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SOCIOMETRY AND REVOLUTION:  
PITIRIM SOROKIN AND RUSSIA'S NATIONAL DEGENERATION

Only eight years have passed since 1914. They have been "incinerating years." Truly, "not much time has passed, and yet we have lived through so much." We have experienced a whole cycle of historical calamities. [. . .] Over the course of eight years we did not live, but writhed with an unrestrained fever, burned with untamed intoxication and blazed in wild sensuality.

Now the temperature is falling. The drunken fever passes. . . . A time of normal life emerges, and together with this a sober accounting of the current situation is needed. . . . We must take in our hands the book of "income and expenses" and add up the balance for these years.

We will try to do this. We will take upon ourselves the psychology of the most meticulous accountant and attempt with his detachment and precision to sum up the results.

After the October Revolution of 1917, even as the Russian civil war deepened and progressed, intellectuals of a wide variety of professional and political backgrounds began to try to make sense of the extraordinary events unfolding around them. Only a very small percentage of the intelligentsia can be said to have sympathized with the Bolsheviks, and even those moderate socialists who refused to oppose the revolution were increasingly disillusioned with the new regime. Among the cries of despair, anger, and defiance emanating from the intelligentsia were an increasing number of attempts to explain the revolution in broader terms, to explain its place in history.

Those non-Bolshevik (in some cases, anti-Bolshevik) intellectuals who did not leave Russia during the civil war believed that they possessed a more

1. Pitirim Sorokin, Sovremennoe sostoyanie Rossii (Prague: Vl. A. Vinnichuk, 1922), 3. Those ellipses not in brackets are in the original.
2. A survey of some of these attempts to make sense of the revolution has been admirably chronicled by Jane Burbank, Intelligentsia and Revolution: Russian Views of Bolshevism, 1917-1922 (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986).
complete understanding of what had happened and about the current state of Russia than did the emigration. Most rejected the so-called "Changing Signposts" movement that had developed in the emigration, which suggested that the current regime would become more moderate and that intellectuals should return to serve the Russian state in whatever form it took. As opportunities to publish opened up again at the end of the civil war and the beginning of the New Economic Policy, there were an increasing number of publications devoted to explaining the causes and consequences of the revolution.

The current article focuses on one of the most comprehensive early explanations for the revolution and the development of the Soviet regime. It was developed by the young Petrograd University Professor Pitirim Sorokin shortly before he was expelled from Russia along with dozens of other prominent academic, literary, and professional intellectuals in fall and winter 1922-23. Sorokin wrote on a variety of cultural, social, and literary matters, but his professional expertise lay in the science of sociology. (Sorokin has the extraordinary distinction of founding the sociology departments at two of the world's greatest universities: Petrograd (formerly St. Petersburg, later Leningrad) and Harvard.) As one of the first in his field in the country, he attempted to present in a quasi-positivistic, scientific manner a depiction of post-revolutionary Russian society very different from the official Marxist prognosis. In particular, he theorized that the preceding cataclysmic years of war, revolution, civil war, and famine had served to debase Russia's human material physically, morally, psychically, and even genetically. His analysis of Russia's national degradation was framed within a comparative sociological analysis of the effects of calamities on human populations. Increasingly, however, unable and unwilling to restrain his anger and despair, he gave full vent to a more personal and emotional response to the catastrophe he regarded as having befallen his native land.

Sorokin's path to St. Petersburg University is an extraordinary story, but unfortunately one that will have to be told briefly in the current context. As opportunities to publish opened up again at the end of the civil war and the beginning of the New Economic Policy, there were an increasing number of publications devoted to explaining the causes and consequences of the revolution.

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