When Bolsheviks, including Trotsky, first began to address the issue of bureaucracy soon after the October Revolution of 1917, they derived their understanding of that problem from various sources. One of these was popular usage of the word *bureaucracy* in both Russia and Western Europe. As commonly used in the early twentieth century, the primary understanding of the term remained close to its original meanings: the rule of officials, or a body of officials who ruled. Secondary definitions and connotations included an excessive degree of formalism and paperwork, as well as the apathy, ignorance, and inefficiency of state officials. An additional influence for the Bolsheviks was the traditional Marxist analysis of bureaucracy. Consistent with the primary popular meaning, Marx and Engels perceived bureaucracy as related to the problem of political alienation. That is, they identified bureaucracy with the independence of the state apparatus from the control of society as a whole, and with the domination of that apparatus over society. Furthermore, they believed that, in normal periods, this alienation was directly related to control of the state by an exploitative class. Finally, they predicted that the problem of bureaucracy would be greatly reduced by the coming socialist revolution, and that eventually it would wither away altogether. In the years and months preceding the Bolshevik Revolution both Trotsky and Lenin reaffirmed this traditional Marxist analysis.

### 1.1 Evolving Meanings of Bureaucracy

Scholars have identified a variety of meanings of the term *bureaucracy* in current Western usage. Martin Albrow has counted seven, and Fred Riggs has identified eleven contemporary uses of the word.\(^1\) Although it had not yet acquired quite as many meanings in either Western European or Russian discourse at the time of the Bolshevik Revolution, bureaucracy already had accumulated a wide range of denotations and connotations. Still, the most common popular understanding of that word remained close to its original meaning.

By most accounts the term *bureaucratie*, or bureaucracy, was first coined in 1745 by the French Physiocrat Jacques Claude Marie Vincent de Gournay, who

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was also responsible for inventing the expression *laissez faire*. Gournay created it by combining the French *bureau*, which referred to a writing desk but also to an office where officials worked, with the Greek word *kratein*, meaning ‘to rule’. His intent was to identify a form of rule comparable to systems such as democracy and aristocracy. From the beginning the word was used as a pejorative to indicate the excessive power of state officials, while also suggesting their tendency to meddle in areas beyond their proper concern. Gournay’s friend the Baron de Grimm observed in a letter to Diderot in 1764:

> We [in France] are obsessed by the idea of regulation, and our Masters of Requests refuse to understand that there is an infinity of things in a great state with which a government should not concern itself. The late M. de Gournay…sometimes used to say: ‘We have an illness in France which bids fair to play havoc with us; this illness is called bureaumania’. Sometimes he used to invent a third or fourth or fifth form of government under the heading of bureaucracy.

Along the same lines, the following year Grimm remarked, ‘The real spirit of the laws of France is that bureaucracy of which the late M. de Gournay…used to complain so greatly; here the offices, clerks, secretaries, inspectors, and *intendants* are not appointed to benefit the public interest, indeed the public interest appears to have been established so that offices might exist’. The term *bureaucratie* soon began to appear in French literary and popular discourse. In 1789 the dramatist and writer Louis Sébastien Mercier explained in his *Le Tableau de Paris* that bureaucracy was a ‘word recently coined to indicate, in a clear and concise manner, the overgrown power possessed by simple clerks who, in the various offices of the administration, make up and push forward all sorts of projects, which they find most often in dusty drawers in the offices, and which they favor for reasons of their own, good and bad’. More neutrally, the 1798 supplement to the dictionary of the French Academy defined bureaucracy simply as ‘Power, influence of the heads and staff of governmental bureaux’.

In the following years, the word with its original meaning began to find its way into other Western European languages. One of the earliest German uses of the term was the observation by Kant’s colleague Christian Klaus in 1799

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3 Quoted in Albrow 1970, p. 16. See also Krygier 1979b, p. 22.
4 Quoted in Albrow 1970, p. 16. See also Krygier 1979b, p. 22.
5 Mercier 1999, p. 172. See also Krygier 1979b, p. 22.
6 Quoted in Albrow 1970, p. 17.