

Aleksandr Buzgalin, Lyudmila Bulavka-Buzgalina, and Andrey Kolganov, *Russia in the Context of Global Transformations: Capitalism and Communism, Culture and Revolution, Studies in Critical Social Sciences*, vol. 240, trans. Renfrey Clarke (Brill, 2023), 370 pp.

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This book is one of those works that will inevitably become the subject of heated debate among readers. The Russian intelligentsia's desire for dialogue with Western publics is difficult to view dispassionately when the Russian Federation, through armed expansion, is actively reviving in international relations the most odious stereotypes of the Cold War–era political culture. In addition, intellectuals who will engage in the discussion ought to bear in mind that the authors have opted for a Marxist discourse to explain the distinctive characteristics of the sociopolitical and economic development of their state, as well as the geopolitical events of the twentieth and the commencement of the twenty-first century. The selected discourse, in the context of the growing confrontation between Russia and its allies against NATO countries, may raise questions about the degree of influence of ideological and political factors on the publication of this book. The reader can perceive certain elements of the presented concept as triggers for the subconscious actualization

of the neo-imperial construct of Russia. In this regard, it is important to recall that not so long ago, from a historical point of view, Russia managed to incorporate a significant part of Eurasia into the Soviet Union, using Marxism as a state ideology. Considering the proposed book as a self-reflection of Russian scholars about their role in the sociopolitical transformations of post-Soviet Russia, it is necessary to pay attention to some details of their biographies. The group of authors consists of Moscow State University professor, doctor of economic sciences Alexander Buzgalin (1954–2023); professor, doctor of economic sciences Andrei Kolganov; and professor, doctor of philosophical science Lyudmila Bulavka-Buzgalina. Their scientific and public careers began in the late 1970s and reached their peak in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when, during the transformations within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) caused by the policy of perestroika, Kolganov and Buzgalin became the organizers of the so-called Marxist platform in the CPSU. After the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), the authors' attempts to remain in big politics failed. Reflecting on their experience, they came to a fundamental conclusion, which became the main idea of the book: the course towards building communism was correct, but for a number of reasons it was not implemented in the twentieth century in the USSR. Explaining the circumstances of the failure, the scholars introduce the concept of “regressive” movement (p. 149). They also argue that the main problem that prevented the establishment of a communist society in the twentieth century was the insufficiency of the social base. In the twenty-

first century, according to the authors, mankind is more ready to achieve communism (pp. 316–350). However, it must be taken into account that the path to the “realm of freedom” can be quite long and zigzag. By analogy with the long coexistence of a feudal order with a capitalist one, the scholars see the possibility of the temporary coexistence of capitalism with socialism. The concrete understanding of socialism is not entirely clear from the text, except that it is a transitional stage to communism (p. 152) and some of its “mutant” forms are possible (pp. 152–157). It is also uncertain how it will coexist with capitalism, especially with the “Jurassic capitalism,” as the authors put it (pp. 211–240), of Russia.

So, the scholars come to the conclusion that today it is possible to “reactivate” the Marxist concept (p. 2). In the post-Soviet period, their efforts were aimed at popularizing these ideas both among the population of the Russian Federation and other countries. The scholars created the “Post-Soviet school of critical Marxism” and published many works on Marxist discourse, which they refer to and which form the basis of the book.

The way of covering the current problems of society through the lens of Marxism may seem retrograde to some readers, since Marxism as a philosophical and political economic doctrine seemed to remain in the past. Concrete historical examples show that when moving into the sphere of practice, the theoretical provisions of the Marxist concept take the form of totalitarianism[1] and attempts to bring it to life end with the murder of millions of people. [2] Crimes against humanity are the principal and most characteristic feature of all regimes that have attempted to implement

Marxism. The fanatical desire to build a “just” society led to a constant war of the authorities against the population, accompanied by the search for “enemies,” repressions, deportations, creation of concentration camps (in peacetime) and so on.[3]

Looking at the poster of El Lissitzky used on the book cover “Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge” of 1919–1920 it is difficult to believe in the authors’ desire to propose a constructive way to resolve social contradictions. The visual message of the design of the book carries a call to war and as a symbol is used for one of the most destructive wars in the history of Russia. For the historian, this illustration is very symbolic because it tells about how the Bolsheviks in Russia came to power in a non-democratic way and with the help of terror held it. However, the authors of the book perceive this period in Russian history as the most creative (pp. 31–67). Perhaps this is explained by the fact that the scholars (as they themselves state) did not set the task of presenting the material in an academic style, but wanted to do it in the form of a “dialogue” with the reader (p. 95), apparently with the aim of convincing him or her of the possibility of reactualizing Marxist ideas. This explains why the events of 1917 considered in the work are not based on historical reconstruction, but on an ideological assessment of the events typical for Soviet historiography. In the work, we do not see historically reliable studies that could confirm the theoretical assumptions of the authors; the book lacks analyses of historical sources and solid historical-scientific works (monographs, dissertations, etc.) on the topic.

The scholars approach to the consequences of the implementation of Marxist ideas on

the development of the spiritual sphere is very specific. The book unquestionably offers the reader a thesis about the high level of culture of the Soviet society, but does not provide historical evidence of this assessment (pp. 93–124). The purpose of including in the work a detailed analysis of the philosophical heritage of the Russian cultural scientist and literary scholar Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975) is not entirely evident (pp. 68–92). It is not clear from the text why so much attention was paid to it, except the mention that this part is a response to C. Emerson’s book dedicated to M. Bakhtin (p. 68).[4]

To summarize, it should be noted that the presented book certainly awakens the interest in studying the history of Marxism and its role in Russia’s past and present. The authors, considering the most acute social problems, also make the reviewer think about the foreseeable future of the globalized world. I dare to formulate a number of questions that may interest the reader in this regard: Will the youth of the twenty-first century be interested in Marxism on a global scale? Is it possible to modernize Soviet Marxism in order to instrumentalize it and use it to defend the foreign policy interests of modern Russia? What price should the world pay if the paradigm of class fight is used as a weapon of information warfare in the struggle of the Global South (led by Russia) against the Global North? Could the reactivation of the idea of building a “just” society on the basis of class segregation provoke a massive destabilization of the social order in the West? I hope that the proposed book will help the reader to find answers to these questions.

Notes

- 1 Leszek Kołakowski, *Glównie nurty marksizmu* [Main currents of Marxism], vols. 1–3 (Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2015).
- 2 Tony Judt and Timothy Snyder, *Thinking the Twentieth Century* (Penguin Publishing Group, 2012); Karel Bartošek et al., *Le Livre noir du communisme: Crimes, terreur, répression* (Robert Laffont, 1997).
- 3 Anne Applebaum, *Gulag: A History* (Doubleday, 2003); Elena Zhemkova, “Zwischen Mitgefühl und Gleichgültigkeit: Die Rehabilitierung der Opfer sowjetischer Verfolgungen,” in *Nach den Diktaturen: Der Umgang mit Opfern in Europa*, eds. Günther Heydemann and Clemens Vollnhals (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016).
- 4 Caryl Emerson, *The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin* (Princeton University Press, 1997).

Paul Starobin, *Putin’s Exiles: Their Fight for A Better Russia* (Columbia Global Reports, 2024), 126 pp.

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“One must leave their country to change it” (p. 16), argues author and journalist Paul Starobin in his latest book, *Putin’s Exiles: Their Fight for A Better Russia*. Through a quick overview of Russian history, Starobin introduces an argument that Russian exiles have often served as agents of change. Therefore, he embarks on a journey to study “a potentially history-changing vanguard” (p. 19) of Russian exiles. Through lengthy, in-person, and online interviews in Armenia, Georgia, England, France, Germany, and the Unit-