



BOOK REVIEW

Literature and Fine Arts

Slova i konflikty: Iazyk protivostoianiia i eskalatsiia grazhdanskoi voiny v Rossii by B. I. Kolonitskii. St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Evropeiskogo Universiteta v Sankt-Peterburge, 2022. 327 pp. ₺500. ISBN 978-5-94380-347-5

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For all its language-sensitive insights into historical and cultural processes, the “history of concepts” (*Begriffsgeschichte*) genre often suffers from overly detailed documentation of the textual twists and turns of the term in question, making for a challenging read for even the most dedicated of readers. *Slova i konflikty* offers a welcome exception to this tendency, providing a fitting centennial complement to *Iazyk, voina, i revoliutsiia* (1923), the seminal work by émigré linguist and Prague Circle participant, Sergei Kartsevskii. By virtue of its focus on a clearly delineated and relative brief historical period—as well as the impressive scholarly discipline and discretion of the contributors—this volume features ten more-or-less compact treatments of keywords of the revolutionary and Civil War period in a little over three hundred pages. Together, the contributions demonstrate the degree to which keywords and concepts of political and social order become highly contested during times of radical change—often times pushing the boundary between multivalence and cacophony. This comes in the form of lexical contrasts (one person’s *revoliutsiia* is another’s *smuta* [turmoil]), gradations of renaming (the reformist’s *grazhdanin* [citizen] becomes an inadequate marker of political belonging in the shadow of the revolutionary’s *tovarishch* [comrade]), and fierce battles of significance within critical keywords themselves—most prominently displayed across several articles relating to public attitudes toward *bol'shevik*, *bol'shevizm*, and various modifications thereof (for example, *tserkovnyi bol'shevizm* [church Bolshevism]). The collection also implicitly argues, in a necessarily messier way, that, rather than a predictable causal relationship between language and reality, we encounter a variety of dynamics. In some cases, such as the liberal use of *grazhdanskaia voina* (civil war) to refer to any form of political and social disorder and chaos, language helps lay the discursive groundwork for events to come. The impact, moreover, is often inadvertent: using *bol'shevik* too often and loosely, even as a term of derision, risks codifying not just the word but the movement itself into the political discourse of the day. Other cases, such as the evolution of the use of *lenintsy* (Leninists) and *bol'sheviki* from a veritable curse word to an admirable (if grudging) recognition of legitimate authority, merely reflect an event-driven shift in political fortune.

In the opening piece, “‘Grazhdanskaia voina’: Politicheskoe ispol'zovanie poniatiiia vesnoi 1917 g.” (pp. 37–59), K. V. Godunov investigates the prevalence of discourse on civil war during the spring of 1917 and the nature and extent of its impact on the post-February political climate. Looking at official dispatches, diaries, and other utterances by various sides of the post-February conflict, as well as the (mainly Petersburg) press, Godunov shows how, particularly with the clashes and crises of April, various sides invoked the notion of ‘civil war’ as a negative consequence of the inadequate or irresponsible actions of the adversary, and, in doing so, “established the discursive frame” (p. 59)



for the actual war several months later. Godunov's discussion features a taut and cautious analysis, supported by wide range of documentary evidence.

In "Revoliutsiia ili smuta? Polemika o sobytiakh 1917 g. i posleduiushchikh let" (pp. 60–80), A. V. Shmelev shows how the characterizations of events of 1917–21 as either *revolutsiia* or *smuta* reflect the historical and political biases of intellectuals who invoked them in the early 1920s. The first was largely embraced by left-leading radicals who supported the Bolsheviks, whereas the second was the more common option for conservatives and centrists resisting the Bolshevik takeover. Underlying each, however, was an assumption shaped by the legacy of the French Revolution in Russia that revolution was a positive historical event, pointing to more rational causes and outcomes, in contrast to the chaos-laden *smuta*. How contemporaries described the political situation also determined how they viewed the future unfolding of events—revolution leading to the establishment of a new order, and turmoil creating the conditions for the ultimate return of the monarchy.

D. I. Ivanov focuses the conceptual lens on *anarkhiia* ("Anarkhiia' i anarkhisty" [pp. 81–102]), which had been in wide circulation in Russia at least since the middle of the nineteenth century, showing how it became a convenient label at all ranges of the political spectrum for the disorderly behavior, words, and policies of one's political opponents. The term's stark contrast to notions of *poriadok* at a time when said order was sorely lacking made it a powerful lexical weapon—to the extent that even the radical socialists felt the need to avoid it, opting instead for euphemistic turns such as "honest and firm revolutionary order" (p. 101) to refer to their behavior during the May 1917 crisis in the Provisional Government.

Looking mainly at transcripts and archives from parliamentary debates, I. V. Sablin ("Grazhdanskii mir' i parlamentskie uchrezhdeniia v imperskoi transformatsii 1905–1922 gg." [pp. 105–27]) traces a long and varied invocation of notions of "civil peace," arguing, much like Ivanov on "anarchy," that the term denoted a variety of often contradictory visions of political order during fractured times. This was exacerbated by the fact that the term was used not only to underscore tensions on the level of class, but those on the level of nationality as well. M. E. Razin'kov ("Mir i poriadok: uskol'zaiushchie smysly russkoi revoliutsii" [pp. 128–48]) follows this study with his own examination the use of *mir* (peace) and *poriadok* across a variety of party literature and regions, arguing that the vast difference in meanings and usage both created and illustrated a public political discourse that had become nonsensical, akin to "a 'public' conversation being conducted in different languages" (p. 147), thus preventing any meaningful resolution to conflicts and leading to a decline in trust and patience on the part of the general population.

After five chapters dedicated to various discourses of civic order and disorder, the collection offers a triad on terms relating to identity and power. In the first, "Vozhdi revoliutsii i legitimatsiia grazhdanskoi voiny" (pp. 151–79), A. V. Reznik looks at texts from local party and military groups after the revolution in 1917–1918 in order to document the "sacralization" (p. 153) of *vozhdizm* (roughly translated as "leadermania") in the everyday political discourse of Bolshevism and trace its function as a means of legitimizing notions of "civil war" and "terror." Yoshiro Ikeda ("Grazhdanin' v revoliutsionnom diskurse, fevral' 1917—iiul' 1918 g." [pp. 180–203]) follows with a compact discussion of the evolution of the term *grazhdanin* during the eighteen revolutionary months, showing how what was first embraced by most reform-minded parties as an antidote to the estate-based (*soslovie*) demarcation of social membership, became more contested as the revolution took on momentum. If liberals continued to embrace it as a common equalizer, socialists came to regard it as a term of more neutral, if not alien, designation, embracing, instead, *tovarishch* as the preferred term for demarcating social and political belonging—although this, too, evolved, as Bolsheviks came to recognize *grazhdanin* as a useful moniker for underscoring the need for an authoritative state system.

Rounding out the section on identity and power is D. I. Ivanov's "Respublika i 'respubliki'" (pp. 204–30), which argues that, while the rejection of monarchy made the emergence of a "democratic republic" the most natural and likely of systemic fits in the revolutionary years, notions of democracy eventually gave way to the radical left's more class-oriented demarcation of authority, and notions of



republicanism ultimately evolved into little more than political-lexical window dressing for a more centralized, dictatorial form of rule.

The final cluster of articles examines various permutations of Bolshevism. In “‘Lenintsy’ i ‘bol’sheviki’ v politicheskom iazyke 1917 g.” (pp. 233–64), K. A. Tarasov nicely documents the perceptual transformation that *bol’shevizm* and *bol’sheviki* undergo from summer to fall of 1917. A group roundly castigated as “anarchists” and “radicals,” associated in the peak of their demonization with plagues, vermin, and mental disorder, saw its fortune change swiftly and dramatically after the Kornilov affair in August, and became the main banner holder of courage and conviction by the fall. Tarasov then argues, in “‘Bol’shevizm’ kak sobiratel’nyi obraz vragov revoliutsii v 1917 g.,” pp. 265–95), that the widespread use of “Bolshevik” and “Bolshevism” as a shorthand for various forms of uneducated radicals, anarchists, and provocateurs over the course of the spring and summer of 1917 served to “depoliticized” the terms (despite their negative connotations) (p. 295), and embed them into the broader everyday lexicon of the language of the day, drawing greater public attention as a result.

P. G. Rogoznyi (“‘Tserkovnyi bol’shevizm’ [istoriia razvitiia termina]” [pp. 296–325]) closes out the section and the book with an analysis of the rise of “church bolshevism” as a derogatory term used at first to refer to unwanted Bolshevik influences in church hierarchy and life beginning in April 1917, then expanding to be used as an umbrella label for any form of hierarchical or ideational disorder in the institution (one of the most conservative and resistant to Bolshevism). Only with the emerging success of Bolsheviks during the civil war did there emerge a contingent more supportive of the new regime, figures who often played an important role in rooting out anti-Bolshevik dissent within the church.

In all, the volume—usefully framed by an introduction by Boris Kolonitskii, who has devoted several decades to the study of the language and symbolism of the Russian Revolution (starting with his landmark monograph, co-authored with Orlando Figes, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution: The Language and Symbols of 1917* [1991])—marks an impressive contribution to the study of Russian political discourse during times of radical change. At times the temporally compact nature of the period in question together with the selective nature of sources consulted leads one to wonder about the representativeness of the changes and trends argued—perhaps a problem that big-data analytical tools might shed light on in subsequent studies. But history of concepts is not corpus linguistics, and, when executed by scholars well versed in their material, offers compelling interpretations of the complex relationship between language and political authority.

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