

From the Editors

## Violence, "Political" Violence, and Terror in Russian History

Most scholars reading these pages in the peaceful quiet of a library or a comfortable chair at home probably would agree, if asked, that violence is not an admirable historical phenomenon. On reflection they would soon recognize, however, that an instinctive abhorrence of violence hardly rises to the level of a universal truth: a few years ago, for example, Soviet historians certainly operated within a framework that endorsed revolutionary violence, and all but the most committed pacifists would maintain that violence is sometimes necessary. Yet that instinctive abhorrence, related to a historical link between the absence of violence and standards of "civilization," is certainly one reason why political violence has become such a favored topic of study in recent years. Studying violence has become a way to focus attention, often in new ways, on the causes and mechanisms of some of the most controversial episodes in the modern period, such as genocide, population transfers, revolutionary and state terror, pogroms, ethnic cleansing, and communist purges.

One thrust behind the contemporary interest in political violence is the implicit question, who is to blame? How could this have occurred, especially in the 20th century? Or, put another way, what makes bad regimes so bad? That this new historiographical lens should quickly be applied to Russia, and especially the Soviet Union, should hardly be surprising in this light. Yet a focus on violence can, by the same token, reflect a new interest in the costs of historical phenomena traditionally considered justifiable. Thus, the nature and purposes of political violence came to occupy center stage in that generator of historiographical as well as historical modernity, the French Revolution. Here again we can observe a live link to our own field, for the discussion of "modern" political violence growing out of the French Revolution has traced this thread from 1793-94 down to Russia's Revolution of 1917.

If we were to follow this implicit logic, which is embedded in much current interest in political violence, this special issue of *Kritika* might have sponsored new research on the Red Terror in 1918, the camp system, the Great Purges, and all the extraordinary horrors of Soviet state violence. Even a cursory glance at the Table of Contents will reveal that this is not the focus of the present volume. This is hardly to imply that all research in those areas fits into a single agenda -- nothing could be farther from the truth -- or that the nature of violence in the Soviet period should not be the object of a greatly expanded research effort and historical reflection. Violence under Soviet communism -- its motivations, regularities, varieties, scope, and unintended consequences -- is surely one of the key issues for the entire Russian field as well as for modern European history. Our point, rather, is that the interest in political violence should be spurred by other logics that can take us down historical byways that are equally important if perhaps less obvious. In the long run, broadening the study of violence should inform and refine conclusions in the already large-scale scholarship on Soviet-era atrocities.

The implicit comparative application need not focus only on illiberal regimes. Violence is intrinsic to any political order: a state is that entity, after all, that claims the monopoly on official force both within its borders (law enforcement) and outside them (war). A study of violence should allow for comparison of the practices of widely different organized groups subscribing to

a range of belief systems -- including, for example, liberalism and nationalism as well as fascism and communism, religious as well as political ideas. At least one article in the present volume addresses the link between violence in Western colonial settings and its application "at home" in Europe and Russia during and after World War I. Moreover, we need not focus only on state violence, but also on violence by a wide range of historical actors. This can provide a way of juxtaposing pre-modern or early modern violence to modern incarnations. To pursue such goals, we must not focus only on the most cataclysmic episodes, but on violence in its many historical forms.

While these are some of the motivations behind the mix of articles in the present issue, we cannot pretend that its chronological focus fully reflected our original intent. These papers were first presented at the Maryland Workshop on New Approaches to Russian and Soviet History in May 2002, held at the University of Maryland at College Park. When organizing that gathering, we hoped to avoid telescoping all discussion of violence and terror into the Soviet period, but also to avoid falling into the other extreme -- the belief that violence is a timeless and defining feature of Russian history. We hoped that the papers would permit the participants to trace the ebb and flow of violence over the *longue durée*, while attending to its mechanisms (and even the factors mitigating its use) in specific cases. Curiously, there were no papers devoted to the period of Peter the Great or even to the 19th century, an absence that we regret. For a variety of reasons, most papers on the Soviet period in the original conference did not enter our special issue. While the gaps in coverage suggest a possible focus for future publications, including in this journal, we see no need to fetishize chronological comprehensiveness in light of the unusual interest of the present set of articles. What we present is a rare cluster of coverage in the late Muscovite and early imperial periods, and another in the late imperial and revolutionary epoch.

If we thus have the opportunity to apply the recent interest in violence to contexts less frequently in the spotlight than Soviet-era events, what does our focus suggest about definitions of violence? This, not surprisingly, was one of the key topics of discussion at the May 2002 workshop. The articles that resulted provide a variety of understandings for "violence." Some focus on "terror" as a form of instrumental violence, either in its embryonic form in the early modern period or in its modern, post-1793 definition. Other papers treat forms of violence that bore the sanction of authority (the church or sovereign in the early modern period, the state in the modern period). That is, they are dealing with legitimate force, either in a domestic context or in the form of war.

While the study of violence has become quite popular, at times there is a terminological vagueness in defining the object of study. Hannah Arendt devoted much attention to questions of force and violence; her work is valuable and distinctive for her scrupulous attention to defining her categories of analysis. Arendt insists that "power and violence are not the same." Power is the ability to act in concert -- it is never the property of one individual. It relies on an implicit sense of legitimacy. Force, on the other hand, is the "energy" released by physical or social movements. It may or may not be underpinned by authority, "the unquestioning recognition by those who are asked to obey" -- neither coercion or persuasion are required. Violence is different from power and force. "No government exclusively based on the means of violence has ever existed.... Power is indeed the essence of all governments, but violence is not. Violence is by nature instrumental; like all means, it always stands in need of guidance and justification through

the ends it pursues.<sup>[1]</sup> "One of the most obvious distinctions between power and violence," she asserts, "is that power always stands in need of numbers, whereas violence up to a point can manage without them because it relies on implements."<sup>[2]</sup> According to this definition, all political systems are established by violence; it is intrinsic to moments of revolution and foundation. Having established itself, a new political order then moves to a form of legitimized force.<sup>[3]</sup> Arendt's arguments reflect her understanding of the horrific violence of 1914-53; the same traumatic experiences prompted Max Weber in 1918 to respond to Trotskii's dictum that "every state is founded on force" by defining the state as "a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory."<sup>[4]</sup> .

Terror, discussed by several papers in our issue, is something else again. Having destroyed all other power, violence "does not abdicate but, on the contrary, remains in full control."<sup>[5]</sup> Terror, then, is the extension of violence by a regime beyond the point at which it has seized power. Rather than relying solely on legitimized force and authority, a regime employing terror continues to employ violence, but this time instrumentally, and with the tools of state. It is the nature of Terror that distinguishes it. As has often been noted, the victims of the Jacobin Terror were dwarfed numerically by the slaughter of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars: according to William Doyle, around 30,000 people died during the year-long Terror in France, but "the same number died in a matter of weeks in the [rebellion in] Ireland in 1798, in a country with only one-sixth of France's population," and France alone lost around 1.4 million soldiers between 1792 and 1815.<sup>[6]</sup> Contemporaries and their descendants fixated on the Terror not because of its body count, but because of the new, self-consciously political goals to which violence had been turned.

Not coincidentally, many papers in our issue concern precisely moments of revolution and upheaval, esp. the Time of Troubles and the revolutionary crisis of 1905-1921.<sup>[7]</sup> Most histories of modern "Terror" point to the crucial role the Russian revolutionary movement (especially the "People's Will") played in its elaboration and even valorization. What was especially notable in Russia was educated society's sympathy for terrorists.<sup>[8]</sup> We can only trace the history of terrorism (non-state violence employed to overthrow an existing order) and its relationship to revolutionary violence and state-sanctioned terror when, as in this issue, we study the conjuncture when they overlapped -- the late imperial and revolutionary periods.

A number of questions flow from an examination that includes violence in the Russian Revolution and in a range of earlier contexts, including the Time of Troubles. Was pre-revolutionary Russia unusually violent? Nearly all the papers can be read as denying that there is something congenitally "violent" about Russia, yet violence certainly appears as a prominent aspect of Russian history. To what extent is this specifically attributable to the "weak" aspects of the tsarist state, so heavy at the top but undergoverned at the bottom? This is the question raised by Laura Engelstein's interesting commentary. How much was due to the nature of Russian society? A point of much discussion at the workshop was the degree to which violent societies produce political violence, and how much violent regimes, by destabilizing social relations, create violent societies. Furthermore, does a violent rhetoric breed violent practices, or does the experience of violence give rise to a violent discourse? The intriguing example of the

Spiridonova myth prompts us to probe cultural dimensions to the history of violence, in this case the relationship among public legend, ethical norms, and justifications of revolutionary acts.

If we define "violence" by its instrumental character, how it is justified and guided is crucial to its character. This broadens the question beyond rhetoric and prompts us to probe the complex links between ideas and practices. The wide range of actors represented here -- opposing factions in civil wars, church hierarchs, patriotic urban mobs, political parties, and revolutionary terrorists underground and in power, among others -- are especially useful for comparative purposes in pursuing these kinds of questions. The one paper squarely in the early Soviet period was included because its unusual approach gives it exceptional methodological value: it discusses violence against the self, or suicide, in the context of ideological understandings of it. This suggests that ideas are crucial not only in motivating and directing violence, but in post hoc attempts to understand its meaning.

The role of ideology -- itself a concept invented in its modern sense in the French Revolution -- raises another difficult question implicit in the present collection. Can we discuss violence in the early modern period in the same way as in the modern one? In other words, how "political" is premodern violence? We are fortunate to have a set of papers on the 17th and 18th centuries; this has the advantage of drawing attention not only to violence by pre-Soviet Russia's state and society, but also to the role of religion and the Orthodox Church.

What, in the end, puts the "political" into political violence? If the guiding justification is so crucial and the state is so central to modern forms of violence, can one discuss violence by churchmen or particular commanders, who may be powerful but represent no "state," as "political"? If the state is crucial, when should we date its emergence? Those wielding violence in the modern period (i.e., since the French Revolution) employ it self-consciously toward political ends. Is this different from violence that pursues religious ends, or essentially "political" ends that are nonetheless legitimated in religious terms? On this point we have come to no agreement. We leave it to our readers to decide.

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We have some sad news and good news to share with our readers. Marshall Poe, who is pursuing a career in publishing outside academia, has stepped down as editor of *Kritika*. While this is not the place for a full-fledged tribute to Marshall's contributions as a Muscovite historian, we would like to acknowledge his crucial role in the founding of this journal. During his time at Harvard in the 1990s, Marshall thought often about the legacy of the old *Kritika*, which was published there from 1964-84. In 1998 and 1999 Marshall played an integral part in the organizational and intellectual work that lay behind the advent of the new series in January 2000. We recall in particular one lamb dinner at which the first concrete plans were laid for founding the journal you have in front of you. We will always remember how Marshall, as he consumed his favorite food, expounded with equal relish about the promise of the future, despite a degree of skepticism voiced around the table. His enormous appetite for debate, his broad scholarly vision, and his inexhaustible energy made their imprint on the form and content of this journal as it got off the ground during its first three volumes. Although his new work no longer permits day-to-day involvement in our affairs, he remains with us both in spirit and as a very dear friend and

colleague. Starting with this issue he appears on the masthead as "co-founder and editor emeritus."

It is with a combined sense of delight and anticipation that we announce that Alexander Martin will be joining us as Editor.

We are also very pleased to announce several other editorial appointments. We welcome Carolyn Pouncy as Managing Editor; Carolyn brings unique experience in academic publishing as well as expertise in Muscovite history to her new position.

We are also proud to announce the appointment of Janet Hartley of the London School of Economics as an Associate Editor. She adds great strength to our coverage of the 18th century and the prereform period in imperial Russian history.

Finally, in order to recognize their real function and contributions, the titles of Theodore Weeks, Jochen Hellbeck, and Nikolaos Chrissidis have been changed from Book Review Editor to Associate Editor..

#### Footnotes

[1] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harvest Book, 1970), 40, 43-55, quotes at 40-41, 43-44, 50-51. For Arendt's views on violence within the overall context of her thought, see Dana Villa, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000)..

[2] Arendt, *On Violence*, 41-42.

[3] See also Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Viking Press, 1963), 10, 13-14, 28.

[4] Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation" (1918), in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans., ed., and with an introduction by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 78. Trotskii made the comment at the Brest-Litovsk negotiations.

[5] Arendt, *On Violence*, 55.

[6] William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 258, 409.

[7] Arendt also has suggestive remarks on this question: *On Revolution*, esp. 28, 95-96.

[8] For an excellent overview, see Oleg Vital'evich Budnitskii, *Terrorizm v rossiiskom osvoboditel'nom dvizhenii: Ideologiia, etika, psikhologii (vtoraia polovina XIX-nachalo XX v.)* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2000).