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**MUSCOVY REDUX: MORE PARALLELS AND CONTINUITIES?**

The current Russian nationality crisis in the USSR might be considered certainly with some interest and perhaps even with some profit from the perspective of the crisis that led to wholesale Westernization in seventeenth-century Muscovy.

This essay has been gestating for some time, but was formally provoked by a presentation by Boris Golubitskii, the director of the theatre in Orël, at Roosevelt University on September 25, 1990. What interested me particularly were his remarks that he had considered for several years that the standard repertoire of the Soviet theater was bankrupt and thus had recently been presenting only the classic Russian plays by Pushkin, Turgenev, Ostrovskii, Chekhov, and the like. The classics he presented spoke much better to Russia's (sic—not the USSR's) current problems than did anything of the Soviet heritage. Now, however, he has decided that he will shift to a repertoire of nothing but American plays. He and some of his troupe were in Chicago to learn how this might be done.

Many parallels between seventeenth-century Muscovy and the USSR for the past two decades are striking. The service state created by what I have termed "the first service class revolution" in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries degenerated in the seventeenth century. Similarly, the service state created by "the third service class revolution" directed by Stalin has been unraveling ever more rapidly since the era of N. S. Khrushchev. The middle service class cavalrymen became technologically obsolescent in the mid-seventeenth century and often refused to serve in the army while still exploiting the enserfed peasants. In the USSR, the nomenklatura and other members of the elite (the "new class") have allowed the country to fall to recognizably third-world status while still keeping their extravagant privileges and perquisites.

In the seventeenth century the events and phenomena most crucial for precipitating the crisis were the Time of Troubles (1598-1618), other subsequent rural and urban civil disorders, Muscovy's defeat in the Smolensk War (1632-34), the legal stratification of society completed by the Ulozhenie of 1649, changing military technology, the plague of 1654 which significantly reduced the population, and the church schism (Raskol) of the 1650s and 1660s. These events led to the perception that society and the church were debauched and backward. They were accompanied by an accelerating importation of Western technology and manpower, a searching for roots either in the
"genuinely Russian" or in ancient Byzantium, the destruction and collapse of Old Russian high culture (painting, music, architecture, literature), and their replacement by a flood of "Western" (often, but not always, Polish) architecture, poetry, drama, styles of dress, music, military technology and tactics, and so forth. Nativists protested, the foreigners were segregated/ghettoized in the North Europeans' settlement, and Peter the Great was the result.

The recent Soviet experience has many parallels to that of pre-Petrine Muscovy centuries ago. The Soviet military, led by the Brezhnev build-up to believe it was the most powerful in the world, was humiliated in Afghanistan. The Central Asian population explosion is a demographic disaster exactly the opposite of that of the famine of 1601-03 and the plague of 1654, but with almost equally unsettling consequences. Socialist realism has proved to be totally bankrupt and debilitating in literature, music, and painting. Most demoralizing has been the performance of the economy, the realm in which the Bolshevik materialists were most certain of all that they were masterful. By the end of the 1970s the Soviet authorities had tried "everything" (higher prices, incentives, consumers' goods, enhanced geographical mobility for the peasants, expanded private plots, limited ownership, education—one at a time) to make agriculture work. This was reported at an Agricultural Economics Workshop at the University of Chicago, where the late Arcadius Kahan sagely asked the dumbfounded Soviet presenter whether any thought had ever been given to trying all of them at once—which would have meant repealing centralized, collectivized Soviet agriculture. By 1985, according to Solidarity adviser Andrzej Richard, the Poles had "tried everything" in an attempt to make socialism work and concluded that it could not be made to work.

Between September 22 and October 5, 1987, the Bulgarians held a closed "theory seminar" in which they and their Soviet guests concluded essentially the same thing—that socialism could not possibly be made to work. Gorbachëv's advisers were there, and he must have known at least since that time that socialism was/is totally bankrupt and cannot be revived. The politician's essential goal, holding on to power, must have been the fact which led the Soviet ruler to reproach Bulgarian dictator Todor Zhivkov for picking advisers who thought of "making Bulgaria a mini-West Germany or mini-Japan" and to the public stance that socialism could be reformed. As a safety valve, however, he made himself head of state as well as head of the Party and has arrogated potentially totally dictatorial powers to himself.

The response to the collapse has been a questioning of national identity and goals. As I tried to show in Slavery in Russia 1450-1725, the Russians have always had trouble with their national identity. Just what is "a Russian" has been a major question for millennium. Russian "blood" means nothing, inter alia, because, for example, the many of the last princes of Kievan Rus' were seven-eighths Turkic, Ivan the Terrible claimed he was a German or Swede, and the last Romanov was sixty-three—sixty-fourths German. Osteologically, Great Russians are supposedly 95 percent Czech and 5 percent