Žižek’s philosophical standpoint, it is not clear that “success” is a real possibility, for revolutions or any other human endeavour. This seems reasonable, especially as applied to revolutions. The concept of success, like the concept of the modern, is time-bounded: what was once modern (successful) is after a while no longer so. The finite nature of revolutions, and the inevitability that at a certain point (which may be regarded as success or failure) they yield to (or produce) something that is not revolutionary, only compounds the problem. In this sense, there is a simple answer to the original question “Was the Russian Revolution a failure?”: yes, of course it was, no other outcome was possible. But if we focus on outcomes, as this paper has tried to suggest, the range of possible answers is wider.

To be sure, any judgement in terms of outcomes will necessarily have a subjective component, as well as being influenced by the contemporary context in which the judgement is made. It would be naïve to think that we are now (or ever will be) in a position to make a permanently-valid evaluation of the Russian Revolution. All we can be sure of is that when the bicentenary comes around, the Russian Revolution will look different to our great grandchildren than it does to us. And my guess (though who knows) is that in 2117 the Russian Revolution – like the French, two hundred years after - will still seem worth thinking about.

-
- ¹ Eric Hobsbawm, The Age of Extremes. A History of the World, 1914-1991 (New York: Pantheon, 1994), 55.
- ² Hobsbawm, Age of Extremes, 7-8.
- ³ Robert Service, Lenin. A Biography (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 494.
- ⁴ Orlando Figes, A People's Tragedy. The Russian Revolution, 1891-1924 (London: Pimlico, 1996)
- ⁵ Tony Brenton ed. Historically Inevitable? Turning Points of the Russian Revolution (London: Profile Books, 2016), p. 1
- ⁶ Brenton, 299.
- ⁷ S.A.Smith, "The Historiography of the Russian Revolution 100 Years On," Kritika 16:4 (2015), 748.
- ⁸ Smith, "Historiography," 740.
- ⁹ Smith, "Historiography," 733.
- ¹⁰ Donald J. Raleigh, "The Russian Revolution After All These 100 Years," Kritika 16:4 (2015), 797.
- ¹¹ See Crane Brinton, Anatomy of Revolutions (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1938); Aristide Zolberg, "Moments of Madness," Politics and Society 2:2 (1972), pp. 183-20.
- ¹² Bronislaw Baczko, Comment sortir de la terreur (Paris: Gallimard, 1989); and Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Ending the Russian Revolution: Reflections on Soviet History and its Interpreters," 2008 Kedourie Lecture, Proceedings of the British Academy, vol. 162 (2009).
- ¹³ N.S. Timasheff, The Great Retreat. The Growth and Decline of Communism in Russia (New York, 1946).
- ¹⁴ Sheila Fitzpatrick, The Russian Revolution (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1st edition, 1982); 4th edition forthcoming July 2017.
- ¹⁵ e.g. Martin Malia, The Soviet Tragedy. A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917-1991 (1994).
- ¹⁶ This is implied by the title and content of the culminating volumes of his multi-volume history of Soviet Russia, Foundations of a Planned Economy (vol. 1, with Robert W. Davies DATE; vol 2, 1969).
- ¹⁷ David Engerman, Modernization from the Other Shore: American Intellectuals and the Romance of Russian Development (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003).
- ¹⁸ See David Engerman, Know Your Enemy. The Rise and Fall of America's Soviet Experts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
- ¹⁹ Hobsbawm, Age of Extremes, 376.
- ²⁰ Responses to question at meeting in Stavropol, 25 January 2016: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/51206>, accessed 28 April 2017.
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² Vladimir Medinsky, "Revoliutsiia. Mify i real'nost'." n.d. <http://patriotplatform.ru/news/4058.html>, accessed 7 Jan 2017.
- ²³ Speech at roundtable in May 2015 on '100 Years of the Great Russian Revolution': <http://edinstvoistorii.odnako.org>, accessed 26 Oct 2016.
- ²⁴ Quoted from a message from Putin to the Federal meeting (*Federal'noe sobranie*, 1 December 2016, not otherwise identified: <http://akostyuhin.livejournal.com/286561.html>, accessed 7 January 2017).
- ²⁵ 'Pamiatnik Primireniia ustanoviat v Kerchi vozle mosta v Krym,' 25 January 2017: <http://moicrimea.ru/pamiatnik-primireniia-ystanoviat-v-kerchi-vozle-mosta-v-krym.html>, accessed 19 April 2017. For earlier information on the plan, see the 2015 announcement of the competition (www.nakanune.ru/news/2015/11/30/22421796, accessed 12 January 2017) and a follow-up call for submissions in October 2016 (<http://rvio.histrf.ru/activities/projects/item-2917>, accessed 11 January 2017).
- ²⁶ Press release, RIA Novosti, 5 November 2014: <https://ria.ru/politics/20141105/1031839813.html>, accessed 26 October 2016.
- ²⁷ Quoted from an article by Lavrov in the Moscow-based Russia in Global Affairs, March 2016, quoted in Tony Kevin, Return to Moscow (Crawley: UWA Publishing, 2017), 251.
- ²⁸ Press release, RIA Novosti, 5 November 2014: <https://ria.ru/politics/20141105/1031839813.html>, accessed 26 October 2016.
- ²⁹ <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/001201612200017?index=1&rangeSize=1>, accessed 7 January 2017.
- ³⁰ Neil MacFarquhar, 'Revolution? What Revolution?' Russia Asks 100 Later,' *The New York Times*, 10 March 2017.

³¹ Emails to author from National Committee, 31 January (invitation) and 28 March 2017 (preliminary program). Among the five panels listed were ‘Revolution and violence’ (a very Western formulation) and ‘The collapse of empires’.

³² Tariq Ali, The Dilemmas of Lenin. Terrorism, War, Empire, Love, Revolution (London and New York: Verso, 2017).

³³ China Miéville, October. The Story of the Russian Revolution (London: Verso, 2017).

³⁴ Tamás Krausz, Reconstructing Lenin: an Intellectual Biography (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2015).

³⁵ Slavoj Žižek, Lenin 2017. Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through (London and New York: Verso, 2017); also idem., ed. with Sebastian Budgen and Stathis Kouvelakis, Lenin Reloaded (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007).

³⁶ Miéville, October, 317.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 315.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁹ Ali, Dilemmas, 1.

⁴⁰ Žižek, Lenin 2017, xlvii.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, xiv.

⁴² *Ibid.*, xv.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, xxviii. The reference is to Samuel Beckett’s Worstward Ho (1983).