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PARLIAMENTS IN THE LATE RUSSIAN EMPIRE, REVOLUTIONARY RUSSIA, AND THE SOVIET UNION

Ivan Sablin



Parliaments in the Late Russian Empire, Revolutionary Russia, and the Soviet Union

This book examines the meanings that were attached to the terms "parliament" and "parliamentarism" in the different historical and discursive contexts of the late Russian Empire, revolutionary and Soviet Russia, and the Soviet Union. It discusses those institutions referred to as parliaments by contemporaries, gives special attention to their functions, and traces the broader debates on parliamentarism within Russia and the Soviet Union, in Russian émigré circles, and among foreign observers. It highlights that only the late imperial and perestroika assemblies can be considered legislative institutions that expressed dissensus but argues that other assemblies, often referred to as "rubber-stamp" parliaments due to their lack of legislative competence and influence over other authorities, should not be dismissed. The Supreme Soviet, for instance, provided an integrative function binding society and elites in a top-down manner, while its deputies engaged in information acquisition and state micromanagement through interactions with their constituents. It also played an important role in interparliamentary relations and, as one of the first institutions of nominal parliamentarism in an autocratic single-party regime, of which there were many in the twentieth century, served as a model for numerous state socialist regimes. By addressing the role of parliaments in reassembling imperial spaces through political representation and the functions of nominal legislative institutions, the book explores the contribution of Russian and Soviet assemblies to global political modernity.

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Abbreviations

AS	*Samizdat* Archive
ASSR	Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic/Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic
Cheka	All-Russian Extraordinary Commission
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
Comecon	Council for Mutual Economic Assistance
Cominform	Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers' Parties
Comintern	Communist International
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CSCE	Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe
ECCI	Executive Committee of the Communist International
FRELIMO	Front of Liberation of Mozambique
GARF	State Archive of the Russian Federation
GMPIR	State Museum of Political History of Russia
GTsMSIR	State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia
HU OSA	Open Society Archives in Budapest
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
KD	Constitutional Democrat/Democratic
KGB	Committee for State Security
Komsomol	All-Union Leninist Young Communist League
Komuch	Committee of Members of the Constituent Assembly
MPLA	People's Movement for Liberation of Angola
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NEP	New Economic Policy
NKVD	People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs
OGPU	Joint State Political Directorate
Politburo	Political Bureau of the Central Committee
PSR	Socialist Revolutionary Party
RCP(b)	Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks)
rev.	reverse
RGAKFD	Russian State Archive of Cinematographic and Photographic Documents

RGANI	Russian State Archive of Contemporary History
RGASPI	Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History
RGIA	Russian State Historical Archive
RSDLP	Russian Social Democratic Labor Party
RSDLP(b)	Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (Bolsheviks)
RSFSR	Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic/Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic
RSL	Russian State Library
SALT	Strategic Arms Limitation Talks
SD	Social Democrat/Democratic
Sovnarkom	Council of People's Commissars
SR	Socialist Revolutionary
SSR	Socialist Soviet Republic/Soviet Socialist Republic
TASS	Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union
TsGAKFFD SPb	Central State Archive of Film and Photo Documents of Saint Petersburg
TsIK	Central Executive Committee
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
USA	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VKP(b)	All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)
VTsIK	All-Russian Central Executive Committee
Zemgor	Central Committee for Army Supply of the All-Russian Zemstvo and Municipal Unions

Note on the text

The simplified Library of Congress System was used for the transliteration of Cyrillic-based languages. The transliteration of Armenian, Georgian, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik, and pre-reform Uzbek was done based on commonly used national transliteration systems. Chinese was transliterated using Pinyin. Conventional spellings in other transliterations were used for geographic names. The Gregorian calendar was used for dates after February 14, 1918, and the Julian calendar for earlier events related to the Russian Empire.

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Introduction

For most of the period between 1905 and 1991, there were parliamentary and quasi-parliamentary bodies in the Russian Empire, revolutionary Russia, and the Soviet Union. These were the State Duma and the reformed State Council in 1906–1917 as well as the various assemblies that emerged during the Revolution of 1917 and the Civil War (1917–1922) including the All-Russian Constituent Assembly. While the Bolsheviks renounced parliamentarism in 1918–1935, Soviet assemblies were often referred to as parliaments even by foreign commentators.[1] In 1938–1988, the bicameral Supreme Soviet was informally called a parliament and gained international recognition as such when Soviet deputies joined the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in 1955. Finally, in 1989–1991, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was formally governed by a parliamentary body, the Congress of People's Deputies, while the reformed Supreme Soviet was made a permanent parliament.

Indeed, from a normative liberal standpoint, the Russian and Soviet institutions can easily be dismissed as sham or nominal parliaments due to their inadequate legislative competence and the lack of influence over other constitutional or extraconstitutional authorities.[2] In the most basic normative terms, only the State Duma and the State Council as well as the Congress of People's Deputies and the reformed Supreme Soviet can be considered parliaments, that is, legislative institutions that expressed dissensus, albeit they also did not meet all the criteria outlined for a parliament as a European concept by Pasi Ihalainen and others (Ihalainen, Ilie, and Palonen 2016a, 1). However, the simple dismissal of Russian and Soviet assemblies leaves a large gap in the global history of concepts and institutions.

The State Duma played a key role during the imperial transformations in Eurasia, which featured parliamentary solutions to the crisis of sovereignty and were supposed to boost modernization, becoming part of a wider parliamentary moment of 1900s–1910s.[3] After the First World War (1914–1918), the Bolshevik antiparliamentary period coincided with the discussions of a Western or even global crisis of parliamentarism. Soviet institutions served as a key reference point for many opponents of parliamentarism. Subsequently, the Supreme Soviet not only became one of the first institutions of nominal parliamentarism in an autocratic regime – of which there were many in the twentieth century – but it also

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became a model for numerous state socialist regimes. Finally, the experience of the Congress of People's Deputies as part of an attempted reform of state socialism was relevant for similar regimes in Eastern Europe, East and West Asia, Africa, and Central America.

This book departed from normative approaches to parliaments and parliamentarism. Instead, it charted a conceptual and institutional history of parliaments within the dynamic imperial and postimperial contexts of Northern Eurasia – the Russian Empire, the postimperial conglomerate of polities, and the formal and informal Soviet empire (Gerasimov et al. 2009). Seeking to reconstruct the specific meanings that were attached to the terms "parliament" and "parliamentarism" within concrete historical and discursive contexts, it analyzed specific institutions that were discussed as parliaments by contemporaries, with special attention given to their symbolic and practical functions. Furthermore, by tracing broader debates on parliamentarism, including those within Russian émigré circles and among foreign commentators, this book sought to shed light on the parliamentary and antiparliamentary ideas as well as on the reception of Russian and Soviet institutions. Finally, the book discussed alternatives to these institutions and to parliaments in general, as proposed by members of the ruling circles and oppositional intellectuals.

Given its focus on conceptual and intellectual history, the study benefited from the works of Ihalainen, Kari Palonen, and Martin Freeden as well as the formative works by Reinhart Koselleck and Quentin Skinner. The concepts of parliament and parliamentarism were understood in their dynamics. The two major schools in the history of concepts – the German *Begriffsgeschichte* (conceptual history) and the Cambridge School of intellectual history – helped distinguish between temporal and relational aspects of these dynamics (Palonen 2002, 4; Skinner 2002, 1:4–5; Koselleck 2004; Norberg 2015). Furthermore, the concepts of parliament and parliamentarism were deeply embedded in networks of interrelated ideas (ideologies) and had different meanings for participants of the discussions in 1905–1991 (Freeden 1996). The works of Ihalainen and Palonen were especially insightful in understanding parliament as a time- and context-specific nexus of meanings and in grasping the dynamic production of these meanings during political debates, including those in parliaments (Ihalainen, Ilie, and Palonen 2016a; Ihalainen 2021; Palonen 2021).

The State Duma and the assemblies of revolutionary Russia, such as the State Conference, the Democratic Conference, the Pre-Parliament, and the Constituent Assembly, were imagined or performed as imperial parliaments. They became the sites where both particularistic political communities, appealing to the categories of difference (ethnic, religious, gender, class, regional, and so on) (Gerasimov et al. 2009), and a broader, composite political community, pertaining to the whole empire or postimperial polity, were constructed and articulated. These assemblies manifested attempts to reconfigure or reassemble the Russian imperial polity during the periods of crisis in 1905–1907 and 1914–1918. In other words, the parliaments were supposed to play a central role in resolving the imperial crisis and ensuring a peaceful victory of the imperial revolution by providing collective rights

to specific interest groups, defined in terms of social categories, and by overcoming the hierarchies of the previous regime (Gerasimov 2017).

The Congress of Soviets and the Central Executive Committee (TsIK), as the standing body of the former, were integral to the Bolshevik (Communist) attempts to construct an antiparliamentary modern state. Conceptually, the introduction of the Supreme Soviet as a Soviet "parliament" (Vyshinskii 1938) in 1935–1936 meant a retreat of the Communist Party[4] from antiparliamentarism in the context of its conceptual dependency on the West (Morozov 2015). However, the Supreme Soviet became an important part of Soviet propaganda and a model for dependent regimes, the radical left internationally, and numerous contemporary and future autocratic governments. The introduction of the Congress of People's Deputies and the reorganization of the Supreme Soviet in 1988 was part of the political reform in the USSR. A new imperial crisis manifested itself after these bodies were convened. In 1989–1991, the perestroika parliaments were supposed to reassemble the Soviet empire on the basis of, once again, an inclusionary and more egalitarian political community but ultimately failed to do so.

The State Duma, the revolutionary assemblies, and the perestroika parliaments were preeminently sites of bottom-up community-building. The pre-perestroika Soviet assemblies, especially the Supreme Soviet, performed a similar function in a top-down sense becoming institutions that integrated Soviet society and fostered its loyalty to the elites. It was this integrative, rather than legislative, function that made the Russian and Soviet assemblies – together with parliamentary and quasi-parliamentary bodies elsewhere – especially distinct from the normatively-defined Western parliament. In addition to community-building, which was performed, *inter alia*, through descriptive representation, the parliamentary bodies of the USSR had a number of other functions within the Soviet system. They were part of a feedback mechanism through which Soviet citizens could inform the government of their grievances – through communication with individual deputies and standing bodies – and that contributed to the fine-tuning of official policies. The Supreme Soviet also played an important part in Soviet diplomacy and foreign propaganda, sending out and receiving dozens of parliamentary delegations and participating in the IPU.

Historiography and contribution

This book sought to contribute to the global history of parliaments and parliamentarism, which has mostly focused on Western Europe and North America due to the European origin of the concept (Ihalainen, Ilie, and Palonen 2016b; Aerts et al. 2019), and to the histories of the Russian Empire, the Revolution of 1917, the Civil War, and the Soviet Union. The introduction of a parliament in the Russian Empire in the early twentieth century was part of the global imperial transformations (Sablin and Semyonov 2020). Spreading throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries beyond Europe, parliamentary institutions were supposed to contribute to the modernization of empires (Burbank and Cooper 2010, 8–9, 11–12; Moniz Bandeira 2017). These institutions were used in the attempted consolidation

of existing political communities and the building of new ones. These political communities not only included those that would define the new nation-states on the territory of former empires but were also built on non-ethnically defined (religious, class, and other) particularistic categories. Furthermore, there were multiple visions of a broader political community – a community that was supposed to accommodate the empire's diverse interest groups, prevent its composite space from disintegrating, and reinforce the imperial state. The parliament was a key institution in building an inclusionary and heterogeneous imperial community (Gerasimov et al. 2009, 20–2). In other words, the imperial parliament was supposed to resolve the paradox between the implied homogeneity of a nation, fostered by the mass politics of the early twentieth century, and the inherent heterogeneity of imperial formations as composite polities based on the differential distribution of rights (Stoler 2009, 49; Semyonov 2020, 31). The "imperial rights regime" was to give way to political representation in an assembly (Burbank 2006).

This book's main argument was informed by the imperial turn in Russian and Eurasian Studies and the New Imperial History. The imperial turn, which began with the collapse of the USSR, primarily reimagined Russia and the Soviet Union as multiethnic spaces. The New Imperial History approached the concept of empire from a poststructuralist perspective, transcending ethnic essentialism and emphasizing the multiplicity and dynamics of social categories in a composite space where boundaries are situational. The poststructuralist approach also made comparative and global studies of empires especially relevant.[5]

This study also made use of the concepts of the "imperialism of free nations" (Duara 2007) and the informal Soviet empire. The latter, conceptualized by the economist Charles Wolf in 1985, excluded the internal empire – meaning the Soviet Union proper – and exhibited the following features: partial contiguity, diverse forms of domination (including satellites, allies, and cooperating regimes), and the special role of ruling parties. The informal empire encompassed countries across Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, and Central America, with the Soviet Communist Party being the primary agent of imperial power (Wolf 1985, 997–8).

The State Duma was thus not part of a "constitutional experiment," which was predetermined to fail (Hosking 1973, vii), and not merely a site of interethnic tensions and homogenizing projects (Kappeler 2013, 334, 341–4, 347), but rather an imperial parliament comparable to its Ottoman and (post-)Qing counterparts (Kayali 1995; Moniz Bandeira 2020). It was a political forum where imperial diversity was articulated and co-produced (Semyonov 2009, 212), particularistic claims were formulated, and various versions of a broader Russian imperial community were being developed in a bottom-up manner. The State Duma hence diverged from the initial plans of the Tsar and the Council of Ministers, who aimed to build a community loyal to the Throne. For the majorities of the First (1906), Second (1907), and especially Fourth Duma (1912–1917) during the First World War, the assembly was a site for reassembling the empire on new principles.

The attempts to reassemble the empire were pivotal to the Revolution of 1917 (Gerasimov 2017). The logic of the imperial parliament was extended to the anticipated All-Russian Constituent Assembly and other assemblies during the

prolonged Revolution and Civil-War period. Numerous institutions sought to reconfigure the imperial state or its parts and prevent the disintegration of the shared social space through parliamentarism. The matters of group political representation and diversity management also shaped the project of the Soviet federation (Sablin and Semyonov 2020).

From a poststructuralist perspective, it was not solely the multilayered character of diversity that made the State Duma an imperial parliament. According to Alexander Semyonov, the State Duma did not merely reflect the national or ethno-confessional distinctions of the imperial population. What rendered it a "microcosm of the empire" was its uneven or multidimensional heterogeneity, encompassing alternating references to territorial, national, and confessional markers or combinations of them in group identification and articulation of political allegiance. Both group identifications and articulations of political allegiance did not correlate but were asymmetrical, overlapping, and sometimes contradictory (Semyonov 2009, 212). Furthermore, the State Duma co-produced empire-wide categories through, for instance, the transformation of localized grievances into a standardized discourse on autonomy.

At the same time, the State Duma was part of the "inclusivist logic of the dynastically and bureaucratically run empire" (Semyonov 2009, 200) and a site where contested projects of a Russian nation were produced. Nicholas II could have envisioned an ethnicized version of "the people of the land" when he agreed to the establishment of the Duma in 1905, as reflected, for instance, in the substantial representation of the peasantry (Wortman 2013, 250). While discussing the State Duma, right-wing intellectuals openly argued in favor of an ethnically exclusionary Russian nation (Rozanov 2008, 616–17). However, in the First, Second, and Fourth Duma (during the First World War), the notion of an inclusionary imperial political community, to be consolidated through the reconfiguration of hierarchies, predominated. Some projects of the Russian civic nation implied not only individual rights and liberties but also group rights in the form of autonomy. In the first two Dumas, the inclusionary imperial nationalism was associated with moderate socialist and liberal deputies. In the Fourth Duma, many Russian nationalists, including earlier opponents of non-Russians, embraced this position, as Melissa Kirschke Stockdale showed. The State Duma played an important role in constructing an "all-Russian" community – "the broad Russian nation" – during the First World War. Political parties and groups pursuing social estate, non-Russian, and women's agendas anticipated democratization and the fulfillment of collective interests after the war, while slogans appealed to the unity of "all the peoples of Russia" and the "deep patriotic feeling" of the Duma. Stockdale convincingly demonstrated that this imperial patriotism was a modern phenomenon (Stockdale 2016, 3–5, 26–7, 54–5, 172, 175).

The construction of the broader political community had important etatist connotations. As argued by Tatiana Khripachenko, the construction of the "Russian political nation" by the government presupposed the principle of loyalty to this government (Khripachenko 2014, 280). However, there was no monopoly on imperial patriotism and its etatist elements. It was the inefficiency of the Tsarist government

in protecting the Russian state in the Russo–Japanese War (1904–1905) and the First World War that fueled projects of building a self-organized Russian imperial nation (Grave 1927, 26–9, 106) – a heterogenous, composite, and inclusionary political community. As argued by Thomas R. Prendergast, intellectuals in the Habsburg Empire were also invested in developing the notion of continental empires as both modern and viable, emphasizing the experience of the imperial state in the successful negotiation and accommodation of difference (Prendergast 2020, 329, 333, 344).

Empirical studies of the State Duma are quite abundant. There are works pertaining to diversity, individual ethno-national, religious, and social groups.[6] The broader literature discussing the Duma[7] also frequently touches upon the issues of diversity and the building of political communities. A major reference volume on the State Duma, containing information on all deputies and parliamentary groups, was especially helpful (Shelokhaev 2008a). Unlike the State Duma, the reformed State Council is researched less thoroughly (Walter-Gerus 1970; Shecket 1974; Korros 1998; Borodin 1999; Demin 2006), but there is also a major reference publication discussing all of its deputies and groups (Shelokhaev 2008b).

Several studies were especially illuminating for addressing the Russian imperial parliament from a global history perspective. Having compared the late Russian Empire to European states of the period, Robert B. McKean (2000, 124) concluded that it was "a genuine constitutional monarchy." Egas Moniz Bandeira (2017, 2020) showed that the Russian parliamentary experience, together with that of the Ottoman Empire, was important for Qing policymakers. Charles Kurzman and Adrian Brisku discussed constitutions and parliaments in broader comparative studies of political change in the Russian and other empires (Kurzman 2008; Brisku 2017). The parliaments of the Russian, Ottoman, and Habsburg empires were different from those of their Western European counterparts, where the voices of diverse and often marginalized communities could be regarded as "unexpected" (Fradera, Portillo, and Segura-Garcia 2021).

August H. Nimtz's (2014) work provided a link between the history of the State Duma and that of the revolutionary assemblies. The number of different congresses, conventions, and quasi-parliamentary bodies, including the soviets ("councils"), during the Revolution of 1917 was tremendous (Melancon 1996). Daniel Orlovsky (1997, 15, 24) made an important conclusion about the predominance of corporatism. However, it is questionable whether corporatist representation should be contrasted with democracy, as he suggested. The simultaneous attempts to cater to group interests through political representation and to establish a regime of universal civic rights continued the imperial debates on the reconfiguration of the imperial space and the possible creation of a multilevel democratic system (Sablin and Semyonov 2020).

A. B. Nikolaev and S. E. Rudneva authored empirical studies on the 1917 assemblies – the State Conference, the All-Russian Democratic Conference, and the Provisional Council of the Russian Republic (Rudneva 2000, 2006; Nikolaev 2022). There are several overview studies of the All-Russian Constituent Assembly, which lasted for a single session on January 5–6, 1918, and those

dealing with individual groups (Haimson 1980; Radkey 1989; Protasov 1997; Wade 2006). There is also a detailed reference publication on the Constituent Assembly (Protasov 2014). However, few works specifically address diversity management (Rabinovitch 2009) or postimperial Russian nationalism. The objective of maintaining the shared space of the (former) empire was important for many participants of the Revolution of 1917, and the all-Russian assemblies were intended to facilitate this by consolidating a (post)imperial community (Semyonov 2020, 31).

Vladimir N. Brovkin (1994) provided an overview of parliamentary ideas during the Civil War. Several quasi-parliamentary institutions positioned themselves as provisional in anticipation of the Bolsheviks' defeat. Some of them appealed to the entirety of Russia, such as the Committee of the Members of the Constituent Assembly (Komuch) (Berk 1973) and the consultative State Economic Conference in the government of Aleksandr Vasil'evich Kolchak (Smele 1996, 504–20). Other bodies, like the Siberian Regional Duma, the Transcaucasian Sejm, and the parliaments of the Far East (Pereira 1988, 1996; Sablin 2018; Brisku 2020), appealed to regions, attempting to reassemble parts of the former empire. However, they also discussed the ultimate reunification of Russia. Assemblies that appealed to ethno-national categories, such as the Ukrainian Central Rada ("council"), were often inclusionary and incorporated elements of broader postimperial nationalism (Abramson 1991; Wade 1993; Korolev 2011; King 2019). In this regard, many assemblies that appealed to particularisms tied to specific territories or groups can also be discussed in the context of broader sub-imperial governance (Marzec 2022).

After the Bolshevik-led coup in October 1917 (the October Coup or the October Revolution), the soviets, their congresses, and the standing executive committees were positioned as explicitly antiparliamentary. The supreme bodies of the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (RSFSR) and the USSR – the Congress of Soviets and the TsIK – had group political representation based on class and nationality in their design. Starting in 1924, the TsIK, the supreme body between the Congresses, became bicameral, comprising the Union Council and the Council of Nationalities. The former was proportional to the population of the union republics, while the latter included a fixed number of representatives from the union republics, autonomous republics, and autonomous regions (Trainin 1940, 43). However, group representation primarily had descriptive functions, as the political authority was vested in the Bolshevik Party. Most decisions of Soviet assemblies were unanimous, and they acted as policy-ratifying and propagating bodies. The constitutional authorities were hence a façade, while power struggles usually occurred within the bodies of the Bolshevik Party (Vanneman 1977, 29, 32, 34–5).

There has been no comprehensive study of the Congresses of Soviets and the Central Executive Committees in connection with the parliamentary and antiparliamentary designs of the Bolsheviks. Jane Burbank demonstrated that Soviet law – and thus the representative institutions – existed in "unacknowledged dialectic with bourgeois legal systems." Vladimir Il'ich Lenin (Ul'ianov) contrasted the "dead bourgeois parliamentarism" of the Constituent Assembly with the "proletarian, simple, in many ways disorderly and incomplete, but alive and vital" Soviet apparatus (Burbank 1995, 38–9). Broader works on the Soviet regime proved informative

for this study (Siegelbaum 1992; Holquist 2002; Smith 2017). In 1918–1937, elections were a complex and costly multistage process, which was part of the Soviet permanent campaigning and mobilization efforts.[8]

The universally elected Supreme Soviet, established by the 1936 Constitution and comprising the Council of the Union and the Council of Nationalities, inherited much from the TsIK in practical terms. It was a sham and nominal parliament. Its brief sessions made proper discussions impossible, while its standing committee – the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet – was the formal supreme body most of the time (Trainin 1940, 182). The elections were not contested, and the "bloc of Communists and non-party members" always emerged victorious. All major decisions were made within the Communist Party and only ratified by the Supreme Soviet or its Presidium. Although deputies sometimes criticized agencies and bureaucrats, they never criticized the party, and all decisions were reached unanimously (Juviler 1960, 3). As a nominal parliament, the Supreme Soviet was not unique. It was comparable to the state assemblies functioning as consensus forums under other single-party regimes, such as those in Italy, Germany, Spain, Turkey, and China.[9]

While the issue of a unified Soviet political community was ambiguous and contested in 1918–1935, the establishment of a universally elected parliamentary body marked a new attempt at building an imperial nation. This collective entity was referred to as either the "Soviet people" (*sovetskii narod*), encompassing numerous nationalities, or as the "peoples of the USSR" (*narody SSSR*), united into one "family," at the Supreme Soviet's first session in 1938 (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1938, 27, 31–2, 61, 67, 149–50). Since 1945, following Iosif Vissarionovich Stalin's (Dzhugashvili) banquet speech, the "Soviet people" became explicitly hierarchical, with the "Russian people" being designated as "the leading force among all the peoples" of the USSR and its most distinguished nation (Iakovlev 2005, 23).

For historians, mainly the 1936 Constitution and elections were of interest (Wimberg 1992; Estraikh 2014; Lomb 2014; Velikanova 2018). Although, according to J. Arch Getty (1991, 18), it was important to reject the "hollow claims" of the institutions, the Soviet leadership took the Constitution very seriously and even considered conducting contested elections. Serhy Yekelchyk (2010, 94–6) argued that apart from being rituals of loyalty or campaigns of political education, elections strengthened the Soviet community through political participation. A volume edited by Ralph Jessen and Hedwig Richter (2011) placed the elections under Stalin into a comparative context. The overview works on the Stalin period helped contextualize institutional and discursive developments (Khlevniuk 1992, 1996; Fitzpatrick 2017). The functions of the Supreme Soviet had not attracted much attention from historians, with the notable exception of A. Iu. Klimanov's (2004) study of its standing commissions and I. N. Strekalov's (2018) discussion of the proposed reforms.

There were multiple studies of the Soviet political system, elections, the Supreme Soviet, and its organs conducted by political scientists and legal scholars (Clarke 1967; Schapiro 1967; Hazard 1968; Lane 1970; Kirstein 1972; Leng 1973; A. H. Brown 1974; Minagawa 1975; Reichel 1976; Lammich 1977; Armstrong 1978; Furtak 1979; Schneider 1981; White 1985). The standing commissions

attracted significant attention in the context of the revisionist approach to the study of Soviet politics since the 1950s (Little 1972; Siegler 1982). Peter Henry Juviler's dissertation was the first comprehensive study of the Supreme Soviet, which he examined through the lens of its deputies' functions. Juviler highlighted the role that this new institution played in both domestic and international propaganda. He also observed that Soviet deputies mediated between the party and state leadership and the populace by receiving and addressing complaints and petitions (Juviler 1960, 1–2, 137–41, 144). Indeed, this feedback mechanism was employed not only for individual cases but also to survey entire spheres of public life when petitions were analyzed *en masse*.

Peter Vanneman suggested looking beyond the understanding of the Supreme Soviet as a mere façade and highlighted its functions in the Soviet political system. Emphasizing the descriptive representation of occupations, nationalities, and women, he argued that the composition of the Supreme Soviet was designed to enhance the regime's legitimacy. It did not fully mirror the Soviet society, as officialdom and intelligentsia were overrepresented. However, as Vanneman noted, non-Slavic nationalities were also overrepresented, at least in the first convocation of the Supreme Soviet (Vanneman 1977, 5–6, 71–2). From a propaganda perspective, descriptive representation was intended to showcase the victory of the imperial revolution.

The Supreme Soviet and its relations with the Communist Party served as a model for government systems that, along with state socialist economies, became an integral part of structural adjustments in Soviet dependencies. The adjustments were not uniform and featured a variety of parliamentary and quasi-parliamentary institutions (Sablin 2022). However, as a comparative volume edited by Daniel Nelson and Stephen White (1982) demonstrated, the core functions of state socialist parliaments, including the Supreme Soviet, were the same.

Nelson detailed some of these functions in the introductory chapter. Beyond descriptive representation, state socialist legislatures contributed to "system integration" in the sense of bringing the populace, which was diverse in national and regional terms, into one political community. The legislatures also brought together "workers, intellectuals, and bureaucrats" for the cooperative "pursuit of communism" and the construction of a classless future. This was especially relevant due to the need to resolve the paradox between the class-centered rhetoric of the early communist ideology and the claims to represent all-popular interests in its updated versions. State socialist legislatures also ensured vertical integration between the party and the populace, political and ideological education and socialization, and elite recruitment (Nelson 1982, 4, 7–9, 11).

Building on this research, this study reinterpreted the integrative function of the Supreme Soviet as that of inclusionary, top-down nation-building. Similarly, the functions of education and socialization were discussed as those of amplification and circulation of the official discourse. Previous research, however, did not analyze the involvement of the Supreme Soviet in foreign policy in detail. The exchanges in delegations between the Supreme Soviet and the assemblies of dependent regimes contributed to the cohesion of the Soviet informal empire.

Those involving the parliaments of postcolonial states were intended to bolster the USSR's image and influence as well as promote socialism. Finally, the exchanges with the parliaments of "capitalist" countries were aimed at reducing Cold War tensions and promote Soviet peace rhetoric.

This book also sought to contribute to the literature on the parliaments of the perestroika period. Similar to the earlier Soviet institutions, the Congress of People's Deputies and the reformed Supreme Soviet were primarily studied by political scientists and legal scholars. Their contributions included the analyses of the new legal system, the newly introduced political contestation, parliamentary elites, the collapse of the single-party regime, and the situation with women's rights (O. Glebov and Crowfoot 1989; Hewett 1989; Gurtov 1990; Kljamkin 1990; Lentini 1991; Luchterhandt 1991; Cappelli 1993; Gill 1994; Nechemias 1994). One of the few historians to address the perestroika parliaments structurally and within the context of a wider transformation was Carolina di Stefano (2020), who discussed the ways the USSR legislature dealt with the nationality question. Expanding upon these and the broader studies of the period (A. Brown 2007; Kotkin 2008), this book discussed the failure of the perestroika political reform through the prism of the legislature's performance and against the backdrop of what became a new imperial crisis. As Ronald Grigor Suny (1993) demonstrated, the institutional development of distinct nationalities in the Soviet state played a key role in the formation of the sovereign states in 1991.

This book also delved into broader discussions about parliaments and parliamentarism in the late Russian Empire, revolutionary Russia, and the Soviet Union. In particular, it explored the parliamentary universalism embraced by liberals and some socialists as well as the antiparliamentarism of the right and radical left in the 1900s and 1910s. This study addressed the Bolshevik discourse on parliaments and parliamentarism, which originated from the antiparliamentarism of the anarchists and evolved into the Soviet official discourse. Within the official discourse, which became increasingly fixed and citational (Yurchak 2013, 28, 79–80), the interpretations of parliaments and parliamentarism were ambiguous. Despite dismissing parliaments as part of the "dictatorship of the bourgeoisie," the Bolsheviks supported their use in political struggle abroad. Furthermore, Soviet assemblies were continuously referred to as "parliaments" even when the criticism of the institution was especially rigid. Since 1955, a complete rejection of parliamentarism became unfeasible due to the normalization of the Supreme Soviet as a parliament through its involvement in foreign affairs. This study touched upon the revival of parliamentary universalism during perestroika and its consequences for the Soviet assemblies and broader political changes.

Finally, this book sought to contribute to the intellectual history of the Russian emigration and the Soviet dissident movement. While Marc Raeff (2005) noted the derivative nature of émigré political ideas and projects, studies like Sergei Glebov's (2017) demonstrated that additional research is required on the sources of these ideas and, in particular, their connection to the imperial, revolutionary, and Soviet intellectual and political contexts. The attitudes of Russian émigré authors toward Soviet institutions were especially relevant, as many of them integrated

into English-speaking academia and co-founded the field of Soviet and Communist Studies in the United States of America (USA) after the Second World War (1939–1945). Regarding the Soviet dissidents, some of whom also became émigrés, most of the existing literature focuses on their biographies and human rights activism, portraying their political ideas in broad strokes (Shatz 2009). Among the exceptions are the works by Robert Horvath and Philip Boobbyer, both of whom stressed the diversity of dissident thought and focused on concrete ideas and concepts (Boobbyer 2005, 3; Horvath 2005, 5–6). This book provided an overview of ideas about parliament and Soviet institutions among émigré and dissident intellectuals, demonstrating conceptual continuities throughout the period under study.

While this book primarily addressed central institutions, it occasionally included brief discussions of parliamentary bodies outside the imperial center. Moreover, it devoted special attention to the participation of representatives from various regions and groups, defined through nationality, religion, and other categories of difference, in multiple central assemblies. Detailed comparisons between the various parliamentary bodies of the Civil War, the supreme soviets of the union and autonomous republics, and the parliamentary institutions in various parts of the USSR during perestroika could be at the center of future collaborative scholarly.

Sources and structure

The main sources for this study included published and unpublished transcripts (verbatim reports) of various assemblies; published and unpublished documents related to the functioning of parliamentary bodies as well as the Russian and Soviet political systems in general; writings by decision-makers within specific contexts and those by their opponents; domestic and international commentary published in books, journals, the press, and *samizdat* ("self-published") media. The material was organized chronologically and thematically in accordance with the study's eight chapters.

Chapter 1 was dedicated to the discussions of parliaments and parliamentarism among the ruling circles and the educated strata in Russia during the Revolution of 1905–1907, the establishment of the State Duma, and the operation and functions of the First and Second Duma. The chapter relied on the published verbatim reports of the State Duma and the State Council, published collections of documents (including those of political parties), and works by imperial intellectuals, many of whom became Duma deputies, published during this period. Individual documents were accessed at the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF). Russian newspapers, such as the liberal *Rech'* ("Speech," Saint Petersburg), provided a glimpse into the broader political and intellectual context of the debates.

Chapter 2 addressed the operation of the State Duma and the State Council as established legislative bodies of the Russian Empire in 1907–1917, along with the broader debates on parliamentary universalism and antiparliamentarism. The published verbatim reports of the State Duma and the State Council, published documents, and works by politicians and intellectuals were the main sources. The chapter also drew upon additional unpublished documents from the collections of

the Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA) and the GARF. The analysis further relied on individual publications in such newspapers as *Musul'manskaia gazeta* ("Muslim Newspaper," Saint Petersburg), *Golos* ("Voice," Yaroslavl), and *Novoe vremia* ("New Time," Petrograd). The political debates in the press were constrained by restrictive official policies, which limited the use of newspapers.

Chapter 3 focused on parliamentary developments during the Russian Revolution of 1917 up to the dissolution of the All-Russian Constituent Assembly. The sources for this chapter included published and unpublished transcripts of various assemblies, a comprehensive selection of press coverage representing most of the political spectrum, published and unpublished archival documents, and writings by intellectuals and participants of the events. In particular, it relied on newspapers such as *Rech'*; the moderate socialist *Delo naroda* ("The Cause of the People," Petrograd) and *Den'* ("Day," Petrograd); the right *Vechernee vremia* ("Evening Time," Petrograd); the radical left *Anarkhiia* ("Anarchy," Moscow) and *Sotsial-demokrat* ("Social Democrat," Moscow); and the official *Vestnik Vremennogo pravitel'stva* ("The Herald of the Provisional Government," Petrograd). Most of the unpublished transcripts and other archival documents were accessed from the GARF.

Chapter 4 discussed the establishment of Soviet Russian state system and traced parliamentary and quasi-parliamentary bodies during the Civil War. The main sources encompassed their published and unpublished transcripts, unpublished archival documents, and works by Bolshevik ideologues and their opponents. Most documents were accessed at the Russian State Archive for Socio-Political History (RGASPI), with supplementary materials located within the collections of the GARF. The internal documents of the Bolshevik Party held particular significance for the chapter. The chapter also incorporated materials from individual Soviet newspapers, such as *Izvestiia* ("News," Petrograd and then Moscow) and *Gudok* ("Whistle," Moscow), and émigré newspapers like the liberal *Poslednie novosti* ("Latest News," Paris).

Chapter 5 featured an analysis of the USSR Congress of Soviets and the TsIK in 1923–1934. In addition to published transcripts of these assemblies, the chapter relied on unpublished archival documents from the RGASPI, primarily related to the internal workings of the Bolshevik Party. These documents included transcripts of the Central Committee Plenums and minutes of its Political Bureau (Politburo). The chapter also drew on the Soviet press, including the satirical magazine *Krokodil* ("Crocodile," Moscow), to analyze the official Soviet perspective on parliaments and the USSR's government bodies. The global implications of the Soviet project were addressed through materials of the Communist International (Comintern), including its magazine *Kommunisticheskii internatsional* ("Communist International," Moscow). Furthermore, the chapter made use of publications by émigré intellectuals, including those in the newspaper *Novoe russkoe slovo* ("New Russian Word," New York).

Chapter 6 delved into the establishment of the USSR Supreme Soviet and its first three convocations. The primary sources for this chapter consisted of unpublished archival documents mainly from the RGASPI, with some materials also from the GARF and the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (RGANI).

Published transcripts of the Supreme Soviet, the Soviet press, and works by Soviet authors were analyzed as part of the official Soviet discourse and propaganda. Amidst the rigorous dictatorial setting of Stalinism, a remarkable uniformity in the discourse prevailed across various Soviet publications and assemblies. The chapter also drew upon publications by émigré authors, including their contributions to academic journals in the USA.

Chapter 7 examined the USSR Supreme Soviet and its functions in 1955–1985, a period marked by minimal changes in the state system, even after the adoption of the 1977 Constitution. The chapter utilized published transcripts of the Supreme Soviet, Soviet press materials, published documents, and individual unpublished documents from the RGANI and the GARF to reconstruct the functions of the Supreme Soviet and its official interpretation. A substantial portion of the chapter was dedicated to the dissident discourse, which drew on *samizdat* and *tamizdat* ("published abroad") materials. Most of the *samizdat* sources were accessed at the Open Society Archives in Budapest (HU OSA). Individual unpublished documents were provided by the Research and Information Centre Memorial in Saint Petersburg.

Chapter 8 focused on the reform ideas within the party leadership since 1985, the emergence of open political debates in the USSR in 1988, and the establishment and functioning of the Congress of People's Deputies and the reorganized Supreme Soviet. Published parliamentary transcripts and press proved to be valuable sources. The chapter made use of *Argumenty i fakty* ("Arguments and Facts," Moscow), which enjoyed wide circulation across the USSR; the early independent newspapers *Moskovskie novosti* ("Moscow News," Moscow) and *Nezavisimaia gazeta* ("Independent Newspaper," Moscow); *Izvestiia*, *Pravda* ("Truth," Moscow), *Literaturnaia gazeta* ("Literary Newspaper," Moscow); and individual issues of local and regional newspapers. Among émigré periodicals, *Strana i mir* ("The Country and the World," Munich) proved to be particularly relevant due to its collaboration with Soviet-based authors and its circulation within the late USSR. Supplementary sources encompassed archival materials, including documents accessible online through the National Security Archive at the George Washington University. The works of government officials, oppositional politicians, and dissidents were also utilized.

The exploration of the broader international reception of Russian and Soviet institutions encompassed various newspapers in English, German, Spanish, Chinese, Italian, and Dutch. Most of these newspapers were examined through ProQuest Historical Newspapers, East View Global Press Archive, the British Newspaper Archive, Google News Archive, and Internet Archive. The study also drew upon contemporary analyses by scholars from the United States, Europe, India, and China. Additionally, several hundred historical photographs and posters were sourced from three repositories: the Russian State Archive of Cinematographic and Photographic Documents (RGAKFD), the State Central Museum of Contemporary History of Russia (GTsMSIR), the Central State Archive of Film and Photo Documents of Saint Petersburg (TsGAKFFD SPb), and the State Museum of Political History of Russia (GMPIR).

Most of the published transcripts of parliamentary and quasi-parliamentary bodies accurately reflected the content of the respective discussions. This accuracy was confirmed through targeted comparisons with unpublished versions. While these transcripts were sometimes incomplete and edited (Kir'ianov and Kornienko 2009), these edits did not alter the overall direction of the debates or discussions on parliaments and parliamentarism within the assemblies. For individual meetings of the Bolshevik bodies, transcripts with visible edits by the speakers were available. Transcripts from the State Dumas, revolutionary assemblies, and perestroika parliaments revealed significant dissensus and non-staged nature of the debates, leading them to be treated as standard parliamentary transcripts. Transcripts of the RSFSR and the USSR Congresses of Soviets and TsIKs were also valuable. They unveiled dissensus and numerous deviations from the Bolshevik normativity. While transcripts of the Supreme Soviet were less useful due to its function as an amplifier for the party's discourse, they still contributed to clarifying certain official interpretations. Transcripts of the Central Committee Plenums proved insightful, as these assemblies operated as a quasi-parliament during a period when Stalin's dictatorship had not yet been firmly established. They also served as a source for understanding the position of the top Bolshevik leadership throughout various periods.

The works authored by policymakers, their opponents, and external commentators were significantly influenced by the immediate political context in most cases. This tendency also extended to the scholarly works produced by pre-Soviet Russian, émigré, and dissident intellectuals. Works written and published within the USSR before the late 1980s were viewed as either adjacent to or fully determined by the official discourse and propaganda. Nonetheless, these publications occasionally offered valuable insights, particularly concerning the peculiarities of official Soviet interpretations of parliaments and specific assemblies. Throughout the study, several diaries and memoirs were employed. Memoirs were treated as biased and unreliable sources. Overall, the diversity of sources allowed for the reconstruction of multiperspective debates on parliaments, parliamentarism, and Russian and Soviet assemblies across all the periods under investigation.

Intellectual and political background

Until 1905, the Russian Empire had no central legislative assembly. Its parts – the Kingdom (Tsardom) of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Finland – had parliament-like institutions in the nineteenth century, although the Polish Sejm was disbanded in 1831, soon after the Constitution of 1815, and the Finnish Diet did not assemble for several decades between 1809 and 1863. Over the nineteenth century, some intellectuals and government officials supported the introduction of a Western-style parliament for the whole empire, while others insisted that it was not needed. The debates about introducing constitution and parliament for the whole Russian Empire had been especially intense since the first decade of the nineteenth century. Key disagreements between the proponents and opponents of parliamentarism concerned the universalist and exceptionalist understandings of Russia's past and present.

The supporters of the universalist view considered the introduction of parliament in Russia possible and desirable, although the debates on Russia's readiness for it continued. The supporters of exceptionalism viewed Western institutions as inapplicable to the Russian state.

The terminology, later used for parliamentary institutions, developed on the territory of the future Russian Empire through reflection on both vernacular and transboundary practices. The terms *veche* ("gathering" or "council"), *duma* ("council"), *sobor* ("gathering" or "assembly"), *sovet* ("council"), *s"ezd* ("congress"), *sobranie* ("assembly"), and *sejm* ("assembly") were used in East Slavic texts since the premodern period (Panov and Lebedev 1936, 51, 57, 70, 85–6, 102, 106, 109, 119, 123, 129, 260, 263, 281, 291). Several premodern and early modern bodies became important for future debates. In the first half of the sixteenth century, the Boyar Duma (*boiarskaia duma*, "the council of lords") developed into a key institution in Muscovy. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there were also several irregular *sobors* and *sovets*, which in the nineteenth century became summarily known as *zemskii sobor* ("assembly of the land"). Russian seventeenth-century officials often used the word *sejm* (*soim*), relevant in the context of the neighboring Grand Duchy of Lithuania and then the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, when referring to foreign assemblies. The word *parlament* ("parliament") was used since at least the middle of the seventeenth century for the English Parliament (Sablin et al. 2021, 15–17).

Over the eighteenth century, multiple collegial bodies were formed in the Russian Empire as part of establishing a modern bureaucratic state. In 1711, Peter I replaced the then already defunct Boyar Duma with a newly appointed advisory body, the Senate (*Senat*), which had supreme authority during the Tsar's absence. In 1721, the Most Holy Governing Synod was established as an appointed administrative body for ecclesiastical matters. In 1763, Catherine II reformed the Senate into an institution of legal oversight, but it remained entirely subordinate to the monarch. She also established the Legislative Commission, a consultative body comprising representatives of social estates and active in 1767–1768. Despite yielding limited results, this body provided a platform for communication between the imperial center and regional elites. Some members of the commission, such as the Buddhist monk Damba-Darzha Zaiaev, had the opportunity to get an audience with Catherine II. Besides, some noble women had a chance to participate in the nomination of candidates (Glagoleva 2021, 79–80, 90; Tsyrempilov 2021, 59). Catherine II's 1785 Charter to the Towns introduced standardized municipal self-government, establishing the municipal dumas, elected by the assemblies of prosperous urban dwellers (Medushevskii 2010a, 17; Sablin et al. 2021, 17).

Parallel to these developments, there were several attempts and suggestions to limit autocracy. In 1730, Anna of Russia signed the so-called "Conditions" that gave authority to the Supreme Privy Council but soon revoked them. Further attempts came under Catherine II, who was born in Prussia and followed the developments of European Enlightenment. In 1762, Nikita Ivanovich Panin, a diplomat and courtier, presented his project of limiting autocracy through the Imperial Council and the reformed Senate to Catherine II but she rejected it. Denis Diderot,

a prominent Enlightenment philosopher, claimed to have suggested during his visit to Saint Petersburg in 1773 that the Legislative Commission be turned into a permanent representative body akin to the British Parliament (Walicki 1979, 5–6; Medushevskii 2010b, 76, 135–43).

The debates on establishing a parliamentary body in the Russian Empire and the searches for its analogs in the Russian past became especially prominent after the American Revolutionary War (1775–1783) and the French Revolution (1789–1799). In 1801, Alexander I introduced the State Council, an appointed consultative institution. In 1809, Mikhail Mikhailovich Speranskii, who was tasked with reforming the Russian government, proposed establishing the legislative State Duma (*Gosudarstvennaia duma*) and further *dumas* at different levels of self-government in 1809. The Tsar rejected the project (Medushevskii 2010a, 21–2, 220, 244–8).

Its territorial expansion into Europe, however, contributed to the introduction of parliamentary institutions in the Russian Empire. During the Russo–Swedish War of 1808–1809, Alexander I agreed to the convocation of the Diet of Finland (the Finnish Estates), an institution which drew its legitimacy from the Kingdom of Sweden, in 1809. The Diet formally established the Grand Duchy of Finland as part of the Russian Empire on the territory that the latter had conquered by then. It also became the first irregular legislative body on the territory of the Russian Empire, even though it was summoned again only in 1863 (Kurunmäki and Marjanen 2021).

Soon after that, in 1815, Alexander I nevertheless approved the first modern constitution on the territory of the Russian Empire in the newly annexed Kingdom of Poland. Prepared by a committee under Adam Jerzy Czartoryski, the Polish nobleman who had previously been Foreign Minister of the Russian Empire, it established an elected legislature, the bicameral State Sejm. However, the Russian Tsar (as the Polish King) remained the supreme authority. The Polish Constitution, which reaffirmed the early modern design of the legislative assembly in Poland and Poland–Lithuania, introduced the concept of the "representation of the people" not only as a principle but also as a parliamentary institution into the official discourse of the Russian Empire (Królestwo Polskie 1815).

> Art. 31. The Polish people [*naród*] will have an eternal representation of the people [*reprezentacja narodowa*] in the Sejm composed of the King and two chambers, the first of which will consist of the Senate, the second [of which will consist of] deputies and delegates from communes.
>
> (Królestwo Polskie 1815)

In 1820, Nikolai Nikolaevich Novosil'tsev, the Russian official in charge of the Kingdom of Poland, proposed a constitution for the whole empire. It used *Sejm* and *Gosudarstvennaia duma* interchangeably for the proposed bicameral parliament, similar to the Polish Sejm. Alexander I rejected the project as well (Novosil'tsev 2010, 270, 283). Although no parliament was established for the whole empire, the use of the term *sejm* (*seim*) in Russian for the Finnish and the Polish assemblies firmly entrenched it in the Russian political discourse.

While the term *sejm* was borrowed from the Polish context, the use of the term *duma* in the early nineteenth century owed to the contemporary beginning of national history writing. Here, the work of Nikolai Mikhailovich Karamzin, the official "historiographer" who became the leading authority on Russian history, was especially important. In *The History of the Russian State*, on which Karamzin had been working since 1803 until his death in 1826 and which was published in 1818–1829, Karamzin and his colleagues, who finished the final twelfth volume based on his drafts, discussed the Boyar Duma and also used the term *zemskaia duma* ("council of the land")[10] for the irregular assemblies (*sobors* and *sovets*) of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Karamzin 1824, 10:8, 75, 227–32, 1829, 12:145, 241, 310–13, 317).

Although Karamzin was a proponent of autocracy and contributed to the rejection of Speranskii's project by the Tsar (Leontovich 1980, 83), his work inspired many Russian intellectuals for treating *dumas* and *sobors* as analogs of Western parliaments and using these terms for proposed institutions. This was part of the development of romantic and civic nationalism in Russia, and similar processes occurred elsewhere in Europe and the Americas. The future participants of the 1825 Decembrist Revolt, the attempt to establish a constitutional monarchy led by a group of noblemen, used the terms *duma* and *sobor* as well as *veche* in their constitutional projects since the early 1820s. Ivan Dmitrievich Iakushkin suggested that the Tsar convened a *zemskaia duma* (Badalian 2013, 141).

Two other Decembrists, Nikita Mikhailovich Murav'ev and Pavel Ivanovich Pestel', both used vernacular terms when proposing institutions modeled after Western European and North American examples. Murav'ev suggested creating a bicameral parliament, the People's Assembly (*Narodnoe veche*), as part of his project of a federation. The Supreme Duma (*Verkhovnaia duma*) would be its lower chamber. Each state of the federation would also have a bicameral parliament, with one of chambers called *derzhavnaia duma* ("state *duma*"). Murav'ev also envisioned extraordinary *sobors*. Pestel' suggested naming the Russian parliament *Narodnoe veche* and the cabinet *Derzhavnaia duma*. He also envisioned the Supreme *sobor* as the "oversight" (*bliustitel'naia*) branch of power. According to Pestel', however, before convening a constituent *sobor*, the foundations for a representative government in Russia were to be created by a provisional government (Murav'ev 2010, 313, 320–1, 2011, 162–4, 166, 170; Pestel' 2010, 330).

In the 1830s and 1840s, the proponents of universalist views on political development supported the introduction of Western institutions, including parliament, in Russia. Some of the intellectuals who would become collectively known as the Westernizers, however, deemed Russia unready for a constitution (Belinskii 1941, 93–4; Seddon 1984, 443). The book *Russia and the Russians* by the émigré author Nikolai Ivanovich Turgenev, who had been accused of being part of the Decembrist plot, was the first lengthy discussion of parliament (which he mainly called "representation") by a Russian author. Supporting universalism, he argued that "good" institutions, like representative government, remained good for all peoples and countries without exception. Turgenev insisted on direct representation but supported electoral qualifications (Turgenev 2001, 277, 300–1, 450–1). Some projects

went beyond the Russian Empire. The members of the Brotherhood of Saints Cyril and Methodius, a Ukrainian political organization, envisioned in 1846–1847 a federal union of Slavic countries in Eastern Europe to be governed by the federal *sejm* (Kotenko 2020, 7).

Karamzin's work also inspired opponents of parliamentarism in Russia. Since the 1840s, the Slavophiles, the proponents of Russia's uniqueness, polemicized with the Westernizers on the nature of historical institutions. The Slavophiles argued that *duma*, *veche*, and *sobor* were not and should not be equivalents of Western parliaments, foregrounding the supposed consensus between the Tsar and his subjects at such assemblies in the past and, possibly, in the future. In the early 1850s, the Slavophile Konstantin Sergeevich Aksakov made *zemskii sobor*[11] the standard term for a consensus-based Russian assembly. The Westernizers rejected the idea of consensus arguing that the *veche* (in the case of Novgorod) was an institution of decision-making by the majority, just as in constitutional states (Sablin and Kukushkin 2021, 106, 111, 121).

The publication of the general legal code of the Russian Empire since the 1830s stimulated the development of legal scholarship and the emergence of jurists as a professional group (Redkin 1846, 4, 11–2). In the 1840s–1860s, state law (*gosudarstvennoe pravo*) rapidly developed in Russia in connection to the scholarship in the broader European context. The works of John Stuart Mill, Robert von Mohl, Johann Caspar Bluntschli, and others were well-known to Russian intellectuals. The German philosophy of law, especially the notions of civil society and legal state (*Rechtsstaat* in German or *pravovoe gosudarstvo* in Russian), proved especially influential. The idea that the state and society (or public) had equal status became central for the liberals of the second half of the nineteenth century (Medushevskii 2010a, 32).

The Great Reforms of the 1860s–1870s under Alexander II, which began with the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, introduced new institutions and further stimulated the debates. In 1864, the new system of local (*zemstvo*) self-government was introduced in parts of European Russia. It included *zemstvo* assemblies (*sobranie*), formed through indirect and non-universal elections, at district (*uezd*) and provincial (*guberniia*) levels. Between the assemblies, the *zemstvo* units were run by administrations (*uprava*), formed by the assemblies. In 1870, municipal dumas were turned from executive councils into assemblies. When the reforms were being prepared and carried out, several projects of an empire-wide representative body were submitted to Alexander II. In 1861, the historian Afanasii Prokof'evich Shchapov suggested the "reestablishment" of a central assembly (*zemskii sobor* or *sovet*) to be elected by regional assemblies. In 1863, Minister of Internal Affairs Petr Aleksandrovich Valuev, who briefly employed Shchapov as an expert on Old Believers, proposed forming a consultative Congress of State Deputies. It was to be elected by provincial *zemstvo* assemblies and subordinate to the State Council. None of the projects were, however, implemented (Sablin and Kukushkin 2021, 121, 123).

As argued by Mariia Gulakova and Alexander Semyonov (2021), the Great Reforms contributed to the emergence of the concept of imperial citizenship, which combined the creation of a universalizing framework of norms and institutions and

the retention of particularistic specificity during the integration into this framework. In this context, Boris Nikolaevich Chicherin published the first major study of parliamentarism in Russian. In his 1866 *On the Representation of the People*, Chicherin argued that the spread of representative government was a consequence of the demand for freedom that swept across Western Europe after the French Revolution of 1789–1799. He located Russia in Europe and compared its historical assemblies to those elsewhere on the continent but argued that Russia was unready for the immediate introduction of parliament. According to Chicherin, it was only after the emancipation of the serfs that Russia started to organize public life on the principles of "universal liberty and law," which were at the foundation of all European peoples and the precondition for representative institutions. Chicherin's book also firmly established the expression "representation of the people" as the term used for parliament (Chicherin 1866, v, 96–7, 126, 355–62, 381–2).

The Great Reforms also stimulated an oppositional movement within Russia and among Russian émigrés. The émigrés Aleksandr Ivanovich Gertsen and Nikolai Platonovich Ogarev and the secret society Land and Freedom (*Zemlia i volia*), which the two of them inspired, were prominent in the debates on parliamentarism in the first half of the 1860s. The émigré authors used the terms *zemskii sobor* and (*zemskaia*) *duma* for the proposed Russian parliament, to which the cabinet would be accountable, or for a constituent assembly. Some members of Land and Freedom, which existed in 1861–1864, preferred the concept of people's assembly, which implied its self-organized status as contrasted to an officially sanctioned *zemskii sobor*. Petr Grigor'evich Zaichnevskii, a student, published a radical manifesto titled *Young Russia* in 1862. The manifesto denounced monarchy, capitalism, and religion, called for a violent revolution, and anticipated the transformation of Russia into a republican-federative union, "a social and democratic republic," with the transfer of all power to the National and regional assemblies. The elections were to be controlled by the revolutionary government in order to exclude the supporters of the prerevolutionary order from the National Assembly. Zaichnevskii explained the need for radicalism by the failure of the French Second Republic (Rudnitskaia and Budnitskii 1997, 42–4, 143, 146–9, 168; Sablin and Kukushkin 2021, 122–3). The movement hence relied on the previously articulated ideas of parliament and federation and was also part of the broader aftermath of the 1848–1849 revolutions in Europe.

Land and Freedom was revived in 1876–1879 as a *Narodnik* ("Populist") organization. In 1879, its radical members formed the revolutionary organization People's Will (*Narodnaia volia*). The members of the People's Will used the terms constituent assembly (*uchreditel'noe sobranie*), *zemskii sobor*, and *zemskoe sobranie* interchangeably. The concept of constituent assembly, which appealed to the French National Constituent Assembly of 1789, predominated as the slogan. The program of the People's Will, worked out under the leadership of Lev Aleksandrovich Tikhomirov in the fall of 1879, stipulated that "the people's will" could be "articulated and realized by a constituent assembly" elected in free universal elections. The organization also envisioned the formation of a "permanent representation of the people" with "complete authority in all state-wide matters," that is,

an omnipotent parliament. *Zemstvo* bodies became a center for the less radical oppositional movement. The 1879 program of the *zemstvo* movement, published by Ivan Il'ich Petrunkevich, a *zemstvo* deputy and activist in the Chernihiv Province, however, also set the goal of convening a constituent assembly (Rudnitskaia and Budnitskii 1997, 417, 428; Trukhin 2012, 101, 2014, 90; Badalian 2018, 150).

Attempting to resolve the political crisis, Minister of the Interior Miqayel Tarieli Lor'is-Meliqov[12] proposed including local self-government bodies in discussing legislation with consultative rights in 1881 (Medushevskii 2010a, 45–7). The assassination of Alexander II by members of the People's Will on March 1, 1881, prevented him from making a decision about Lor'is-Meliqov's project. During the prosecution of the organization's members in 1882, some of them mentioned the convocation of *zemskii sobor* as their goal, while others abandoned it, arguing that a *zemskii sobor* of nobles, bureaucrats, merchants, and rich peasants would not protect social interests (Trukhin 2012, 100, 103–4, 2014, 97). Other socialists, like Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, still considered the convocation of a *zemskii sobor* by the Tsar as a viable path to liberation in the 1890s (Popova 1998, 151).

As noted by a contemporary author, in the 1870s, the debates on establishing parliament in Russia became mainstream among the intellectuals both within the empire and abroad, with many proponents and opponents of an "elected state representation" (Kavelin 2008, 362, 366, 374–5). Federalist ideas also remained an important part of the debates. Since the late 1870s, Mykhailo Petrovych Drahomanov, a Ukrainian émigré historian and political thinker, supported the idea of convening a *zemskii sobor* in the process of turning Russia into a free federation of Slavs (Kotenko 2020, 8; Sablin and Kukushkin 2021, 123–4).

The moderate takes on parliamentarism benefited from the development of state law in the 1870s–early 1900s, with Aleksandr Dmitrievich Gradovskii, Maksim Maksimovich Kovalevskii, and Moisei Iakovlevich Ostrogorskii being among the field's most prominent representatives. Relying on the Western experience and critically engaging with the works of their Western colleagues, Russian legal scholars theorized about the "representation of the people," describing its possible competence (including the accountability of the cabinet to it), its internal structure (bicameral or unicameral), and the elections to it (proportional or majoritarian, direct or indirect, and so on). Whereas they did not necessarily support the immediate introduction of parliament in Russia or did not publicly voice any opinion on the matter, most of the leading law scholars subscribed to universalist views on constitutionalism and parliamentarism anticipating their eventual introduction in Russia, like elsewhere.[13] B. N. Chicherin's work on the "representation of the people" was also republished in 1899 (Chicherin 1899).

Despite the restrictive reform of *zemstvo* in 1890, self-government bodies remained an important center for moderate opposition. The liberal *zemstvo* opposition consolidated under the slogan of the "representation of the people," but in 1895, Nicholas II refused to include *zemstvo* representatives in government pledging to defend autocracy. Dmitrii Nikolaevich Shipov, who chaired the Moscow Provincial Zemstvo Administration, initiated unofficial *zemstvo* congresses in 1896. In 1903, the Union of Zemstvo Constitutionalists was formed. Another liberal organization,

the Union of Liberation, which united legal scholars, historians, philosophers, and other intellectuals in 1904, developed its own program of parliamentarism. The majority at the unofficial *zemstvo* congress, which was convened by the two unions in Saint Petersburg on November 6–9, 1904, supported a legislative "representation of the people" and appealed to the Tsar for its establishment. The congress also discussed a draft constitution, which was most likely authored by Fedor Fedorovich Kokoshkin and other legal scholars. The draft envisioned a bicameral parliament with a universally elected lower chamber. The upper chamber (the State Council) was to be nominated by *zemstvos*, municipal dumas, and universities. The same month, Minister of the Interior Petr Dmitrievich Sviatopolk-Mirskii proposed to include elected *zemstvo* and municipal representatives in the State Council, very much in line with Lor'is-Meliqov's project (Belokonskii 1910, 33, 41, 47, 49–52, 69, 139–41; Pavlov and Shelokhaev 1996, 41–2, 49; Lukoianov 2000, 12–13; Pavlov, Lezhneva, and Shelokhaev 2001, 29; Tsiunchuk 2008, 103–5).

The idea of introducing a parliament in Russia had many opponents among conservative intellectuals. Mikhail Nikiforovich Katkov, a journalist, argued that parliaments represented not the people but political parties. According to Katkov, the government needed "to get closer to the people" by addressing the people "directly" and "not through a representation of the people" (Katkov 1898, 4). Some conservatives argued that such a direct connection of the Tsar and the people could be realized through a *zemskii sobor* in its Slavophile understanding. In 1889, Aleksandr Alekseevich Kireev, a writer and general, suggested reintroducing the consultative *sobors* for providing the monarch with local information. *Zemskii sobor* became a popular conservative slogan in response to the demands of the "representation of the people." The then conservative Tikhomirov argued in 1902 that the direct communication between the supreme authority and the people was possible only in an organized nation, while in a disorganized one, the "mediastinum" of bureaucracy prevented it. Parliament, according to Tikhomirov, could not reestablish such communication since the deputies only expressed the will of the "politicking estate" and further increased the separation between the state and the nation. He asserted that only the creative and conservative stratum could enable this communication. According to Tikhomirov, such communication could take place at a *zemskii sobor* but could also occur directly through individuals (Sablin and Kukushkin 2021, 113).

Chief Procurator of the Most Holy Synod Konstantin Petrovich Pobedonostsev was also a prominent opponent of parliamentarism. In his *Moscow Collection*, he called the idea of democracy (*narodovlastie*) "one of the most deceptive political principles," rejecting the notion of popular sovereignty. He cited the numerous violations of the principles of parliamentarism in the parliamentary practice of Western countries claiming that the "representatives of the people" did not care about the views of their voters and that ministers depended not on the parliament but on personal connections and political parties. Pobedonostsev concluded that parliamentarism was in crisis (Pobedonostsev 1996, 99–101, 108–11).

Among socialists, there was no unity on the need for parliament. The program of the Union of Socialists-Revolutionaries, formed in 1896, included the need for

"permanent representation of the people in the supreme legislative assembly" (Rudnitskaia and Budnitskii 1997, 504). Among the members of the Socialist Revolutionary Party (PSR or SR), which was established in 1902, there were those who named the convocation of a popular *zemskii sobor* as the condition for stopping terror since it would hold the arbitrariness of the government in check in a peaceful and civilized manner (Zhukov 1989, 140).

Some members of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP or SD), formed in 1898, took a pragmatic stance on parliamentarism, foreshadowing sham parliamentarism. This was highlighted during the debates at the Second Congress of the RSDLP, which took place in Brussels and London in the summer of 1903. After the members of the Jewish Labor Bund (Bundists) departed the congress out of protest, the remaining delegates adopted a program of two parts, "minimum" and "maximum." The maximum part set socialist revolution as the party's ultimate goal and the dictatorship of the proletariat as its prerequisite. The minimum part aimed at establishing a democratic republic in Russia and featured, *inter alia*, the creation of a parliament. Georgii Valentinovich Plekhanov, one of the first Russian Marxists and later a leader of the Menshevik faction of the SDs, voiced a rather cynical view on parliament during the debates.

> If, in an impulse of revolutionary enthusiasm, the people would have elected a very good parliament – a kind of *chambre introuvable* [*unobtainable chamber*][14] – we [the Social Democrats] should try to make it a long parliament, and if the election would have failed, we should try to disperse it not in two years but, if possible, in two weeks.
>
> (Shanshiev 1959, 182)

These words evoked protests from some of those present and other imperial intellectuals and became a popular reference during later debates.[15]

The most radical left-wing intellectuals rejected parliamentarism altogether. Indeed, parliaments as part of the oppressive state machinery were unacceptable for anarchists. In 1873, Mikhail Aleksandrovich Bakunin, who polemicized with Karl Marx and other "statist communists," denounced the antipopular character of the modern state, which only had the goal of exploiting labor for the benefit of capitalists, and claimed that hiding behind the "parliamentary game of sham constitutionalism" did not change the state's nature. Instead of governments and parliaments, Bakunin (2019, 19, 49) supported forming a free, bottom-up organization of communes, regions, peoples, and, eventually, all humans. In his *Words of a Rebel*, first published in French in 1885, the anarchist Petr Alekseevich Kropotkin formulated his stance on parliamentarism. According to Kropotkin, representative regimes were not a source of freedom but a mere acknowledgment of the rights that the people conquered through rebellions. As institutions, parliaments remained representations of the propertied class. Besides, they would always remain an institution of subordination of the majority to a ruling minority; hence their composition was irrelevant (Kropotkin 1906, 89, 101). Responding to the assassination of Minister of Internal Affairs Viacheslav Konstantinovich fon Pleve by an SR in July 1904, an

anarchist group opposed the slogan of *zemskii sobor*, claiming that it would simply legalize the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, and called for the struggle against capital and the state in a proletarian uprising. In November 1904, an Odessa anarchist-communist group dismissed the promises of "political freedom and *zemskii sobor*" by the SRs and the SDs, claiming that they would simply replace the autocratic oppression with constitutional and citing the violence against workers in politically free countries (Kriven'kii 1998, 1:43–4, 71).

Between 1809, when the State Duma as a modern parliament was first proposed, and the start of the Revolution in 1905, there had been almost a century of intense debates on the need for parliament and its possible forms in Russia. The positions that emerged over the nineteenth century consolidated before the revolution and even further so after it began. The revolution, however, created the possibility of implementing these ideas, which ultimately happened with the introduction of a modern parliament under the name of the State Duma in 1905 and the launch of the period of parliamentary developments.

Notes

1 *The New York Times*, February 17, 1925: 25; *The Wall Street Journal*, December 29, 1933: 4.
2 The concepts of sham and nominal parliamentarism are based on Andrei Medushevsky's typology of constitutionalism. Sham parliamentarism refers to a system in which parliament lacks supreme legislative authority legally, whereas nominal parliamentarism refers to a system in which parliament does not effectively exercise its constitutional authority in practice (Medushevsky 2006, 16, 22, 35). The discussion of the new Russian political system as "sham constitutionalism" started with Max Weber but was soon picked up by other authors (Weber 1906; Miliukov 1921).
3 See Kurzman (2008) and Moniz Bandeira (2017, 2020). For comparative discussions of parliamentarism in late imperial modernizations and single-party regimes, see Sablin and Moniz Bandeira (2021, 2022).
4 The party originated as the Bolshevik Faction of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP), which later transformed into a distinct party, the RSDLP (Bolsheviks) or the RSDLP(b). Subsequently, it was known as the All-Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) or the RCP(b) in 1918–1925, the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) or the VKP(b) in 1925–1952, and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in 1952–1991.
5 For a historiographic overview of the imperial turn, see Sunderland (2016). For a detailed discussion of the New Imperial History's approach, see Gerasimov et al. (2009) and Stoler (2009). For an interpretation of the USSR as an empire, see Martin (2001), Suny and Martin (2001), Hirsch (2005), and Kivelson and Suny (2016).
6 See Tsiunchuk (2004) and R. A. Tsiunchuk (2004). For an English-language summary of some of the book's findings. See also Chmielewski (1970), Doctorow (1975), Galai (2004), Harcave (1944), Horowitz (2013, 37–52), Janus (1971), Mindlin (2014), Usmanova (1999), Vinogradoff (1979), and Zaprudnik (1969).
7 See Hosking (1973), Emmons (1983), Verner (1990, 184–350), Demin (1996), Kozbanenko (1996), Smirnov (1998), Lukoianov (2003), Dahlmann and Trees (2009), Kir'ianov (2009), Solov'ev and Shelokhaev (2013), and Solov'ev (2019). See also Hausmann (2002), Häfner (2008), Pearson (1972), Lerner (1976), Galai (2010), Thatcher (2011), and Löwe (1992).
8 See Lih (2020). See also Ekiert, Perry, and Yan (2020).

9 See Fimiani (2011, 237) and Urban (2011, 44–5). In Italy, the establishment of a consensus forum was gradual, see Pinto (2019, 11–12). In Turkey, the Republic of China, and Spain, there were many more opportunities for expressing dissenting views than in the USSR. See for instance, Demirel (2011), Edwards (1999), and Payne (1999, 390).
10 This term was not used in contemporary sources with the same meaning.
11 The Slavophile Aleksei Stepanovich Khomiakov first used the term *zemskii sobor* in a theater piece in 1833.
12 Russian: Mikhail Tarielovich Loris-Melikov.
13 See, for instance, Gradovskii (1885, 250–337).
14 It was the name given to the Chamber of Deputies that was elected after the Second Bourbon Restoration in 1815 and that was controlled by Ultra-royalists.
15 See, for instance, Kistiakovskii (1916, 558–9).

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1 Representation of the people

The making of the State Duma, 1905–1907

Following the establishment of the legislative State Duma on October 17, 1905, and the adoption of the new Fundamental State Laws of the Russian Empire on April 23, 1906, Vladimir Matveevich Gessen and Boris Emmanuilovich Nol'de, two prominent liberal legal scholars, listed Russia, together with Iran and Montenegro, as the new constitutional states. Articulating a widespread opinion, they claimed that Russia's failures in the Russo–Japanese War (1904–1905) unmasked the inefficiency of bureaucratic autocracy, contributing to a broad liberation movement across the country, that is, the Revolution of 1905–1907 (V. M. Gessen and Nol'de 1907, 2:565–6).

The establishment of the State Duma was a milestone in the prolonged intellectual and political developments in Russia and also part of the imperial transformations of the early twentieth century, which engulfed, *inter alia*, the Russian, Ottoman, and Qing Empires. During these transformations, parliamentary institutions were built into the imperial repertoires of governing diverse populations and contributed to the construction and consolidation of political communities. Some of these political communities appealed to particularistic categories of nationality (ethnicity), religion, and class; others sought to include the whole empires, accommodate diverse interest groups, prevent the shared social space from disintegrating, and reinforce imperial states. Parliaments played a crucial role in the attempts to modernize empires and build inclusionary and heterogeneous imperial communities. They were supposed to resolve the paradox between the implied homogeneity of a nation and the inherent heterogeneity of imperial formations as composite polities based on the differential distribution of rights.[1] Although many Eurasian intellectuals perceived the Western system as universal, they were not uncritical, with some suggesting that the Eurasian empires were not yet ready for such a level of popular participation as in the West. At the same time, some rejected the very idea of introducing a Western-style parliament (Kurzman 2008; Moniz Bandeira 2017).

The State Duma, which had its seat in the eighteenth-century Tauride Palace in Saint Petersburg (Figure 1.1), reshaped imperial politics. The building became a powerful symbol, which circulated on photographs and postcards, giving a material manifestation to the Russian parliament.

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Figure 1.1 A general view of the Tauride Palace, designed by the architect I. E. Starov and constructed in 1783–1789. Saint Petersburg, 1913. TsGAKFFD SPb, E14884.

Although the ruling elite attempted to use the Duma to construct the Russian political nation on the principle of loyalty to the government (Khripachenko 2014, 280), its first (April 27–July 8, 1906) and second (February 20, 1907–June 3, 1907) convocations had situational yet oppositional majorities.[2] As noted by Diliara Usmanova (2014), the first two convocations of the Duma were revolutionary assemblies, and their deputies addressed a broader imperial audience in the first place. The deputies relied on the revolutionary discourses channeled in the uncensored press and other publications as well as at various rallies and congresses, such as, for instance, the congresses of *zemstvo* and municipal activists (Shchepkin 1905). The debates in the First and Second Duma, which were widely publicized through the press, amplified the socialist and liberal discourses, standardized them, and made them into the oppositional mainstream, which was reproduced by a broad array of intellectuals and activists and did not correspond to clear party divisions.[3]

The First and Second Duma became political forums where difference was articulated and co-produced, particularistic claims were formulated, and different versions of an imperial community were developed to reassemble Russia on new principles. The projects of building an imperial community fell into the broader trend of developing non-essentializing legal philosophies and the notion of empires as both modern and viable (Prendergast 2020, 329, 333, 344; Semyonov 2009, 212). Difference, formulated in terms of nationality (Polish, Ukrainian, Jewish,

Kazakh, Bashkir, and other), class (worker and peasant), social estate (peasant and Cossack), religion (Muslim, Jewish, and other), and region (the Baltic region, Siberia, Western Peripheries, and other), played an important role in the self-organization of deputies and in the parliamentary debates, and its ethnic and religious dimensions are relatively well studied.[4]

The production of the synthetic and ambivalent discourse (Brubaker 1998, 55), which imagined the community (Anderson 1991) of Russia's overlapping ethnic, religious, and social groups, received much less attention. The appeals to Russia and the "people" as well as the widespread homogenizing notion of the parliament itself, which was described as the "representation of the people" (*narodnoe predstavitel'stvo*) and, collectively, as the "representatives of the people" (*narodnye predstaviteli*), also contributed to the integrative function of the Duma (Semyonov 2009, 191–2). As noted later by Vasilii Alekseevich Maklakov (2006, 34), a leader of the liberal Constitutional Democratic Party (KD or the Party of People's Freedom) and deputy of the Second, Third, and Fourth Duma, the public (*obshchestvennost'*) in general viewed popular sovereignty as the source of the late imperial reform, while the Tsar traced it to his sovereignty.

Debates on parliamentarism and the introduction of the State Duma

The Revolution of 1905–1907 launched mass, participatory politics across the former Russian Empire, not only in towns but also in some rural settings (Steinwedel 2000, 555). Members of the intelligentsia, workers, and some peasants made economic and political demands, to which the Imperial government partially conceded, establishing the legislative State Duma. During the Revolution, scholarly and political debates on democracy and parliamentarism also became especially intense, with a number of new works being published across the empire.

Richard Pipes viewed the *zemstvo* movement of 1904, which began with the *zemstvos* uniting for the relief effort during the Russo–Japanese War, as the start of the revolution. Indeed, after the first "legal" *zemstvo* congress and the launch of the liberal "banquet campaign," organized by the Union of Liberation and featuring a series of banquets of different professional groups at which political demands were made, in November 1904, Tsar Nicholas II conceded to some demands in the wake of the disastrous war. On December 12, 1904, in a Decree to the Governing Senate, he formally expressed his interest in reforming the state by extending self-government rights, improving workers' conditions, increasing religious tolerance, empowering ethnic non-Russians, and relaxing censorship and political persecution, albeit he personally excluded the point on representation from the draft of the Decree. With the shooting of a peaceful demonstration in Saint Petersburg on January 9, 1905, known as the Bloody Sunday, the events turned violent on a massive scale. Agrarian and military riots, strikes, pogroms against Jews, and other forms of civil disorder and unrest, which in some regions of the empire started in 1904, spread to many areas. Unionism, that is,

the formation of political unions on occupational principle, and political parties became the prime forms of political self-organization throughout 1905. The same year, the first soviets ("councils") emerged among workers as strike committees (Lazarevskii 1909, 3–6; Ascher 1988, 3, 127, 130, 138, 152, 161–2; Pipes 1991, 18–21; Tsiunchuk 2008, 106; Sablin 2018, 34).

During the revolution, the discussions of parliaments and parliamentarism, which had been previously confined to intellectuals, officials, and émigrés, became widespread, thanks to popular rallies, the activities of unions, numerous congresses, the short-lived freedom of the press, and the legalization of political parties. The academic discussions remained deeply connected to international, predominantly European, scholarship. Western works on constitutionalism and parliamentarism were available in original and were also published in Russian translations, often with introductions by Russian scholars. The works of the liberal Heidelberg Professor Georg Jellinek,[5] who developed a dualistic approach to studying the state as both a social and legal phenomenon, circulated widely both in original and in translations. Those of William Anson, Abbott Lawrence Lowell, and Julius Hatschek were also known to Russian scholars. Although both Russian and Western authors continued to rely on country-specific data and acknowledged differences between different European states, parliaments remained part of the normative modern universalism for many of them (Flanden 1906, ii). Jellinek, for instance, described parliament as "the organized people" and the institution that enabled the people itself to become the primary body of government (Ellinek 1908, 429–33).

In the introduction to Woodrow Wilson's *The State*, which in its Russian edition had the subtitle *The Past and Present of Constitutional Establishments*, Kovalevskii stressed that participation of citizens in political power was the main feature of the modern constitutional state, with local self-government playing a pivotal role in its stability. Even though societal self-government developed in the West, according to Kovalevskii, the political past of Western Europe and Russia had similarities, which was a premise for its establishment in Russia. Together with Kovalevskii's conviction in the evolution of the state and humanity at large, this contributed to his idea that the Russians had to learn from the achievements of the "Romano-Germanic" world, albeit not uncritically (Kovalevskii 1905, xxix, xxxiii–xxxv, xliii).

In his own three-volume work *From Direct Democracy to Representative and from Patriarchal Monarchy to Parliamentarism: The Development of the State and Its Reflection in the History of Political Theories*, which was published in 1906, he sought to summarize the entirety of Western experience of state development "from the times of the Athenian Republic until the French one" and prove that there was progress in the history of the state. The title of the book also summarized the direction of this development, which ultimately led to the "system of societal self-organization under a hereditary or elected leader." The main characteristic of parliamentarism, the end result of this development, according to Kovalevskii, was the establishment of cabinet

accountable to parliament and consisting of its members. He argued that the experiments with elements of direct democracy, referendum in the first place, meant that the progress had not stopped with parliamentarism (Kovalevskii 1906, 1:iv–vi). He concluded the introduction to the work with an address to the Russians.

> The government of the society through representatives, both of the highest interests of the country as well as of local administration, and alongside this the freedom of self-determination for individuals and for whole groups – these are the inestimable advantages provided by parliamentarism, and they are quite enough to understand why the states that have temporarily settled on the idea of separation and balance of powers, like, for example, the United States of America, are irresistibly striving, even contrary to laws and the constitution, to subjugate the executive authority to the legislative, to the transfer of leadership of domestic and foreign policy into the hands of the country's representative assembly and the committees appointed by it. May this example serve as a lesson for us as well. Thinking about creating something national, we will not dwell on the intermediate stages in the development of the system of the society's self-government: neither on the estate monarchy, nor on the representation of various types of property interests, nor on the system of balance of powers; while preserving the hereditary leadership of the nation by its historical leader, we will put the system of the society's self-government at the basis of the Russian renewal.
>
> (Kovalevskii 1906, 1:vii)

On February 18, 1905, Nicholas II signed the Rescript to Minister of Internal Affairs Aleksandr Grigor'evich Bulygin, in which he included the possibility of inviting elected representatives for preliminary development and discussion of legislation, and the Decree to the Senate, which ordered the Council of Ministers to consider proposals of individuals and public bodies on the improvement of state system. A commission under Bulygin was created for working out the form of participation of elected representatives (Lazarevskii 1909, 18, 22; Tsiunchuk 2008, 106).

The preface to the first edition of the volume *Constitutional State*, prepared by Iosif Vladimirovich (Saulovich) Gessen and Avgust Isaakovich Kaminka, two prominent legal scholars, argued that its articles on elections, design, and operation of foreign parliaments would be especially important in practical terms in the context of the February 18 act and the decision to convene representatives of the people. Similar to other works, the volume supported the teleology between absolutist states and legal states (*pravovoe gosudarstvo*),[6] guarded by a constitutional system, in "civilized" countries (I. V. Gessen and Kaminka 1905, i–ii).

Among other contributions, the volume included a chapter by Mikhail Andreevich Reisner,[7] a legal scholar and Social Democratic (SD, that is, member of

the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party or RSDLP) activist, on the "representation of the people." Following Jellinek, Reisner argued:

> The people and the representation of the people are one and the same. As a collegial body of the state, it [the people] exercises [one] part of its own functions directly, and the other [part] through its representatives, who at the same time form a body of the state itself.
>
> (Reisner 1905, 136)

Reisner stressed the importance of class differentiation and maintained that most large political parties had a "social-economic element" as their basis. He also noted the importance of differences based on nationality and religion. Although Reisner was critical toward parties, he underscored their pivotal role in politics, that is, the transformation of difference and sporadic struggle into "the conscious and open competition of opposing sides by means of thought and word." In parliament, he argued, the party struggle ended with the vote and the decision of the majority, which transformed the will of the people into legislation. The desires of separate parties were, in this context, the elements from which the people's will was formed (Reisner 1905, 152, 155–6, 160, 164–5).

Apart from theoretical chapters, the volume *Constitutional State* included a draft of the Fundamental Law, prepared by the members of the Union of Liberation, including V. M. Gessen and I. V. Gessen, in October 1904 and published abroad in 1905. Following the Decree to the Senate, municipal dumas, *zemstvo* assemblies, and congresses of representatives of local self-government bodies (in April, May, June, and July 1905) extensively discussed possible reforms, including the design of the "representation of the people," and legal scholars joined these debates. The April 1905 *zemstvo* congress discussed the draft Fundamental Law of the Union of Liberation. According to the draft, the "supreme authority" in the Russian Empire belonged to the Emperor "with the participation of the State Duma." The State Duma consisted of two chambers, the Zemstvo Chamber and the Chamber of People's Representatives. The former was nominated by provincial *zemstvo* assemblies and municipal dumas of large cities proportionally to the population and for the same term as the self-government bodies. The Chamber of People's Representatives was formed through universal male, equal, and direct elections with a secret ballot for three years. Those who were in active military service, the officials of the police, those under guardianship, and those deprived of their rights by court were excluded from the franchise. The Emperor and each deputy had the right to initiative. Only those drafts that were approved by both chambers were submitted to the Emperor for approval. The Duma was responsible for adopting the state budget and introducing additional taxes, fees, and duties. The draft envisioned the Council of Ministers with the State Chancellor as its chairman. The ministers were appointed by the Emperor but were collectively accountable to the State Duma. The deputies had legislative immunity and the right to interpellation. The right to declare war and to sign international treaties belonged to the Emperor, but the Duma had to ratify

all major international agreements (I. V. Gessen and Kaminka 1905, ii; Shchepkin 1905, 4–5; Medushevskii 2010a, 621–2; 2010b, 497, 500–4).

Following the discussion, the April congress approved this draft. It was then revised by a committee of the Bureau of Zemstvo Congresses. Sergei Andreevich Muromtsev, a legal scholar, and Kokoshkin prepared the new draft, which was published in July 1905 (Tsiunchuk 2009, 85; Medushevskii 2010a, 621). The design of the State Duma had only minor changes. The threshold for municipal duma representatives in the Zemstvo Chamber was lowered to include the cities with a population higher than 100,000 people. As for the Chamber of People's Representatives, it was specified that active and passive voting rights belonged to all males who had reached the age of 25. The limitations were extended to include those who were declared debtors (apart from those declared bankrupt), those living in charitable institutions, governors and vice-governors, and officials of the prosecutorial supervision. The new draft also included provisions about the independence of deputies from voters and on the reception of written petitions by the Duma.[8]

As summarized by Nikolai Nikolaevich Shchepkin, a deputy of the Moscow City Duma and member of the Union of Liberation, most participants of the debates agreed that the elections had to be universal, direct, and equal with a secret ballot. The majority of municipal deputies supported voting rights for men and women, but the issue of women's participation in the elections was not settled in the *zemstvo* circles, although many *zemstvo* assemblies resolved in favor of it. Most of the participants of the discussions also favored a bicameral parliament and broad decentralization due to Russia's large territory and diverse population (Shchepkin 1905, 6–17, 23–4, 29, 42–5, 48). In the meantime, in the more radical circles of the public, the slogan of a universally elected constituent assembly grew stronger (Tsiunchuk 2009, 86).

Conservatively minded officials insisted that constitution and parliament could not be introduced in Russia and considered the ideas of a one-time assembly, a consultative *zemskii sobor*, or simple addition of elected representatives to the State Council or its departments and commission (Tsiunchuk 2008, 107). Bureaucrats discussed a possible *zemskii sobor* since January 1905 in the context of the revolution and the disastrous Russo–Japanese War. In February 1905, the Council of Ministers under Nicholas II's presidency considered a possible consultative and irregular *zemskii sobor*, elected from the social estates, but there was no unity in the government on the matter. In March 1905, Minister of Agriculture and State Property Aleksei Sergeevich Ermolov suggested in a letter, which was passed to Nicholas II, to establish a people's *zemskaia duma*, freely elected from all classes and estates, for direct communication between the Tsar and the people on the most pressing issues. Anatolii Ivanovich Kulomzin, a member of the State Council, proposed a bureaucratic *sobor* of the existing governing bodies and four representatives from each province (one from the clergy, the landlords, the merchants, and the peasants, respectively) (Lukoianov 2000, 15–18, 23).

The Slavophile notions of the pre-modern and pre-Petrine Russian state in general and *zemskii sobor* in particular contributed greatly to the debates of a political reform among the right. Already in the fall of 1904, Petr Sergeevich

Porokhovshchikov, a jurist and right-wing author, suggested the "revival" of *zemskii sobor*. In January 1905, a meeting of Saint Petersburg editors composed an address to Minister of Internal Affairs Petr Dmitrievich Sviatopolk-Mirskii, suggesting to convene a *zemskii sobor* of representatives from all estates and classes with "the unlimited freedom of opinions." The same month, the idea was reaffirmed in a newspaper article by the publisher Aleksei Sergeevich Suvorin. Apart from establishing the communication between the Tsar and the "whole Russian Land" and ensuring a strong government, Suvorin expected the *zemskii sobor* to raise the international prestige of the Russian monarchy, especially among the Slavic peoples. In another article, published in February, Suvorin specified that the *sobor* was to consist of some thousand deputies, while the elections were to be almost universal, including women and the ethnic non-Russians who knew the Russian language. The idea of *zemskii sobor* was supported by several other Slavophile and right-wing authors at the time. Most monarchists seemed to agree on an irregular *sobor*, which would meet on the Tsar's rescript and be primarily used for channeling the needs of the people to the Tsar. Its decisions would not be binding for the government (L. L'vov 1926, 1:105–6; Lukoianov 2000, 13–14; Omel'ianchuk 2014, 46). Nikolai Nikolaevich Mazurenko backed the program with historical arguments, claiming that Russian monarchs frequently convened *sobors* for listening to the opinion of the people and interpreted the Legislative Commission, assembled by Catherine II, as a *zemskii sobor* (Mazurenko 1905, 4, 48–9).

Zemskii sobor, in Aleksandr Alekseevich Kireev's interpretation, remained a popular idea among the broader right. Kireev criticized "the bureaucratic autocracy" and deemed the convocation of a *zemskii sobor* an alternative to revolution. His plan was to transform autocracy from bureaucratic into "consultative" through it. In March 1905, the idea of combining autocracy with popular representation, put forward by Nikolai Alekseevich Khomiakov, A. S. Khomiakov's son, was backed by a meeting of several leaders of provincial nobility, but there were also provincial noble assemblies that rejected it. Fedor Dmitrievich Samarin, the son of another Slavophile Dmitrii Fedorovich Samarin, rejected the idea of *sobor* claiming that it would inevitably turn into a parliament and stimulate the revolution. The same month, a group of right-wing politicians under Aleksei Aleksandrovich Bobrinskii united into a party, the Patriotic Union (*Otechestvennyi soiuz*), and discussed their own project of *zemskii sobor*. Vladimir Iosifovich Gurko drafted the electoral regulations, according to which the *sobor* was to include 612 deputies elected from different groups of the population based on property or land qualifications, expecting that the peasants and the landowners would form the largest groups. The *sobor* was to convene for a short period to resolve the most urgent matters of state life, but it was also to form a permanent body, the *zemskaia duma* of 128 members, which would participate in drafting legislation. The Patriotic Union debated on how to prevent the intelligentsia from being elected to the *sobor* and resolved to raise the qualifications (Ol'denburg 1939, 1:272–3; Lukoianov 2000, 19–23).

Many right-wing intellectuals and activists agreed to a one-time *sobor* if the monarch deemed it necessary. Some of the monarchists, who opposed any changes that could threaten autocracy, however, saw the idea of *sobor* as a compromise

and rejected it. Vladimir Andreevich Gringmut, a far-right author and politician, for instance, accused the Slavophiles of a "mystical or aesthetical" policy (Lukoianov 2000, 12). Andrei Sergeevich Viazigin, a historian and later member of the Third State Duma, also dismissed the idea completely. In 1905, he argued that *zemskii sobor* existed when the "tops and bottoms" of the society had the same worldview. According to Viazigin, in the situation when the Russians were fragmented into numerous social strata, including classes, however, its revival was not possible. Furthermore, he argued, the function of gathering local information could be easily performed by press, telegraph, and telephone and did not require a *zemskii sobor* (Omel'ianchuk 2014, 47–8).

The anti-parliamentarism of the radical left also persisted. Petr Alekseevich Kropotkin's position was taken up by other Russian anarchists. In April 1905, an anarchist proclamation dismissed the slogans of *zemskii sobor* and constituent assembly, as well as parliamentarism in general, claiming that socialists in a parliament only brought more harm (Kriven'kii 1998, 1:108–10). The same year, one anarchist group wrote in its proclamation, "Blessed is he who throws a bomb at the *zemskii sobor* on the first day of its convocation."[9]

As for the discussions among the ruling elites, Nicholas II was inclined to support an irregular consultative *zemskii sobor*, but the Bulygin's commission suggested a permanent assembly of 400–500 people. Sergei Efimovich Kryzhanovskii of the Ministry of Internal Affairs was the main advocate of introducing the State Duma. On May 23, 1905, Nicholas II brought Kryzhanovskii's project of a bicameral consultative body, consisting of the State Duma and the State Council, to the Council of Ministers. The name of the new body was taken from Mikhail Mikhailovich Speranskii's project (Lukoianov 2000, 24–7), which was referenced directly during the official discussions of the new institution at the closed Peterhof Conference, held on July 19–26, 1905, and chaired by the Tsar. Some participants of the conference viewed the gathering of local information and the communication between the Tsar and his subjects as the main objective of the Duma, supporting thereby the Slavophile interpretation of *zemskii sobor*. The historian Vasilii Osipovich Kliuchevskii, one of the few liberal voices at the Peterhof Conference, located the Duma in the history of people's representation in Russia, which he traced to the *zemskii sobors*, and stressed the need to base legislation on the will of the majority of the people, hence attempting to define the Duma as a parliament. Although most of the ruling elite did not see the Duma as a parliament and rejected the very idea of limiting autocracy, Nicholas II's attempt to de-modernize the proposed institution even further by calling it a *Gosudareva* ("of the autocrat") rather than *Gosudarstvennaia* ("of the state") *duma*, which he made at the Peterhof Conference, was shut down ([P. N. Miliukov] 1910, 21–2, 34, 80–1, 220).

Despite the broadly supported slogan of a legislative assembly, Nicholas II's Manifesto and the Statute (*Uchrezhdenie*) of the State Duma, published on August 6, 1905, established the State Duma only as a consultative body, which would participate in preliminary development and discussions of draft legislation to be then passed to the Tsar ("the Supreme Autocratic Authority") via the State Council. It had the right to initiate legislative proposals, albeit not on the state system, and

the right of interpellation, though it was limited to supposed violations of law by officials. The Duma's term was set at five years, but the Tsar could dissolve it by a decree before that. There were some similarities to the *zemstvo* project, as the deputies were deemed independent from voters. They, however, were not granted immunity. Furthermore, if a deputy did not satisfy the electoral qualification anymore, he lost his status. The Electoral Law, also published on August 6, 1905, introduced non-universal, indirect, and unequal elections. High property qualification excluded most subjects. The franchise, divided into three "curial" groups (landowners, townsmen, and peasants), excluded women, students, those in active military service, some groups of nomadic indigenous peoples, workers, and many intellectuals. Police officers and some other officials were also excluded, like in the *zemstvo* project. The voting age was also set at 25 years. For the peasants, the elections were to have four tiers; for petty landowners, they were to have three; and for large landowners and rich townspeople, they were to have two. Different stages of elections had secret ballot. The elections in the Kingdom of Poland, the Urals, Siberia, Central Asia, and the Caucasus were to be regulated by additional acts. The Manifesto stated that the way of including the Grand Duchy of Finland into the Duma would be settled later (Lazarevskii 1909, 99, 101, 103–7, 115–23, 125–6).

The "Bulygin Duma" attracted much criticism from liberals and socialists. Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, the leader of the Bolshevik Faction of the RSDLP, called for boycotting it, noting, *inter alia*, that its electoral law was "a direct mockery of the idea of representation of the people." The boycott itself, according to Lenin, had to be accompanied by agitation for an armed uprising for the "genuine representation of the people," that is, the constituent assembly (Lenin 1960, 166, 170).

The preface to the second edition of the volume *Constitutional State* claimed that "Bulygin Duma" did not reflect the desires of the society at all but was still important (I. V. Gessen and Kaminka 1905, v). The volume's second edition also included an article by V. M. Gessen on the Duma, in which he compared it to foreign parliaments. His conclusions were extremely harsh. He maintained that the State Duma was not a representation of the people in the genuine sense of the word and did not represent even the enfranchised groups and that it was not a body of legislation, which remained undividedly in the hands of unaccountable bureaucracy. V. M. Gessen (1905, 525–6) argued that the Russian public opinion would never recognize the Duma, in the form established on August 6, 1905, as a representative body and that it would never be a "normal and permanent" body.

The *zemstvo* congress, which assembled in September 1905, also rejected the "Bulygin Duma" and demanded civil liberties, universal elections, and a legislative Duma. The unions, which formed the Union of Unions, and other organized groups of the population expressed dissatisfaction with the government's political concessions and organized the October General Strike, during which the slogans of constituent assembly and republic were articulated across the empire. Following the defeat of the conservatives under Pobedonostsev, the reformist program of Sergei Iul'evich Vitte, who was then the Minister of Finance, predominated. As a result, the Tsar signed the so-called October Manifesto (October 17, 1905), which granted Russian subjects civil liberties, including the freedom of speech,

assembly, and association. The State Duma was turned into a legislative, albeit still non-universally elected assembly. The Manifesto also envisioned the extension of the franchise. On October 19, 1905, the Council of Ministers was turned into a modern cabinet, with Vitte appointed its Chairman. The October Manifesto did not stop the revolution, and violence continued, with major street fighting in Moscow in December 1905. The government redoubled its efforts to suppress the unrests by force. It nevertheless continued to work on developing the new system. On December 11, 1905, when the uprising in Moscow, which had constituent assembly among its slogans, was in full swing, the new electoral law broadened the franchise by including a new curia for the workers and extending voting rights to several other categories of the population (Lazarevskii 1909, 151, 157; Tsiunchuk 2009, 87–8, 90; Sablin 2018, 34, 42).

The inclusion of the right to association into the October Manifesto contributed to the legalization of existing political parties and led to the emergence of new ones. The two largest socialist parties, the Socialist Revolutionary Party (PSR or SR) and the RSDLP, were not satisfied with the reforms and continued to support the slogan of democratic republic. The 1903 SD program, which remained in place, included democratic republic – an "autocracy of the people" with the concentration of all state power in the hands of a unicameral legislative assembly – only as an immediate task, with a social revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat being its ultimate goal. The SRs also included the slogan of revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat, into their draft program in 1905 but ultimately dropped it in favor of democratic republic ruled by the people through their elected representatives and referendums. Both parties supported universal suffrage without the discrimination based on gender. The SRs also included broad autonomy for regions and urban and rural communities and federative relations between nationalities, with their right to self-determination, while the SDs simply mentioned the right to self-determination for all nations "of the state" (*Programmy russkikh politicheskikh partii* 1905, 54–6, 64–5; Arinin and Shelokhaev 2002, 97).

Defending the SD unicameralism, the Armenian SD Bogdan Knownyanc[10] maintained that even elected second chambers, such as the Senate in France, continued to represent the interests of the propertied classes and would hence slow down the legislation developed for the benefit of the toiling people (Radin 1906, 15). Although the SRs overwhelmingly supported unicameralism, there were voices in favor of bicameralism within the party, and the number of chambers was not mentioned in their first program. Speaking at the First Congress of the PSR, which took place on December 29, 1905–January 4, 1906, Viktor Mikhailovich Chernov, one of the party's leaders, suggested that a non-privileged second chamber representing the country's autonomous parts was possible in a federative system (Erofeev and Shelokhaev 1996, 1:405).

Given that the two major socialist parties sought to continue the revolution, they opposed the limited system of the State Duma. The PSR unanimously resolved to boycott both the institution and the elections to it at their congress in late December 1905 (Erofeev and Shelokhaev 1996, 1:246). The RSDLP did not have a single opinion. As summarized by Lenin in January 1906, both the Bolsheviks and the

Mensheviks agreed that the "current Duma" was "a pitiful counterfeit of people's representation" and that it was "necessary to fight against this deceit" and "to prepare for an armed uprising to convene a constituent assembly freely elected by all the people." The Mensheviks, however, supported the participation in the voting for delegates and electors at the different tiers of the elections, but not the deputies themselves, while the Bolsheviks advocated a complete boycott. The Mensheviks, according to Lenin, considered using the delegates and electors to create a people's duma, a free and illegal representation, something like "an all-Russian soviet of workers' (and also peasants') deputies," while the Bolsheviks did not see any reasons to, first, use the Duma for that and, second, to create new soviets since the old ones were still in place (Lenin 1968, 158–60).

The liberal KD Party was formed on October 12–18, 1905, during the General Strike, and united the Union of Zemstvo Constitutionalists and the Union of Liberation, with many legal scholars, historians, and other members of the educated public becoming its founding members. It also deemed the reforms insufficient but agreed to participate in the Duma. Although its majority supported universal suffrage without the discrimination based on gender, this point was not binding for the minority that opposed the inclusion of women into the franchise. The party did not have a single opinion on the preferred design of parliament either, with some supporting unicameralism, and others retaining the project of a *zemstvo* and municipal chamber (*Programmy russkikh politicheskikh partii* 1905, 43). As explained by Pavel Nikolaevich Miliukov, a historian and founding member of the KD Party, at the party's constituent congress, it did not support the slogan of democratic republic since some of its members did not support it at all, while others did not see it as part of "practical politics." Miliukov then drew a direct parallel between his party and Western intellectuals, claiming that it was especially close to "social reformists" (Miliukov 1907, 100–101).

The KD party supported broad self-government and envisioned local autonomy in the future. The program envisioned an immediate reestablishment of autonomy of the Kingdom of Poland after the convocation of the "all-empire democratic representation with constitutional rights," which included the convocation of the Sejm. As for Finland, its special state system was to be fully reestablished, and all further matters were to be settled by the legislative bodies of the empire and the Grand Duchy of Finland (*Programmy russkikh politicheskikh partii* 1905, 45). In the amended KD program, adopted in January 1906, the party included universal suffrage for both men and women. It, however, made "constitutional and parliamentary monarchy" its main program point on the state system. The issue of chambers remained open (Lezhneva and Shelokhaev 1997, 1:190–1).

Sergei Andreevich Kotliarevskii, a historian, legal scholar, and one of the founding members of the KD Party, defended the idea of such a chamber and bicameralism in general, maintaining that a unicameral parliament would focus on narrow class interests and threaten with excessive centralization. Accompanied by local and regional decentralization, based on potent universally elected self-government, the second chamber would serve as a safeguard against radicalism and embody democratic decentralization (Kotliarevskii 2008a, 559–60, 572–3). In January

1906, Kotliarevskii explained the KD Party's inclusion of decentralization into its program in the context of "internal peace." According to Kotliarevskii, the empire needed "a national peace no less than a social peace," and therefore, it was necessary to implement the principles of cultural self-determination and local self-government. Kotliarevskii (1998, 44–5) reaffirmed that only "an assembly of people's representatives from the whole empire, based on universal suffrage, can resolve national and regional issues peacefully, establishing Poland's autonomy in the first place and opening up a legal way for the formation of other autonomies."

Given the examples of Finland, which had a parliament, and Poland, which used to have one, the autonomist projects implied the creation of national and regional parliaments in the transformed empire. Although such plans had not been articulated by all particularistic movements during the Revolution of 1905–1907, some unions and other organizations already had clear programs on the matter. The program of the Siberian Regional Union, which was formed in Tomsk in 1905, included the establishment of a regional parliament, the Siberian Regional Duma, with broad competence pertaining to communications, tariffs, indigenous affairs, and other matters. In a similar manner, the idea that Ukraine should be ruled by a regional parliament was widely shared by Ukrainian intellectuals already in 1906 (Sablin 2018, 41; Kotenko 2020, 7).

The more conservative part of the *zemstvo* and municipal movement, which, *inter alia*, rejected autonomy, formed their own center-right party, the Union of October 17 ("Octobrists"), soon after the adoption of the eponymous manifesto. Its program, adopted in February 1906 at the party's first congress, set the development of the "principle of constitutional monarchy with a representation of the people, based on universal suffrage," as one of its goals. The Octobrists rejected the idea of constituent assembly but called for a sooner convocation of the State Duma (Pavlov and Shelokhaev 1996, 60, 62).

Right-wing politicians still did not abandon the idea of *zemskii sobor*, suggesting it as an alternative to the legislative State Duma. In December 1905, the far-right Union of the Russian Persons[11] (*Soiuz russkikh liudei*), chaired by Aleksandr Grigor'evich Shcherbatov, appealed to the Tsar, promising to defend autocracy and asking him to convene a "great *zemskii sobor*" of the Russian people, based on faith and descendance, the people who had "enthroned" Nicolas II's ancestor, in Moscow. The *sobor* was to be convened from the existing estate bodies (Kir'ianov 1998, 1:82–3). In its 1906 program, the Union of the Russian People (*Soiuz russkogo naroda*), a mass right-wing organization, which was formed in November 1905, specified that the "original Russian Orthodox land-state community [*zemsko-gosudarstvennaia sobornost'*]" was to be manifested in the *zemskii sobor* or the State Duma of Orthodox Russians, based on the estate principle and elected from the Church or administrative units. All non-Orthodox peoples were to be included into the *sobor* or the Duma as petitioners (Arinin and Shelokhaev 2002, 40).

The Imperial government organized a series of special conferences for establishing the legal basis for the new system. The laws on elections in the imperial peripheries, which had been developed by a special conference under Dmitrii Martynovich Sol'skii, who chaired the State Council, were published in October 1905–April 1906.

Another commission, which was formally headed by Sol'skii but in practice was led by Vitte and met in November 1905–January 1906, reworked the Statute of the State Duma after the October Manifesto. Given the continued violence, which led to the government's increased efforts to suppress the revolution by force, and the failure to reach an agreement with the liberals on their participation in the Council of Ministers, Vitte took a conservative stance and supported limited rights for the Duma. On February 20, 1906, a new Statute was adopted for the State Duma, while the Statute of the State Council was amended. Parallel to that, the State Chancellery of the State Council developed the Fundamental State Laws of the Russian Empire under the leadership of Petr Alekseevich Kharitonov. The draft that it prepared was a compilation of different European constitutions and included some provisions from the drafts of the liberals. It granted broad competence to the two legislative chambers. It was then discussed at a Tsarskoye Selo conference under Nicholas II and, despite the attempts of the conservative to significantly cut the competence of the Duma, the original draft was only slightly edited. On April 23, 1906, the new edition of the Fundamental State Laws of the Russian Empire was published (Demin 1996, 10–12; Shelokhaev 2008, 141).

According to the Fundamental State Laws, the Emperor exercised legislative authority "in unity with the State Council and the State Duma" but had the exclusive right to initiate changes in the Fundamental Laws. Although no law could come into force without its approval by the State Council, the State Duma, and the Emperor, Article 45 of the Fundamental State Laws stated that when the Duma was not in session and if extraordinary circumstances demanded it, the Council of Ministers could propose a legal "measure" directly to the Tsar. Such "measure" could not change the Fundamental Laws, the Statutes of the State Duma and the State Council, and the legislation on elections and needed to be submitted to the State Duma within two months for its approval by the two chambers. This meant that the Council of Ministers also had legislative competence. As for the two chambers, they had equal rights in legislation, the right to initiative, and the right of interpellation (once again with limitations). The chambers got the right to consider and approve state budget. The ministers were accountable only to the Emperor (Rossiiskaia Imperiia 1909c, 457, 459–60).

The new Statute of the State Duma reaffirmed the five-year term of the Duma and the Emperor's right to dissolve it before the end of the term. The Duma had the right to form departments and commissions. The Statute created the Conference of the Duma, which included the Duma's Chairman, his deputies, the Duma's Secretary, and one of his deputies, for discussing general issues related to the Duma. The independence of the deputies from their voters was retained, but they were not granted full legislative immunity and could be prosecuted without the Duma's consent like other officials. Furthermore, deputations and oral or written petitions to the Duma were explicitly forbidden (Rossiiskaia Imperiia 1909b, 150–1, 154). According to all of the electoral laws, the Duma had 524 members, including those from European Russia (412 deputies), Poland (37), the Caucasus (29), Siberia (25), and Central Asia (21). Finland was ultimately excluded from the Duma completely (Rossiiskaia Imperiia 1909c, 460; Demin 1996, 12–13).

The amendments to the Statute of the State Council specified that the body consisted of appointed and elected members. The latter were elected from territories and from four curias, namely, from the clergy of the Russian Orthodox Church; from associations of nobility; from the Academy of Sciences and universities; and from the associations of trade and industry. The Statute specified that the number of its appointed members "summoned to be present" could not exceed that of the elected ones. In practice, this meant that the reformed State Council had 196 active members, of whom 98 were appointed. Those appointed members who exceeded this number were considered "not present" but not excluded from the body. As for the elected members, 56 were elected from territories, that is, from the *zemstvo* assemblies and provincial congresses of landowners in some territories, for three years, and 42 were elected from curias for nine years. One-third of each curia was reelected every three years. The voters' qualification was the same as for the large landowners in the Duma elections. Only those over the age of 40 could be elected. It was also forbidden to submit petitions in person or in writing to the State Council. The elections to the State Council were based on a very small and privileged franchise. As of 1906, Finland was not represented in the State Council. Neither was the Asian part of the empire (Rossiiskaia Imperiia 1909a, 154–5, 158–9; Demin 2006, 39–43, 48).

The First State Duma

Although the legislation intentionally did not mention the word parliament, some members of the State Duma and the State Council conceptualized these bodies as such. Already during its rather short first and second convocations, the State Duma proved to be a key site of community-building, both in the sense of building the larger inclusionary political community of the empire and the smaller particularistic communities (based on ethnicity, religion, region, social estate, and class) in the larger composite space.

The First State Duma (April 27–July 8, 1906) was elected in March–April 1906 on the basis of the electoral law of December 11, 1905. The peasant and Cossack curias elected some 42 percent of electors, followed by those of the landowners (35 percent) and urban voters (22 percent). The workers' curia elected only 3 percent of electors. In the context of the unequal elections, the workers were also the most underprivileged curia, with 1 elector per 90,000 voters. The peasants (1 elector per 50,000 voters) came next. For the urban population, the ratio was 1 elector per 4,000 voters. The landowner curia was the most privileged, with 1 elector per 1,000 voters. The Russians in Turkestan were overrepresented compared to the indigenous population. In several large cities, including Saint Petersburg and Moscow, the election became *de facto* direct since the parties agitated for candidates and not electors. At provincial electors' congresses, the outcome of voting usually depended on peasants, but they often voted as ordered by the authorities or randomly. The authorities got involved in the elections in other ways as well, arresting undesirable voters and candidates and annulling the results if the latter succeeded, dissolving meetings, and openly supporting right-wing candidates (Demin 1996, 27, 30).

Right-wing activists, many of whom enjoyed the support of the administration, sought to discredit the Duma. As reported by the KD newspaper *Rech'*, in the Vladimir Province, for instance, rumors were spread that only Jews were elected to the Duma and that the Duma would not improve the workers' situation. Furthermore, members of the far-right Black Hundreds reportedly called for violence against Jews and intelligentsia.[12]

Due to the delayed elections in the imperial peripheries, the first meeting of the First Duma was attended by 436 deputies; later on, the total number of deputies reached 497 out of the planned 524. The elections were not finished in most of Central Asia, Eastern Siberia, part of the Northern Caucasus, and elsewhere. The First Duma had one session of 40 meetings. The Duma met in the auditorium of the Tauride Palace. The seats were arranged into a semi-circle so that representatives of different political forces could take places on the left, on the right, or at the center according to their orientations. Behind the rostrum and the seat of the Chairman was a large portrait of Nicholas II (Figure 1.2). Nicholas II met with the members of the Duma and the State Council on April 27, 1906, and called them "the best people," elected by the subjects on his behest, in his speech, but he did not attend the meetings themselves (Shelokhaev 2008, 446–8).

The deputies divided into both political parties and caucuses, which overlapped with the party groups and, occasionally, between each other. Despite the restrictive electoral law and violations during the elections themselves, liberals made up most of the Duma's members. The KD Party formed the largest faction, with the number



Figure 1.2 The First State Duma in session. Tauride Palace, Saint Petersburg, 1906. TsGAKFFD SPb, G1996.

of deputies fluctuating around 180. There were smaller factions of other liberal parties, including the Octobrists, and non-partisan progressives. The moderate socialist Labor Group (Trudoviks) was the second largest faction of 110 members. The SD Faction had 18 members despite the partial boycott. No members of the Union of the Russian People were elected, but there were non-partisan right deputies. The First Duma included many of the leading liberal politicians, including prominent scholars (Figure 1.3). The KD Muromtsev became its Chairman (Demin 1996, 38; Shelokhaev 2008, 447–8).

According to Rustem Tsiunchuk's estimate, some 41 percent of the deputies in the First Duma were non-Russian. Indeed, during the elections, several parties were connected to particular ethno-national projects. The Polish National-Democratic Party (*Stronnictwo Demokratyczno-Narodowe*, legalized in 1905), the Estonian Progressive National Democratic Party (*Eesti Rahvameelne Eduerakond*, founded in 1905), and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutyun, not legalized in the Russian Empire) serve as illustrative examples. Yet only two non-party caucuses in the First Duma were explicitly ethno-national, the Polish Koło ("circle"), which formed their own faction of 33 members, and the Ukrainian Hromada ("community").[13]

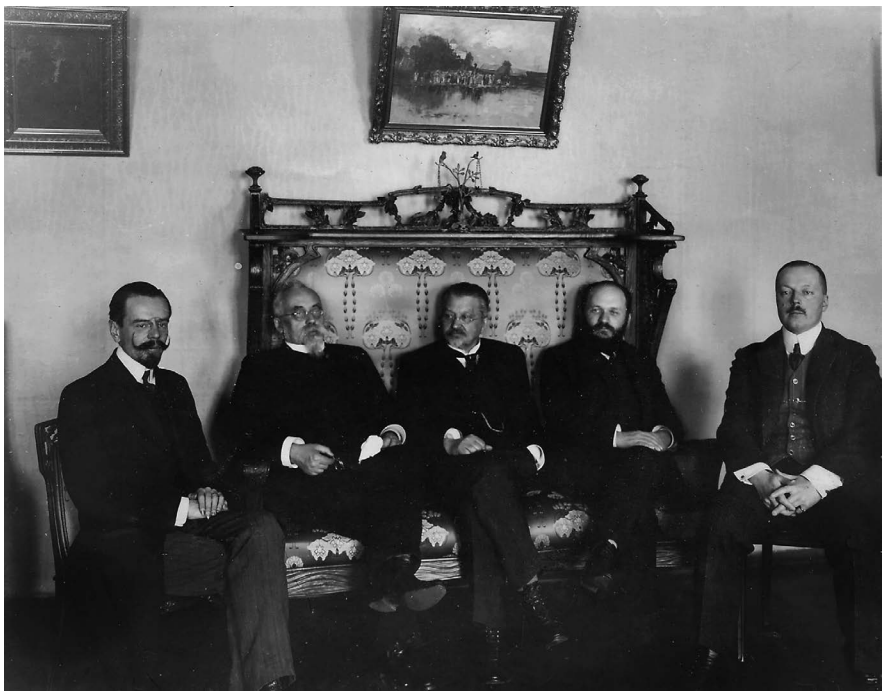


Figure 1.3 KD deputies of the First Duma. Saint Petersburg, 1906. Left to right: F. F. Kokoshkin, S. A. Muromtsev, I. I. Petrunkevich, M. M. Vinaver, V. D. Nabokov. TsGAKFFD SPb, E90.

Other caucuses were based on religion (the Muslim Faction), social estate (the Cossacks), and region (the Group of Western Peripheries) in addition to the party factions. There was also the Caucus of Autonomists (Figure 1.4), which united nationalist and regionalist advocates of decentralization. As argued by Alexander Semyonov, the State Duma was a microcosm of empire not because it ostensibly represented the national or ethno-confessional distinctions but because the parliament itself was based on uneven or multidimensional heterogeneity. The elections, albeit restrictive and representative of just a fraction of the overall population, included several principles, which alternately referenced territorial, social estate, ethno-national, and confessional markers or combinations of them. It owed to the differentiating and individuating approach of the government to imperial space. In the Duma itself it resulted in the articulation



Figure 1.4 A group of deputies of the First State Duma who were part of the Caucus of Autonomists, including members of the Polish Koło and the Group of Western Peripheries, with journalists. Seated, front row, from left: Hieronim Drucki-Lubecki (second), Józefat Błyskosz (third), Martyn Żukowski (fourth), Czesław Jankowski (fifth); second row, from left: Jan Gralewski (second), Eduard von der Ropp (fourth), Stanisław Horwatt (fifth), Jan Harusewicz (sixth); standing, front row, from left: Hieronim Kondratowicz (fifth, behind Gralewski); standing, front row, from right: Antonius Songaila (second); standing, second row, from left: Wiktor Janczewski (first); standing, second row, from right: Szczęsny Leon Poniatowski (first), Bronisław Zygmunt Grabiański (third); standing, third row, from left: Piotr Marian Massonius (second); standing, back row, from left: Tadeusz Walicki (second). Saint Petersburg, 1906, TsGAKFFD SPb, E16243.

of multiple and overlapping categories, with some having been politicized before and with others being operationalized only in the imperial parliament. The intersections between different interest groups, institutionalized as factions and caucuses, and the lack of a single criterion for faction-building embodied the "pluralist nature of political representation" in the First Duma (Semyonov 2009, 211–13, 215–16).

In the First Duma, the KDs, supported by the particularistic caucuses on most issues, had a program of radical democratization. They wanted to introduce political amnesty and stop the state's repressions. As for the land issue, one of the most pressing one for the State Duma, they supported partial transition of privately owned lands to the peasants with a payment to the previous owners. The Polish Koło and the Group of Western Peripheries sided with the KDs on most issues but opposed their plan of redistributing land in their respective regions. The socialist factions supported full expropriation of the propertied classes and opposed any formal concessions to monarchy. They were ready to use the Duma for political propaganda and continuing the revolution. Most deputies agreed that the cabinet had to implement the decisions of the Duma and thereby satisfy the demands of the people irrespective of the exiting legal system. The KDs dominated voting on most issues, but the opinion of the Labor Group was also important, and the KDs recognized it as the opinion of the masses. At the start of the session, the KD Faction and the Labor Group acted jointly, but since late May, this did not happen anymore (Shelokhaev 2008, 448, 450).

The Duma was celebrated as a parliament or the first step toward the establishment of one in the letters that it received from within Russia and from abroad (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1906a, 8–9, 33, 421). It was treated as a parliament by many deputies. When procedure and the Duma's internal structure were discussed, there were references to "Western European parliaments" and "parliamentary countries." Muromtsev, Kovalevskii, and Moisei Iakovlevich Ostrogorskii – all of them members of the First Duma – were treated as experts in constitutional law in the Duma (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1906a, 16, 47–8, 55, 555, 664–5, 783, 785, 787).

Deputies from different factions saw a key function of the Duma in bringing "internal peace" to the country. Already at the first meeting of the Duma on April 27, 1906, the KD Ivan Il'ich Petrunkevich, a lawyer by training and long-time *zemstvo* activist (Figure 1.3), called for Russia's freedom "not to cost any more sacrifices" and for "peace and harmony." As explained at the second meeting of the Duma by another member of the KD Party Fedor Izmailovich Rodichev, also a *zemstvo* activist and lawyer (Figure 1.5), amnesty was the guarantee for peace in the country (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1906a, 3, 24).

The Octobrists also turned to the issue of "peace." Aleksandr Alekseevich Ostaf'ev, a *zemstvo* activist, saw the Duma's "broad legislative work," including the successful resolution of the land question, as the key to the protection of "peace" and "salvation of Russia." Petr Aleksandrovich Geiden, a *zemstvo* activist and one of the founding members of the Union of October 17, pointed to equality as the only way "for the peaceful coexistence of kindred peoples on the same territory" and appealed to the principle of parliamentarism, stating that a cabinet that had the confidence of



Figure 1.5 KD deputies of the First State Duma. Saint Petersburg, April 27, 1906. Left to right: N. I. Kareev, F. I. Rodichev, V. D. Nabokov. TsGAKFFD SPb, D5040.

the Duma could maintain order and establish public peace. Iakov Vasil'evich Il'in, a peasant and member of the Right Faction, also spoke about the Duma's importance in establishing "peace" (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1906a, 71, 81–2, 137; 1906b, 1193).

The KD understanding of "internal peace" as a dual, social and national, peace was included in the text of the Response to the Throne Speech.

> The State Duma, which has representatives of all classes and all nationalities inhabiting Russia among its members, is united by a common ardent desire to renew Russia and to create in it a state order based on the peaceful coexistence of all classes and nationalities and on solid foundations of civil liberty.
>
> (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1906a, 150)

The Duma's response to the Tsar's speech was adopted unanimously after some deputies from the right departed the meeting and hence reflected a liberal and moderate socialist consensus on the need for reforms. As such a program, it aimed at renewing Russia, including the introduction of universal elections, the creation of an accountable cabinet, and the elimination of the State Council. It articulated the Duma's plans to legally establish the inviolability of person as well as the freedom of conscience, speech, press, association, assembly, and strikes; to eliminate all estate, national, religious, and gender limitations and privileges; and to abolish death penalty. The Duma's response also included its intention to transfer parts of the private lands to the peasants, to establish social security for the workers and ensure

their right to self-organization, to introduce universal free education, and to lower the taxes for the poorest at the expense of the rich. It also spoke of the necessity to reform local administration and self-government, to ensure legality in the military, and to satisfy the needs of different nationalities. Finally, it demanded political, religious, and agrarian amnesty (Shelokhaev 2008, 448, 450).

As noted by Piotr Marian Massonius,[14] a philosopher of Russian–Polish background and member of the Group of Western Peripheries, which represented the Krajowcy ("Fellow Countrymen") regionalist movement and also called itself the Circle of Deputies of Lithuania and Rus' (Figure 1.4), the document was similar to a political program rather than a response to the Tsar, when it was still being discussed (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1906a, 88). Aleksei Fedorovich Alad'in (Figure 1.6), a political activist of peasant background and one of the founding leaders of the Labor Group, however, argued that the address was indeed a manifesto, a "Charter to the Russian People" (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1906a, 88).

The Council of Ministers responded with a declaration, which was approved by Nicholas II and read in the Duma by Prime Minister Ivan Logginovich Goremykin on May 13, 1906. The declaration stressed the limits of the Duma's competence. Although the cabinet agreed on the need to grant the peasants legal equality, to care for the needs of the workers, to introduce universal education, to change taxation, and to reform local administration with the peculiarities of the peripheries in mind,



Figure 1.6 Members of the Labor Group of the First Duma. Saint Petersburg. April 27, 1906. Left to right: A. A. Alad'in, I. V. Zhilkin, and S. V. Anikin. TsGAKFFD SPb, E16246.

it stressed that liberties should not be abused. The declaration completely rejected any forced transfer of private lands to the peasants. It also deemed the extension of the franchise premature due to the lack of experience of the Duma. Finally, it stressed that amnesty was beyond the Duma's competence and declared the intention to continue suppressing violent unrests. The Duma responded with a unanimous resolution acknowledging that the cabinet did not want to satisfy the people's demands for land, law, and freedom. It called for the cabinet's resignation and the formation of a new cabinet based on the trust of the Duma (Shelokhaev 2008, 450).

The Duma continued to send numerous inquiries to the cabinet, which mainly concerned repressions, but they were not stopped. The most important matter was the anti-Jewish pogrom in Białystok on June 1–3, 1906. The Duma also sent a commission there, after which it laid the blame for the pogrom on the police, administration, and the military. Not all inquiries were purely symbolic. The inquiry concerning those affected by bad harvest resulted in the cabinet's draft on providing assistance, which was adopted by the Duma, the State Council, and signed by Nicholas II into law, becoming the only one enacted during the First Duma. As for the agrarian issue, the First Duma was largely used by the leading political forces for articulating their stance on the matter. The drafts of the KD Faction, which proposed to partially transfer private lands to the peasants with a compensation, and the Labor Group, which proposed to liquidate private land ownership, were transferred to the Duma's agrarian commission (Shelokhaev 2008, 450).

Numerous deputies, including those who supported particularistic (ethnic, religious, class, and other) interests, evoked the idea of a homogenous civic nation, building on the notion of "the representation of the people." Jaan Tõnisson,[15] a founder of the Estonian Progressive National Democratic Party, member of the KD Faction, and member of the Caucus of Autonomists, urged the Duma to be "the reason of the nation" (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1906a, 650). When the First Duma discussed its response to the Tsar's speech, one Trudovik deputy stressed that it should overcome program differences because it had to be the address of the nation and not an address of individual parties. Alad'in used the terms nation and people interchangeably. The idea of the "representation of the people" also drove the rejection of the half-appointed State Council, the *de facto* upper chamber, as an intermediary between the monarch and the people's representatives by both liberals and Trudoviks. Kovalevskii, who headed the minor center-right Party of Democratic Reforms in the Duma, argued that the State Council was the supreme administrative body and could not hence be at the same time a legislative body (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1906a, 79, 106, 115, 175, 214). After Goremykin rejected the demands of the Duma's response, Vladimir Dmitrievich Nabokov (Figure 1.5), a legal scholar and one of the founding members of the KD Party, demanded the subordination of the executive to the legislative branch in line with the "principle of people's representation" (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1906a, 326).

For both the KDs and the Trudoviks constructing the Russian nation required full civil equality through the elimination of existing discrimination based on gender, nationality, religion, and social estate (Ruthchild 2007, 9). The KD Kokoshkin (Figure 1.3) deemed "civil equality of all citizens of the Russian Empire"

necessary and claimed that it became possible since the whole popular mass joined the upper classes at the historical scene. He underscored the need to eliminate all privileges and limitations of social estates, all forms of national and religious discrimination, especially those related to the Poles and the Jews, and gender inequality (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1906b, 1006–8). Kokoshkin used etatist argumentation when advocating the construction of a Russian nation.

> After all, the establishment of civil equality is not only a matter of justice, it is a matter of state necessity. If we want to really construct a new state building, we must remember that legally, according to our legislation, at the present time we do not have a people, a nation in the legal sense of the word; we have only separate groups of the population, separate tribes, nationalities, and class groups, which are subordinate to one authority, but they do not constitute one legal whole. […] We do not have a people, a nation in the political sense of the word. A nation is a necessary foundation for a modern constitutional [*pravovoe*] state. It [the nation] is being organized in our country *de facto*, but we need to organize and unite it *de jure*, we need to create the Russian people in the legal sense of the word, we need to create a nation – and such in our time can only be a union of free, equal citizens (*applause*).
>
> (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1906b, 1010)

Rodichev made the same argument, urging to "put an end to inequality" and "initiate the actual creation of a nation" and suggesting that until then the "concept 'Russian people'" was a mere "paper concept" (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1906b, 1020).

The issue of women's rights was raised predominately by the Trudoviks. Some of them argued that the Duma's response to the Tsar needed to specify that universal suffrage included women's suffrage. Whereas the statements in favor of women's suffrage were well-received, the patriarchal arguments against it, made by a non-partisan deputy of peasant background, were also met with applause. Geiden claimed that universal suffrage was unnecessary since the Duma needed to get used to parliamentary activity involving only men first. Most of those who spoke on the matter in the First Duma, however, supported women's suffrage. The KD Abusogud Gabdelkhalik uly Akhtamov[16] (Ufa Province), a leader of the Muslim Faction, opposed the suggestion that Islam did not support women's equality, which some Muslim activists ostensibly communicated to the Trudovik Alad'in, and reaffirmed his caucus's support for women's rights (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1906a, 139–40, 142–4, 147–8; 1906b, 1112–13; Ruthchild 2007, 9).

Multiple deputies focused on the issue of ethnic and religious inequality and violence. Denouncing the Białystok pogrom, Kovalevskii reaffirmed that all-Russian citizens were "brothers" and stood "for each other as one person" (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1906b, 957). Kotliarevskii argued that full civil equality of all-Russian citizens without discrimination on the basis of nationality and religion was to become the main means against pogroms. Petrunkevich decried the official appeals to patriotism when justifying violence against non-Russians, Jews and Poles in the

first place. The Trudovik Alad'in argued that the Russian people were not complicit in the pogroms since all of them were organized by the authorities (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1906a, 573; 1906b, 957–8).

The KDs also submitted a series of legislative proposals on the elimination of death penalty, civil equality, inviolability of person, freedom of conscience, assembly, and so on. The KD Rodichev tied the issue to patriotism, suggesting that "a Russian citizen, no matter how modest his existence" was, "should have the right to call Russia his Fatherland" (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1906b, 1066). The ministers considered them, and they had been discussed form the middle of June 1906. On June 19, Duma approved the draft on the revocation of death penalty. In June, however, the initial consideration of an agreement with the KDs in the cabinet dwindled, and it began to see the Duma firmly as the center of revolutionary propaganda. Although in the context of the large interest in the Duma, especially among the peasants, some members of the cabinet were cautious of its immediate dissolution, the majority supported Goremykin's opinion that the Duma was the base of the revolution and a danger to the existence of the state. The opinion at the court was in favor of a compromise with the Duma, and there had been talks with the KD leader Miliukov, himself not a member of the First Duma, about a coalitional cabinet, but he was not ready for concessions (Shelokhaev 2008, 450–1).

The idea of the people as a civic nation did not necessarily mean republicanism. The KDs supported constitutional monarchy. Speaking at the First Duma, the KD Nikolai Ivanovich Kareev, a historian and sociologist (Figure 1.5), asserted that only full unity of the monarch and the nation could lead the country out of the deadlock. Urging to avoid the horrors of the 1789 French Revolution, Kareev maintained that an accountable cabinet was the key to this unity since it established a connection between the monarch and the people's representatives (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1906a, 156–7).

Mikhail Aleksandrovich Stakhovich, a *zemstvo* activist and one of the founders of the Union of 17 October, articulated a minority opinion against parliamentarism. Stakhovich insisted that the accountability of the cabinet to the Tsar would eliminate the danger of "political passions" (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1906a, 154).

Many of the left deputies, however, viewed the people as external to the Duma. The Trudovik Cossack Fedor Dmitrievich Kriukov wrote in a private letter that if the State Council rejected the agrarian law of the Duma, the Russian people itself would have to act (Shelokhaev and Solov'ev 2014, 21). Indeed, the members of the Labor Group grew disillusioned with the ability of the Duma to renew Russia and supported the continuation of the revolution (Shelokhaev 2008, 451). The SDs had no confidence in the Duma from the onset. The Georgian SD Isidore Ramishvili[17] (Figure 1.7), a teacher who had been imprisoned due to his participation in the worker's movement prior to being elected to the First Duma, maintained that the all-Russian people was the only master of Russia. Another Georgian SD Ivane Gomarteli[18] (Figure 1.7), a medical doctor, called the government the enemy of the "whole Russian people" in the First Duma (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1906b, 1284, 1989).



Figure 1.7 SD deputies of the First Duma. Saint Petersburg, 1906. Left to right, standing: Ivane Gomarteli, I. F. Savel'ev, I. E. Shuvalov, M. I. Mykhailychenko, V. A. Il'in, Noe Zhordania, P. A. Ershov, Sergi Japaridze, S. N. Tsereteli; seated: Z. I. Vyrovoi, V. N. Churiukov, I. I. Antonov, A. I. Smirnov, Isidore Ramishvili. TsGAKFFD SPb, E19387.

Although the SDs had an exclusionary vision of the Russian people in terms of class, they envisioned an internationalist political community, both in Russia and beyond. Ramishvili denounced colonialism and Russification and spoke of the bad stereotypes of the Russians in the Caucasus, which nurtured separatism. He also celebrated the newly found unity in class since the Russian proletarians were also oppressed.

> We are happy to prove together with the Russian proletariat to all oppressors that it is not so easy to torture the people. Gentlemen, there is no tribal strife in Georgia, because a powerful proletariat stands there between the bureaucracy and the people. The proletariat has shown its strength and says, 'We are here without distinction of nations – Georgians, Armenians, Tatars – all together under one common banner of the great Russian proletariat. The international slogan is written on this banner in large letters, 'Proletarians of all countries, unite!'"
>
> (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1906b, 1238)

Nationality, however, remained a major point of differentiation. Although those deputies who advocated particularistic interests also supported the First Duma's response to the Tsar and, hence, the idea of a homogeneous civic nation, the issue of making a single nation compatible with group interests remained. Some deputies proposed to legally differentiate ethno-national and regional categories, reconfiguring the empire.

When Aleksander Lednicki,[19] a Polish lawyer, co-founder of the KD Party, one of the leaders of the Caucus of Autonomists, and member of the Group of Western Peripheries, presented the Autonomist program, he specified that autonomy was supposed to be the main principle of reforming the state and establishing the "organic connection of individual elements" into the shared whole. He nevertheless juxtaposed the Russian people and other nationalities, addressing the Duma as the representatives of the former and presenting the program as the demands of the latter (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1906a, 102–3). Other supporters of autonomy stressed its benefit for the whole Russian state. Bolesław Jałowiecki,[20] a Polish engineer and leader of the Group of Western Peripheries, differentiated between individuals, societies, and peoples, all of which could understand each other and find the best forms for shared living through their free agency (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1906a, 606; 1906b, 985, 991–2).

Non-Russian deputies also spoke of autonomy in the context of differentiated approach to the agrarian question. Volodymyr Mykhailovych Shemet,[21] a Ukrainian activist and member of the Caucus of Autonomists summarized this position stating that "many representatives of the enslaved nationalities" had "already expressed the position that the agrarian question in its entirety" could be solved not in the Duma but "only in representative autonomous institutions" (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1906a, 994). Although the Duma proceedings were in Russian, one deputy spoke Ukrainian (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1906a, 178).

The KD Kareev criticized an ethnic, exclusionary understanding of the Russian nation by Russia's ruling elites but also remained cautious about the juxtaposition of the Russians and non-Russians.

> They say, "Russia is for the Russians." I understand this, but I understand this only in the sense in which one could say, "Austria is for the Austrians." But, if in this case the formula "Russia is for the Russians" means something different, if in this case it means only one part of the population, that is, if this formula in Austria sounded like this: "Austria is for the Germans", then I would naturally protest against this with all the strength of my soul. Meanwhile, until now, we have definitely not yet got rid of the idea that the future Russia, which should realize the brotherhood of all peoples inhabiting it, will ostensibly be the Russia of the [ethnic] Russians alone. Here, from this very rostrum, a representative of one of the nationalities of the Russian Empire [meaning Lednicki] addressed us as the "representatives of the Russian people," juxtaposing himself to us. No! Here we see the representatives of the peoples of all Russia, and one part of this assembly cannot in this case juxtapose itself to another part. We are all equal here. We are representatives

> of the peoples inhabiting Russia; among us there are representatives of the Polish people, the Jewish people, the Tatar people, and many other peoples. Some of us are in the majority here, which corresponds to the numerical composition of the population of the Russian Empire, others are in the minority, but we are all equal here.
>
> (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1906a, 121–2)

Kareev advocated the unification of Russia's different groups into one community of Russian citizens but without the assimilation of nationalities. Supporting self-determination of Russia's peoples, Kareev nevertheless viewed the emerging composite community as asymmetric. He argued that the Russian nationality would not lose its position due to its size, culture, and the position of the Russian language, which was the language of "the Russian parliament" and would remain the language of the state. At the same time, Kareev argued that such an asymmetry could only be based on convenience and history and not on domination. He also spoke about the love for the new Russia in terms of aspirational patriotism, as this new Russia would exist for its citizens and represent "supreme justice" (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1906a, 121–3).

Aspirational patriotism and the attention to nationalities nurtured new imperial ambitions. Although the idea of exporting democracy would loom large only in 1917, already in the First Duma, Kovalevskii started formulating such a civilizing discourse. He argued that "the renewed Russia," which would be reconstructed "on the principles of freedom and self-determination of both individuals and whole national groups," would remain a great power and, in addition to keeping its own integrity, it would take care of "justice in the relations of all nations and especially in their relations to the Slavdom." Kovalevskii connected the Tsar's supposed aspiration to ensure international peace to domestic affairs and the need to stop enmity and unrest at home. At the same time, his suggestion was meant to allow Russia to define the principles of international peace, which was to rely on the inviolability of borders and the nations' right to independent development. Furthermore, Kovalevskii's suggestion on including the special care for Slavic peoples, ensuring their freedom and self-determination, in the Duma's response was directly connected to pan-Slavic expansionism (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1906a, 220). Kovalevskii's suggestion was opposed by several KD deputies. Nabokov voiced practical considerations, suggesting that the mention of foreign policy would weaken the response other points. Another KD claimed that the Duma was a domestic institution and hence not qualified to discuss the complexities of international law (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1906a, 220–1).

The Duma nevertheless performed internationally. In June 1906, it received an invitation to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Conference on third-party arbitration between countries, to be held in London. Ostrogorskii celebrated the telegram, in which 326 members of the "oldest," that is, British Parliament, welcomed the members of the "youngest" parliament, the Duma, as a "guarantee of world freedom and human civilization." When the response and participation were being discussed, Alad'in maintained that one way of engagement was to find a group of people

who believed that European or world peace was possible, like it was done in other European parliaments. However, if the whole Duma declared unanimously that it strove to peace not only in Europe but throughout the world, the Duma could acquire international prominence, becoming the leader of the European movement. In the end, the proposal of Ostrogorskii to send a response from the whole Duma with the signature of Muromtsev as its Chairman was adopted. The Duma also resolved to elect a delegation of six people to the conference (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1906a, 531; 1906b, 1853–6, 1858–9; Hollingsworth 1975).

In early July 1906, the Duma's majority adopted a resolution reminding the cabinet of its own legislative rights. The latter considered such a position openly revolutionary, and on July 8, Nicholas II agreed to dissolve the Duma, with a Manifesto on the matter dated July 9 (Shelokhaev 2008, 451). On July 7, an *ad hoc* committee of the First Duma presented its report on equal rights, but the debate never started. It is noteworthy that the Imperial government did not hamper the introduction of women's suffrage in Finland as part of the broader democratic reform, which was passed by the Finnish Parliament (*Eduskunta*). In March 1907, when the Second Duma was already in session, Finland held the first universal parliamentary election in Europe (Ruthchild 2007, 4, 9–10).

After the dissolution of the First State Duma, the Labor Group and the SD Faction insisted on organizing its meetings illegally. The KD leadership resolved to call the population to civic disobedience. At a meeting of up to 230 deputies of all factions in Vyborg (on the territory of the Grand Duchy of Finland) on July 9–10, 180 deputies (mainly KDs, Trudoviks, and SDs) signed a manifesto, which largely followed the KD suggestions. Later, several more deputies supported it. The Vyborg Manifesto claimed that the deputies attempted to legally ensure the freedom of the people and provide peasants with land and called the people to support the Duma by not paying taxes and boycotting conscription, both of which had to be regulated by the Duma. In the meantime, the socialists called the peasants and the Army to overthrow the existing authorities. The manifesto did not have the intended effect. Furthermore, the signers of the manifesto were criminally persecuted, and 155 deputies were sentenced to three months in prison and disenfranchised. Several more deputies were persecuted later (Shelokhaev 2008, 113–14).

The debates in the State Council, which had acquired a new capacity as a legislative body and gained elected members, were far less intense than in the State Duma. The State Council had three main factions: the Center Group, which was the largest in 1906; the Right Group; and the Left Group, the core of which consisted of delegates from the Academy of Sciences and universities. Its first session coincided with the First Duma's term, and there were 15 meetings. The members of the State Council discussed the changed nature of the body, with some of the speakers implying its status as parliament in a constitutional system. When discussing the State Council's response to the Tsar, Hipolit Jan Milewski herba Korwin,[22] a Polish Krajowcy activist, jurist by training, and publisher who was elected from the Vilnius Province, claimed that two of the three drafts were unconstitutional. The first, conservative draft, he argued, misinterpreted the nature of the State Council that was not supposed to guard the foundations of autocracy but had to be one

of the three "equal bodies constituting the legislature," that is, the Tsar and the two chambers. The second draft, which was prepared by the KD leader of the Left Group Dmytro Ivanovych Bahalii,[23] a historian and delegate from the Academy of Sciences, demanded that the State Council approve the decisions of the State Duma and that the cabinet should have the trust of the Duma's majority. Milewski maintained that it contradicted the FUNDAMENTAL LAWS and normal historical development since it demanded an immediate move from the constitutional system to a parliamentary one so that the control over the executive passed from the Tsar to the State Duma. Milewski argued that the "Chambers of Parliament" were only starting their work and did not yet have a chance to prove their experience. Hence, the State Council commission in charge of the response came up with a centrist draft (Gosudarstvennyi sovet 1906, 3:22–3; Demin 2006, 126–7, 146–7, 171, 173).

Unlike Duma deputies, the members of the State Council did not consider their chamber a "representation of the people" and addressed each other simply as "members of the State Council." They nevertheless frequently used the terms "legislative chambers" and "legislative bodies." As for the word "parliament," it was mainly used when speaking about the Duma, but occasionally it was used for the State Council as well. References to "Western" or "foreign" parliaments were especially frequent when procedure, attendance, commissions, and other matters were being discussed. Bahalii, Milewski, and Vasilii Ivanovich Timiriazev, former Minister of Trade and Industry and elected member from trade and industry, were treated as experts on these matters due to their experience with foreign parliaments (Gosudarstvennyi sovet 1906, 3:7, 6:10, 12, 16, 21, 7:9–10, 8:4, 13–14, 13:10, 14:4, 8, 10, 12, 14, 15:2).

The Western experience was not, however, seen uncritically (Gosudarstvennyi sovet 1906, 8:16). Furthermore, when discussing a law on fighting famines, Archbishop Antonii (Aleksei Pavlovich Khrapovitskii), a founding member of the Union of the Russian People and member of the Right Group, was among those who rejected the State Council's status as parliament.

> It would be very sad if the State Council had to become like Western European parliaments, where nine-tenths of the deliberations are spent on various political topics, personal scores, and mutual wranglings, and not on giving an opportunity to work out provisions pertaining to the good of the people.
>
> (Gosudarstvennyi sovet 1906, 12:14)

The State Council also discussed the 1906 IPU Conference in London, and Nicholas II allowed the appointed members to participate in it if they wanted (Gosudarstvennyi sovet 1906, 8:22–3, 13:15).

The Second State Duma

Unlike the First Duma, the Second Duma did not spend much time on trying to conceptualize the Russian legislature. The articulations of an inclusionary Russian nation also were less frequent. The building of particularistic communities, however, remained an important aspect of the Duma's operation.

The Second State Duma (February 20–June 3, 1907) was elected in January–February 1907. Although the legal base stayed the same, the Senate limited voting rights through its "interpretations" of the law. In some provinces, this significantly limited the peasant access to the meetings of electors, although as a social group, they remained quite influential for the results (Demin 1996, 20, 27). The KD press reported on the violations during the elections and denounced the restrictive "interpretations" of the electoral law during the elections to the Second Duma.[24] Those SDs who did not partake in the elections to the First Duma and the SRs revised their boycott. All this resulted in the only Duma elections in which all major parties participated. Many KD and Trudovik deputies of the First Duma could not participate in the elections due to their signing of the Vyborg Manifesto and subsequent disenfranchisement (Shelokhaev 2008, 109). Several Octobrists from the Western peripheries proposed to the party to petition the government to establish separate representation for the "persons of Russian nationality," but the party's congress rejected it in February 1907. Some Octobrists nevertheless joined a deputation that petitioned the Tsar on this issue in March 1907.[25]

The Second Duma had one session of 53 meetings. By the end of the session, there were 517 deputies out of the planned 524. Three more deputies were elected but did not make it to the capital before the Duma was dissolved. The elections were not finished in the Priamur General-Governorship. By the end of the session, the KD Faction was the largest with 124 deputies. The socialists, however, became the largest overall force, with 64 SDs, 38 SRs, 18 People's Socialists, and 78 members of the Labor Group and the Faction of the Peasant Union. There was a small Octobrist Faction of 17 members. Unlike the First Duma, the Second Duma had a sizable organized Group of the Right with 49 members. The KD Fedor Aleksandrovich Golovin, a *zemstvo* activist, was elected Chairman. Among the caucuses, the Polish Koło, the Muslim Faction, and the Ukrainian Faction were among the largest. The Group of Western Peripheries became smaller. There were also a Cossack Group and, unlike in the First Duma, the Group of Siberian Progressive Deputies. The leading role once again belonged to the KDs, while political decisions were made by the KD, the Polish Koło, and the Labor Group. Similar to the First Duma, a majority of liberals and moderate socialists sought radical democratization and legal guarantees for civil rights. There were, however, disagreements on the agrarian question and the tactics of struggle. Whereas the liberals sought to preserve the Duma, moderate socialists and the Polish Koło did not see it as essential. Socialists once again supported redistribution of land (Shelokhaev 2008, 110).

Ahead of the Second Duma's opening, the KDs anticipated a provocation from the right and, seeking to prevent it, the KD Duma Faction and Central Committee worked out the agenda for the beginning of its first session and established relations with the Labor Group, the Polish Koło, the Muslim Faction, and the People's Socialist Party.[26]

Given the dissolution of the First Duma, with its proposals being voided, the KDs resubmitted many of their proposals on specific rights and freedoms to the Second Duma. Socialists also submitted proposals on specific rights and freedoms

to the Second Duma (Pozhigailo 2006, 454–5, 457, 460–1, 465–6, 471–3, 475–7, 481–3, 527, 672–3, 681, 685–8). The KD legislative proposal, prepared for the First Duma and submitted to the Second Duma, specified that universal suffrage was the foundation for a modern state based on the rule of law (Pozhigailo 2006, 506, 515–17).

The agrarian question was at the center of the debates. The socialists and the KDs supported complete or partial transfer of land to the peasants. The Right, the Octobrists, and the Polish Koło opposed it. On May 10, 1907, Petr Arkad'evich Stolypin, the new Prime Minister, declared that there would be no dispossession of the private lands, apart from extraordinary cases. The Duma's majority was against the cabinet's plans on land, but the Duma had no time to consider them. Its own agrarian commission resolved in favor of dispossession but against establishing a permanent state land fund. The Duma also discussed drafts submitted by the cabinet, repressions, and welfare (Shelokhaev 2008, 111).

The budget for 1907 was passed to the budget commission, where the cabinet's proposals were supported with minor amendments, but it was not submitted to the plenary. The commission considered that the Duma needed to decide if "the representation of the people" could take the responsibility for a deficit budget. Altogether, the Duma approved 18 drafts of the cabinet. Three of them, including one on conscripts and one on alleviating the results of a bad harvest, became laws. The State Council did not consider the rest, and they became "void" with the dissolution of the Duma. The Duma committees approved over 70 further drafts of the cabinet, mainly on small financial matters. The Duma also approved its own draft on the inviolability of the person. The Duma approved draft law on the abolition of martial courts, but it was rejected by the State Council. In May 1907, the Duma rejected four of the cabinet's extraordinary decrees on repressions and on raising taxes. The Duma made eleven inquiries, including those on repressions. The Duma's majority refused to discuss revolutionary violence but did discuss political amnesty, passing the matter to a commission. In terms of institutional development, a large contribution of the Second Duma was the creation of the Council of Elders (*Seniorenkonvent*), which included the representatives of all Duma factions (Shelokhaev 2008, 52, 111).

Compared to the First Duma, there were fewer discussions of parliamentarism and the building of an inclusionary civic nation in the Second Duma. The program of the Muslim Faction in the Second Duma reaffirmed the notion of the "genuine participation of the people" in ruling Russia and supported "constitutional parliamentary monarchy," in which the monarch and the people shared the supreme authority (Iamaeva 1998, 49, 52). The Georgian SD Irak'li Ts'ereteli[27] took Nabokov's statement from the First Duma further, demanding the subordination of the cabinet to the will of the people and claiming that only the organized force of the people could ensure it. "We say, in unity with the people, in contact with the people, let the legislative power subjugate the executive power." Some right-wing deputies interpreted Ts'ereteli's words as a call to insurgency (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1907a, 124–6).

During the discussions of general issues, particularistic demands remained important. Polish deputies continued to insist on autonomy for the Kingdom of Poland and for the revocation of restrictions on the Poles in the Western peripheries (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1907a, 906–7; 1907b, 75–6). The interests defined through religion intersected with those defined through ethnicity for the Muslim Faction, which defended the use of native languages and stressed the religious dimension of diversity, by including the equality of all religions, the abolition of a state religion, and the right to have religious education into its program (Iamaeva 1998, 52, 56). Kälimulla Gômär uly Hasanov,[28] a teacher and founding member of the Muslim Labor Group, which split from the Muslim Faction (Figure 1.8), stressed, for instance, that Bashkir rural population wanted the teachers in their local schools to be Muslims, but instead, non-Muslim teachers were appointed, and the children were educated by "a completely different element." He also protested against the use of Russian letters for native languages of the Muslims, and demanded that the teaching at schools was done in native language (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1907b, 184–6).

Although Hasanov and other non-Russians advocated an unrestrained use of native languages, many of them also recognized the importance of the Russian



Figure 1.8 A group of deputies of the Second State Duma who were members of the Muslim Labor Group. Saint Petersburg, 1907. Left to right, seated: Kälimulla Gômär uly Hasanov, Z. Zeinalov, Kh. Atlasov, Kh. Massagutov; standing: F. Tuktarov, Sh. Akhmarov [?]. TsGAKFFD SPb, E19348.

language (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1907b, 186). Sadri Maqsudi,[29] a Tatar jurist, leader of the liberal Muslim Union (Ittifaq al-Muslimin), and member of the Muslim Faction, summarized such a position.

> We have never shied away from the Russian language, and our intelligentsia will always try to spread the Russian language. After all, the Russian language is necessary for us not only as the state language but as the source of science and civilization. Until now, the government tried not to spread the Russian language, but to destroy native dialects [languages]. This is a huge difference. […] When promulgating laws on public education, we must never, gentlemen, lose sight of the diversity of our great Empire.
>
> (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1907b, 553)

Unlike the First Duma, the Second Duma included a sizable Right Group, which included members of the militant far-right Union of the Russian People. Its members defined Russian interests in exclusionary, particularistic sense. They also verbally attacked deputies of other nationalities. For instance, shouts from the right interrupted Hasanov. Somebody yelled, "Go to Turkey" during his speech on language rights. He was again interrupted when he mentioned that the country had become constitutional (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1907b, 186).

The understanding of the Russian people in exclusionary sense was shared by Minister of Finance Vladimir Nikolaevich Kokovtsov, who claimed in the Duma that the "Polish peripheries" benefited at the expense of the "Russian people," which led to noise from the left and applause and affirmative shouts from the right (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1907a, 909).

Socialist deputies discussed the situation in the country in class terms. The SD Grigorii Alekseevich Aleksinskii, a writer and activist, for instance, maintained that his faction represented the proletariat and set the building of socialism as its ultimate goal. On another occasion, he claimed that in Russia, "the class of bureaucrats-landowners" reigned. Aleksinskii also insisted that not only the cabinet's land reform plan but also that of the liberals had to be rejected, as only expropriation of private lands would be beneficial for the peasants. He also reaffirmed that for the SDs, the Fundamental State Laws did not matter since their "main fundamental law" was "the interests of the classes" that they represented in the Duma, the peasants and the workers (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1907a, 247, 463, 1635–6). Ts'ereteli also reaffirmed the importance of class and underscored the leading role of the proletariat in the all-Russian liberation (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1907a, 129).

Other particularistic interests pertained to social estate and region. Cossack deputies articulated specific Cossack interests. Siberian deputies spoke of regional interests in the context of the mass settlement of Siberia (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1907a, 1363, 2264). Nikolai Iakovlevich Konshin, a journalist and ethnographer, who had stayed in Semipalatinsk after he was exiled there, argued, for instance, "As a Siberian, I must say that such government policy threatens innumerable disasters for the natives and old settlers in Siberia" (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1907a, 2271–2).

Nicholas II had a hostile stance on the Second Duma from the onset. Stolypin sought compromise with the KDs but would not make concessions on the agrarian question and needed the Duma to depart from the revolution. The Zurabov Incident – Golovin's sanction against the Armenian SD Arshak Zowrabov[30] after his comment that the Army was only capable of fighting the popular movement at home led to protests by the right-wing deputies and ministers – spoiled the relations between the KDs and socialists. It also most likely made Stolypin support action against the Duma. On June 1, he demanded that the SD Faction was removed from the Duma for being part of the revolutionary RSDLP, which was propagating in the Army. If the Duma did not comply, it would be dissolved. The Duma majority did not recognize party membership as criminal, and, hence, Nicholas II dissolved it on June 3, 1907. Unlike in 1906, this was accompanied by the publication of a new, much more restrictive electoral law, which, *inter alia*, removed the representation of Central Asia (Shelokhaev 2008, 111–12, 215).

There were 16 meetings of the State Council's second session, which ran parallel to the Second Duma. The issue of parliamentarism, just like in the Second State Duma, was touched upon much less frequently. Milewski, for instance, reaffirmed that he supported a constitutional system but was against parliamentarism (Gosudarstvennyi sovet 1907, 83). The biggest issue, concerning the state system, concerned the drafts submitted by the First Duma. Nikolai Stepanovich Tagantsev, a jurist and official, opposed their dismissal, but Timiriazev cited the Western experience where all issues were discontinued once a chamber's session was closed or once it was dissolved. The majority agreed that they should be considered void. The commission in charge of working out the decision agreed that the activities of the two chambers had to be coordinated. Vladimir Karlovich Sabler, a jurist and imperial official, confirmed that this was needed to ensure the "unity of thought and will" of the two legislative bodies (Gosudarstvennyi sovet 1907, 144–8, 152, 164–5, 169).

Debates on the State Duma and parliamentarism

The new legislation and the experience of the First and Second Duma fueled further discussions of parliaments and parliamentarism both in Russia and abroad. Overall, the reception of the State Duma among liberals and other moderates was mixed. Socialists generally dismissed it, although many of them were ready to use it as a rostrum. The far-right commentators continued to reject it.

Liberal commentators tried to position Russia's new system on the assumed universal path from autocracy to parliamentarism or societal self-government. In March 1906, Kotliarevskii, for instance, reaffirmed the need for universal suffrage, but the notion of political evolution helped him justify the establishment of the "Prussian regime" of a non-accountable cabinet as a transitional stage. Although he did not expect "parliamentarism" from the then upcoming Duma, he stressed that Russian progressive parties still needed to strive for a parliamentary system (Kotliarevskii 2008b, 568–70).

Despite their criticism of the new Russian system, liberals celebrated the First Duma as the first Russian parliament. Mykhailo Mykhailovych Mohylians'kyi,[31]

a Ukrainian literary critic, for instance, treated it as such and deemed its dissolution "a colossal mistake" since it obstructed the path of "legitimate parliamentary work" (Mogilianskii 1907, 3, 143). The dissolution of the First Duma made the KD *Rech'* reposition Russia vis-à-vis foreign contexts. It argued that the ruling bureaucracy in Russia was against the very idea of the representation of the people and considered eliminating it. This, according to the newspaper, meant that the cabinet in Russia was not constitutional and differed even from the one in Germany, where it was also non-accountable to the parliament.[32]

Other liberal commentators, however, remained optimistic. The KD Kaminka, for instance, argued that the period of a non-accountable regime until the Second Duma would be much shorter compared to the Russian history before the Duma's establishment. He also called for defending the legacy of the First Duma from its opponents.[33] Nikolai Fedorovich Ezerskii, a lawyer and the KD Party's leader in Penza, argued that although there was much "immature, heated, [and] superfluous" in the experience of the First Duma, it served the country and was driven by the idea of taking it out of the crisis in a peaceful, legislative way. Urging the Second Duma to continue the policies of the first one, he stressed the importance of parliamentary development. "Without making a fetish out of the representation of the people, we must recognize that this is still the most reasonable, easy, and painless way to resolve the conflict" (Ezerskii 1907, 139, 144).

Writing about the Second Duma, Kaminka and Nabokov called for a balanced assessment of the First and Second Duma.

> It must be admitted that the functioning of our young parliament is still unquestionably unsatisfactory. But, in criticizing the activities of our first two Dumas, one completely loses sight of the fact that parliament, although absolutely necessary, is by no means the only condition for a legal state.
>
> Our constitution was introduced in such a way that many other necessary conditions for a constitutional system were absent. It is clear that the Duma could not immediately create these conditions. Meanwhile, the population did not want, and, perhaps, was not able to understand this. It demanded a miracle from the Duma, forgetting that no parliament can perform miracles.
>
> (Kaminka and Nabokov 1907, ii–iii)

Indeed, the population, especially the peasants, were quite hopeful about the Duma, especially the first one. Mohylians'kyi, for instance, wrote about the pessimism of the peasant deputies of the Chernihiv Provincial Zemstvo Assembly after the dissolution of the First Duma. For them, this meant that the Duma would bring no results and that the authorities did not want to grant "land and freedom" to the peasants (Mogilianskii 1907, 129–230).

On the left and the right, the reception of the new Russian system and the experience of the First and Second Duma was overwhelmingly negative. Nikolai Aleksandrovich Rubakin, a writer, educator, and then member of the PSR, argued that the Duma, as established by the act of February 20, 1906, was a mere ornament.

He compared the Duma to the Ottoman Constitution of 1876, claiming that both of them were a mere "a tool in the hands of the central government," "a tool of popular and international deception," intended, *inter alia*, for international bankers (Rubakin 1906, 29, 32). A similar take on the new regime was articulated in an anonymous 1907 book, most likely published by the SRs. It argued that the very adoption of the new Fundamental Laws without the Duma was a violation of the October Manifesto, while the laws themselves bound the Duma "hand and foot." The Tsar, the book argued, continued to see himself as an autocrat and convened the Duma only to trick other states and to ensure foreign loans. The dissolution of the First Duma meant that the experiment with a constitution was a thing of the past and that the Tsar had deceived the people and could not be trusted anymore. The book then argued that a democratic republic was also not a salvation for the toilers, who needed a labor republic instead, and concluded with the slogan of constituent assembly that would establish such a republic and set the path to socialism (B. Z. N. 1907, 56–8, 84, 87–8).

Many socialists nevertheless supported participation in the Duma, especially in its second convocation, for tactical reasons. The Menshevik activist Fedor Il'ich Dan, a doctor by training, for instance, stressed the need to attract popular attention to specific issues through the elections under party programs and the discussions in the Duma, disregarding its nature as a non-parliament and contributing to the future uprising (Tiutiukin 1996, 182). After the experience and the dissolution of the First Duma, Lenin did not support a new boycott claiming that the Second Duma could be used for the "rapprochement with the revolutionary peasantry against the KDs" and as a rostrum for revolutionary agitation. He nevertheless stressed that it could only be secondary to the activities outside the Duma (Lenin 1972, 343).

The SR Mikhail Iakovlevich Gendel'man (Grabovskii), a jurist and activist, denounced the experience of the First Duma in December 1906.

> We cannot consider that bastard, the State Duma, with which the government hoped to buy off the people, a proper body of legislative power. Not all the people send their deputies to the Duma and they do so indirectly, not every citizen has equal voting rights, and the Duma therefore does not reflect the true will of the people.
>
> (Iakobii 1907, 76)

He then criticized the KD initiatives in the First Duma, denying the latter the right to adopt laws since only a constituent assembly could do that. Like his party, he nevertheless did not boycott the Second Duma. The first and main task of the Duma, he argued, was to fight for the constituent assembly, and one had to address the people directly through it. The PSR, according to Gendel'man, wanted to use the Duma for awakening the "consciousness of the people" and for making them acquainted with the SR program; they wanted it to be a revolutionary rally (Iakobii 1907, 76–7).

The anarchists remained firmly antiparliamentarian. A 1906 proclamation of the Moscow Anarchists-Communists, for instance, called the working people to

boycott not only the "Tsarist" State Duma but also a possible "revolutionary" constituent assembly. The toilers were to "lose any faith in their liberation through parliament (from above) and believe only in the might of their organizations." According to the proclamation, when the moment was ripe, the toilers were to liberate themselves by seizing the means of production and organizing communal economy (Kriven'kii 1998, 1:202–3).

Kropotkin himself reaffirmed the radical antiparliamentary view at the Congress of Anarchists-Communists (London, September 17–18, 1906). He rejected the idea of dividing the struggle into two steps – a political coup and economic reforms ostensibly to be implemented by a Russian parliament. The struggle against autocracy and capital was to be simultaneous. Any parliament was a deal between the parties of the past and those of the future and hence would never introduce revolutionary measures. The most revolutionary parliament would be able to only legalize what the people would have already achieved by then. In this context, Kropotkin maintained that the Russian people had a historic chance to take the power into their own hands and surpass the stages that the West went through. According to Kropotkin, the workers were to self-organize into unions for struggling against capital and for ruling themselves later and avoid parliamentary gradualism (Kriven'kii 1998, 1:230–4, 241–2).

Evgenii Iustinovich Lozinskii, an anarchist author, criticized parliamentarism even in the setting of a democratic republic in his 1907 book. He explained that only "different educated gentlemen" would benefit from universal elections since it would be them who would make it into parliament or the Duma. The professionalization of parliamentary work, he argued, resulted in the representation of the working class by those belonging to the hegemonic class. According to Lozinskii, parliament was always the central government of the hegemonic class. Although the workers could make demands from it, they should not and could not participate in it (Lozinskii 1907, 7, 37, 109).

Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoi, the famous writer whose views partially relied on anarchism, also continuously opposed the Duma and parliamentarism in general. In 1906, for instance, he reaffirmed in his open letter to the Penang-born and British-educated Ku Hung-Ming that submitting oneself to a human organization of power instead of the natural or divine order meant remaining a slave. According to Tolstoi, the establishment of parliamentary institutions in the West was simply replacing the violence of one autocrat by that of a group of people. He concluded that in the Qing, Ottoman, Iranian, and Russian imperial formations, the evils of despotism could be overcome by means other than those in the West, that is, through freeing oneself from human authority and submitting to divine authority (Moniz Bandeira 2017, 68–9).

Among the center-right and conservative intellectuals, the attitudes to the new Russian system and the Duma were also mixed. The Octobrist Vladimir Ivanovich Ger'e, a historian and appointed member of the State Council, supported "constitutional" rather than "parliamentary" monarchy. Unlike the latter, the former represented not the rule of parties but the rule of the government above them. Hence, constitutional monarchy kept the benefits of monarchist rule, such as the unity of

will in the state. As independent from classes and parties, monarchy could mitigate the differentiation between them and observe the general interest, the interest of the state (Ger'e 2008, 589–91).

Speaking about the experience of the Duma itself, Ger'e claimed that some deputies had nothing to do with the localities that sent them and represented party organizations. Overall, the Duma represented, in his opinion, the most radical part of the public opinion (Ger'e 1906, 9–10). He also specifically attacked the SDs, calling them "a party of the liberation of Caucasus from Russia, rather than the liberation of Russia from capitalists" (Ger'e 2008, 595–7). Citing the Tsar's limitation of his own authority, Ger'e expressed hope that the Second State Duma would also engage in self-limitation. The representatives' ability of self-limitation, he argued, would free Russia from both the wild terror from below and the repressions from above (Ger'e 1906, 118–19).

Vasilii Vassil'evich Rozanov, a philosopher and journalist, who exhibited a mixture of right-wing and populist attitudes, refused to admit that a "constitution" and a "parliament" were introduced in Russia, maintaining that the Duma was a product of Russian history, produced by the Russian soul, enthusiasm, patience, and work, and not a "foreign novelty." Although Rozanov admitted that the Russian people also moved to liberation like elsewhere, this movement was parallel to those of the others. For Rozanov, however, it did not have the same direction. The Duma did not mimic Western institutions and was not a place for representing difference, and Rozanov called for unity of Russia's political groups there, directed at mitigating the splits in the Russian society (Rozanov 2008b, 607–8).

As for the First Duma itself, Rozanov claimed that it was undoubtedly a parliament, and one "shouty, demanding, raging" at that. It was the KD victory that, in his opinion, made the Duma a real parliament, but it was the Trudoviks who "gave it a popular, beloved character" and who "turned parliamentarism from a public [meaning the educated public] and intellectual phenomenon into a national, all-Russian, all-city, and all-countryside one." The introduction of parliamentarism and constitutionalism in Russia, Rozanov argued, happened, however, too late, "since from the times of Aleksandr Ivanovich Gertsen and Mikhail Aleksandrovich Bakunin, the Russian public took a position far to the left of parliamentarism" (Rozanov 1910, 246–8, 257–8).

Rozanov's aspiration for unity in the State Duma was shattered by the experience of the first two Dumas. Anticipating the convocation of the Third Duma, based on the limited electoral law, Rozanov expected the new Duma to finally become one of the "state" and not one of the "public," rejecting thereby the liberal notion of societal self-organization and voicing his support for etatism. Rozanov expressed hope that the Duma would be a "national Russian" representation and personally attacked the Armenian Zowrabov and the Georgian Ramishvili, the SD deputies in the Second and First Duma, respectively. Rozanov also interpreted the Dumas' composition as a threat to the empire's established elites: he claimed that the "grey-haired old Rus'," embodied by the people of "serious positions and professions," had to listen to the "nonsense" of the deputies from the Caucasus (Rozanov 2008a, 616–17).

Writing in 1906, Vladislav Frantsevich Zalesskii, a legal scholar, economist, and right-wing Black Hundred activist in the Kazan Province, denounced the "imposition of Western European parliamentarism" in Russia. Citing the very negative experience of the First Duma, he was skeptical about the second one. His arguments were primarily directed against liberal universalism, as he relied on the Western criticism of parliamentarism by Josef Schöffel, Ettore Lombardo Pellegrino, Alfred Offermann, Pietro Chimienti, Karl Walcker, and other European scholars and politicians. The issue of party politics was of particular importance for him. According to Zalesskii, contemporary deputies represented party rather than state interests at the expense of common good. He called parliamentary rule a many-head tyranny and a tyranny of the majority, both dismissing the very principle of majority rule as erroneous and pointing out that a minority could impose its will through parliamentarism, depending on electoral constellations, and claim to be the majority (Zalesskii 1909, 1–2, 10–13, 15–17).

Similar to Rozanov, Zalesskii supported the state in its relations with the society (or the public) and claimed that parliamentarism contradicted the idea of the state by allowing the society to take over it. The society for Zalesskii was a people divided by access to moral and material goods and a means for achieving selfish individual interests. It could not overcome the divisions by itself, and only the state, as a force above the society, could subordinate all individual interests to one goal – the goal of the good for the whole people. Parliamentarism that allowed grouping for own interests hence undermined the capacity of the state to do so. Agreeing with the opinion that England's experience was unique, Zalesskii dismissed the notion of parliamentarism's natural spread through the civilized world over the nineteenth century as blind copying of the English system. Citing the experience of the Habsburg Empire, Zalesskii claimed that parliamentarism was specifically dangerous for multiethnic states, as deputies represented not the whole people but their national groups. Finally, Zalesskii offered sporadic cases of corruption and inefficient spending by authorities in Europe and the USA as a proof of parliamentarism's inefficiency. Zalesskii maintained that the West itself was disenchanted with parliamentarism (Zalesskii 1909, 39–40).

The antiparliamentary pamphlet by Schöffel, a journalist and former member of the Austrian Reichsrat, which was originally published in 1902, was published in Russian in 1907. Schöffel claimed that parliamentarism was "the most corrupt form of government, the source of all kinds of decay on the continent" and that "in all great states it demonstrated its own inaptitude" (Sheffel 1907, 8). In the introduction to the Russian translation, Iurii Petrovich Bartenev (1907, 5), a Slavophile and monarchist activist, reaffirmed the main points of right-wing criticism of parliamentarism, maintaining that it emerged from the struggle of parties, relied on private interests and profits, and hence damaged the broader state interests.

The far-right press constantly attacked the Duma. The organ of the local department of the Union of the Russian People in the Smolensk Province, for instance, accused "many" deputies of the First and Second Duma of conspiracy and of assassination attempt on the Tsar.[34] There was, however, no consensus on the issue

of participating in the Duma. In 1906, ahead of the convocation of the First State Duma, a proclamation of the Union of the Russian Persons defended autocracy but argued that the unity of the Tsar and the people was to be manifested through the counsel of the State Duma and the *zemskii sobors*. The latter were to be convened for discussing fundamental laws, "extraordinary" events of state life, and the general directions of domestic governance (Kir'ianov 1998, 1:138).

Despite their rejection of societal self-organization, rightists also participated in mass politics. Speaking at the Third All-Russian Congress of the Russian Persons (Kyiv, October 2–7, 1906), Zalesskii maintained that Russia had to get rid of parliamentarism as the "mediastinum" that prevented unity between the Tsar and the people (Kir'ianov 1998, 1:220). In his 1907 speech, Sergei Fedorovich Sharapov, a founding member of the Union of the Russian Persons, denounced the convocation of the Third State Duma after the complete failure of parliamentarism, which for him manifested in the first two Dumas, instead of returning "to the genuinely Russian foundations and the covenants of history" and convening a "*zemskii sobor*" in Moscow (Sharapov 2010, 338).

Gringmut, who was one of the founders of the Russian Monarchist Party, published a manual for members of the far-right Black Hundred movement in June 1906. Gringmut, *inter alia*, specified that it was "Russia's internal enemies in alliance with its external enemies" who wanted to limit the autocracy of the Russian Tsar. He listed the constitutionalists, democrats, socialists, revolutionaries, anarchists, and Jews as the "internal enemies." Gringmut then explained that a constitution was "a contract, a treaty between the Tsar and the people," which was invented in Western Europe. He asserted that Russia did not need one, as the people in Russia subordinated to the monarch not because of a contract but because of their faith, their oath to, and their love for the Tsar. He then explained that members of parliament only claimed to be the representatives of the people but, in practice, represented only their own parties. According to Gringmut, the First Duma was a parliament in which there were only the representatives of the KD and "socialist" parties. The monarchist black-hundredists were nevertheless expected to respect the laws concerning the State Duma and the reformed State Council since they were established according to the Tsar's will. At the same time, they had to appeal to the Tsar for the abolition of these assemblies since their "experience" had shown their "imperfection" and for the reestablishment of "genuine autocracy." Gringmut defined the "genuine autocrat" as the monarch who ruled himself and was not separated from the people by the "parliament, Duma, or bureaucracy" (Kozhurin, Sinitsyn, and Bogatyrev 2016, 501, 505).

The new system in Russia had a mixed reception abroad. International press described the Fundamental Laws, the details of which were available before their adoption, as "unexpectedly liberal"[35] and "quite of a reactionary nature."[36] There were, however, hardly any foreign observers who viewed the Duma as a parliament equal to its Western counterparts. Some argued that it would be "rather a parliament in name than in fact."[37] Others stressed Russia's backwardness. The Anglo-French traveler and journalist Lionel Decle noted that despite having received a constitution from the Tsar, the Russian Empire would not immediately transform "from its



Figure 1.9 "Learning to Walk." Caricature by J. S. Pughe. *Puck*, June 6, 1906: cover.

present condition" since it was lagging some 500 years behind England and since "the Russians" had to "first learn" that "every right involves a corresponding duty" (Decle 1906, 241–2). Satirical depictions of the Duma's introduction relied on the notion of Russia lagging behind the West (Figure 1.9).

However, many foreign commentators either expressed optimism or noted positive aspects of the Duma's experience. *Chicago Daily Tribune* called the opening of the First Duma the final victory for the people.

> The people have won. The parliament that meets in this capital today is an assembly wrested from the autocracy by force.
>
> It is not a free parliament in the sense that the parliament of England is free, or even to the extent of the liberty enjoyed by the people of Germany and Italy. But it is a parliament, vested with certain rights, and it is safe to say that the autocracy never again will attempt to take these rights away.[38]

Henry Woodd Nevinson, a British journalist, political commentator, and suffragist, called the Duma an "infant parliament" but claimed that "in starting fresh, the

Russian parliament had at least as many advantage as difficulty" and anticipated that it would "rapidly develop improvements" (Nevinson 1906, 333, 335). The famous German sociologist Max Weber used the term "sham constitutionalism" to stress that in Russia the cabinet had all the authority but also noted the activity of the Duma's commissions, which had done more work than any other parliament, "just not in the sense that suited the Tsar" (Weber 1906, 229, 391).

Stephen Boxsal, an American journalist, defended the Duma in his interview with L. N. Tolstoi. Tolstoi claimed that he had no hope in the Duma or any "form of parliamentary government" and argued that parliamentarism was a failure everywhere, citing the "envy and party hatreds" in the United States (US) Congress and state legislatures. Boxsal contended by praising the Duma, in which he "had sat" for six weeks. He found it to be a deliberative assembly in which "all classes of the empire were more or less fairly represented, including, perhaps, even the terrorists and the expropriators."[39]

Some Western commentators retained optimism after the First Duma was dissolved (Salter 1907, 316), but they became overwhelmingly pessimistic once the Second Duma assembled. The dissolution of the Second Duma was called a "death knell" of the people's hopes. The introduction of the new electoral law was called a coup and a "breach of the constitution," while the new election was expected to "exclude the masses" and to make the Third Duma "a mere echo of the Council of Ministers." The radicalism of the socialist members of the first two Dumas was, however, also portrayed as a factor in their dissolution.[40]

In the Qing Empire, the constitutional and parliamentary developments in Russia were closely followed. A group of Qing officials under Duanfang and Dai Hongci visited the Russian Empire for the purpose of studying its political system in 1906. The commissioners shared the public sentiment that autocracy was the cause of Russia's weakness, which manifested, *inter alia*, in its defeat against Japan, and that constitutionalism could be a solution. At the same time, the Qing elites supported a gradualist approach that stressed the need for a period of "preparation for constitutionalism." In particular, Duanfang reported on the tensions between the cabinet and the Duma when describing the unsatisfactory state of things in Russia, while Dai noted that Vitte told the Qing commissioners to be very cautious with a reform of the state system. The difficulties stemming from the rapid introduction of a new system in Russia were also noted by the reform-oriented Qing press. Other Qing commentators used the violence of the Revolution of 1905–1907 as an argument against constitutionalism altogether (Moniz Bandeira 2017, 57–66).

Conclusion

By the time of the Revolution of 1905–1907, the supporters of the universalist view on parliamentarism made up the bulk of the imperial experts in state law and shaped the programs of both liberal and most socialist political organizations. Those who opposed it had a strong foothold in the ruling elites of the empire, with Tsar Nicholas II himself influenced by Slavophile ideas. The debates

continued during the revolution and, even though the State Duma was introduced as an elected legislative institution, there was no consensus if it was an equivalent to the Western parliament.

The new Fundamental State Laws of the Russian Empire did not include the word "parliament," but members of the State Duma saw it as such and sought to incorporate Western parliamentary experience into its practice. The First and Second Duma had few legislative results. At the same time, the representation of the empire's diverse social, ethno-national, religious, and regional categories made the chamber a major site of community-building. While the ruling elites of the empire hoped to integrate the population in loyalty to the Tsar and the government, the integration of a civic nation in the Duma followed a post-monarchic logic: the inclusionary imperial nation could be a source of sovereignty without the need for the dynasty.

Notes

1 See Burbank and Cooper (2010, 8–9, 11–12), Gerasimov (2017, 20–2), Semyonov (2020, 31), and Stoler (2009, 49). See also Kayali (1995), Moniz Bandeira (2017), and Sablin and Moniz Bandeira (2021).
2 The Council of Ministers was not accountable to the Duma, which meant that although the majority of the Duma deputies opposed it, they still could not form their own cabinet.
3 See, for instance, Sablin (2017).
4 See, for instance, Chmielewski (1970), Galai (2004), and Usmanova (2005).
5 Many Russian legal scholars and activists, in fact, had a chance to attend Jellinek's lectures in Heidelberg. His works became available to Russian readers shortly before the Revolution of 1905 (Ellinek 1903).
6 That is, a state governed by the rule of law.
7 German: Michael von Reusner.
8 *Russkie vedomosti* (Moscow), July 6, 1905: 1–2.
9 Quoted in Zhukov (1989, 142).
10 Russian: Bogdan Mirzadzanovich Knuniants.
11 The word "persons" was used in the translation to distinguish this organization from a different one.
12 *Rech'* (Saint Petersburg), April 1, 1906: 2.
13 Rustem Tsiunchuk used contemporary ethno-national categories asserting that the Russians, Ukrainians, Poles, Belarusians, Jews, Tatars, Bashkirs, Germans, Lithuanians, Azeris, Georgians, Latvians, Armenians, Moldovans, Estonians, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Mordvins, Chuvashs, Chechens, Kalmyks, and other "peoples" were represented in the First Duma. Although he noted that some "counted themselves among the Russians," this clear-cut division into nationalities did not reflect the debates in the Duma (Tsiunchuk 2007, 383, 387–8).
14 Russian: Petr Petrovich Massonius.
15 Russian: Ian Ianovich Tennison.
16 Russian: Abussugud Abdel'khalikovich Akhtiamov.
17 Russian: Isidor Ivanovich Ramishvili.
18 Russian: Ivan Gedevanovich Gomarteli.
19 Russian: Aleksandr Robertovich Lednitskii.
20 Russian: Boleslav Antonovich Ialovetskii.
21 Russian: Vladimir Mikhailovich Shemet.
22 Russian: Ippolit Oskarovich Korvin-Milevskii.
23 Russian: Dmitrii Ivanovich Bagalei.

24 *Rech'*, November 7, 1906: 1.
25 GARF, f. 115, op. 1, d. 1, l. 12 (Report to the Committee of the Union of October 17 on unauthorized actions of several departments in the Western peripheries, 1907).
26 GARF, f. 523, op. 1, d. 4, l. 2 (Minutes of the meeting of the KD Duma Faction with the KD Central Committee, February 17, 1907).
27 Russian: Iraklii Georgievich Tsereteli.
28 Russian: Kalimulla Gumerovich Khasanov.
29 Russian: Sadretdin Nizametdinovich Maksudov.
30 Russian: Arshak Gerasimivoch Zurabov.
31 Russian: Mikhail Mikhailovich Mogilianskii.
32 *Rech'*, November 7, 1906: 2.
33 *Rzhevskaia gazeta* (Rzhev), August 20, 1906: 1.
34 *Sychevskaia gazeta* (Sychevka), November 12, 1907: 3.
35 *The New York Times*, March 4, 1906: 8.
36 *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), May 11, 1906: 7.
37 *Los Angeles Times*, March 22, 1906: I14.
38 *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 10, 1906: 1.
39 *The New York Times*, July 7, 1907: SM1.
40 *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 16, 1907: 1; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 23, 1907: B1–2; *The Boston Daily Globe*, June 16, 1907: 1; *The New York Times*, July 4, 1907: 6; *The Times of India*, July 10, 1907: 6.

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2 Legislative chambers

The State Duma and the State Council, 1907–1917

The non-universal, indirect, and unequal elections were further limited with the dissolution of the Second Duma on June 3, 1907, which became known as the "Coup of June 3." The new electoral law, adopted on the same day and prepared by Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs Sergei Efimovich Kryzhanovskii, completely excluded Central Asia and parts of Siberia and European Russia (the Kalmyk Steppe) from representation in the Duma and limited the number of deputies from the Caucasus, Poland, the remaining parts of Asian Russia, and some provinces in European Russia, in which oppositional members of the Duma had been elected before. The new law also split the urban voters into two curias, which increased the representation of the upper urban stratum, changed the distribution of electors between curias, shifting the balance in favor of landowners, and introduced divisions between Russian and non-Russian voters in several Western provinces, Warsaw, and the Caucasus (Demin 1996, 12–14, 28–9; Shelokhaev 2008a, 473–4). As for the State Council, one deputy since 1912 and two since 1915 were elected from Asian Russia (Demin 2006, 48).

Compared to the broad support that its previous convocations, predominantely the First Duma, enjoyed among the empire's population, especially the peasants, the Third (November 1, 1907–June 9, 1912) and Fourth Duma (November 15, 1912–February 25, 1917)[1] were frequently denied the status of the "representation of the people." Among the peasants, the hopes for solving the land question through the Duma were shattered and monarchist sentiments dwindled (Shelokhaev 2008a, 478). The liberal legal scholar Nikolai Ivanovich Lazarevskii argued that no one had any doubts about the illegitimate character of the new electoral law (Lazarevskii 1908, 1:75). Furthermore, despite the continued violations by officials during the elections, especially to the Fourth Duma, the Third Duma annulled the election of only one deputy, while none were annulled by the Fourth Duma. Even when serious violations were evident, the annulment of elections did not get enough votes (Demin 1996, 30–1).

Lazarevskii and many of his liberal colleagues, however, still considered the Russian Empire a constitutional state (Lazarevskii 1908, 1:117). Supporting this view, Boris Emmanuilovich Nol'de called the State Duma the first normally functioning parliament in Russia, reaffirming the country's connection to parliamentary universalism.[2] Indeed, the Third and Fourth Duma became regular bodies of the

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Imperial government, and together with the reformed State Council, they were often referred to as the "legislative chambers." Whereas the drafts adopted by the First and Second Duma and not yet discussed in the State Council were dismissed by it after their dissolution, the absolute majority of some 3,500 drafts of the Third and Fourth Duma had been adopted in the other chamber as well. It is important to note, however, that the bulk of the unamended drafts related to the increase of staff in different state agencies, while the drafts pertaining to more important matters were amended by the State Council, at times in a conservative vein. The amendments and the 46 rejections of drafts were mainly carried out based on the cabinet's position (Shelokhaev 2008a, 141).

Although some of the drafts, which were passed in the Duma, were rejected either by the State Council or the Tsar himself, the Duma played an important role in legislation and debates on multiple issues, despite the limitations. Furthermore, during the First World War, a new oppositional majority, the interparty Progressive Bloc with a coherent program, emerged in the Duma. As an institution, the Duma not only became an important part of the empire's governance and politics but also reconfigured its political topology by bringing non-Russian and non-elite deputies into the government (Semyonov 2009; Solov'ev 2019). The tense relations with the cabinet, however, contributed to the revival of the unionism of the First Russian Revolution during the First World War and the shift of societal self-organization toward extraparliamentary forms. The Duma, nevertheless, was inscribed into the system, and the Progressive Bloc connected it to the *zemstvo* and municipal unions, war industries committees, cooperatives (diverse credit, consumer, and producer societies), and other new or revived organizations.

The Third and Fourth State Duma remained important sites for the building of particularistic communities based on nationality, class, religion, social estate, and region. It was the relatively small yet vocal minorities of the two convocations that continued to articulate the need for autonomy, defended non-Russian language rights, spoke of class interests, and opposed the Russification and Christianization policies in the peripheries. During the First World War, however, the Progressive Bloc made the matters pertaining to nationality, class, religion, and social estate part of its program. As for the integrative discourse of an inclusionary Russianness, it was also still articulated, despite the sizable and very vocal right-wing groups that understood the Russian people in an exclusionary sense. The war was also important in this regard. Already on its eve, the State Duma and the State Council articulated the issue of unity of the whole people and the government. After the war took a disastrous turn for the Russian Empire, the formation of the Progressive Bloc marked the exclusion of the existing cabinet from this unity, but the unity of the Russian nation and "internal peace" had remained crucial for the Duma's majority.

The debates on parliamentarism also continued. Liberal legal scholars, many of them having experience in the Duma, continued to subscribe to parliamentary universalism and to see the signs of Russia's slow transition to parliamentarism. Although socialists harshly criticized the State Duma, they still did not agree on how the Duma could be utilized. Furthermore, some of them saw parliamentarism

in general as progress, especially in Asia. Like before, there were also many critical voices focusing not just on the deficiencies of the State Duma but on the inadequacy of the parliamentary system as such. Some on the left joined the discussion of the crisis of parliamentarism in the West. The discourse of the right continued to foreground Russia's uniqueness and great power status, both of which were ostensibly threatened by parliamentarism, and to decry the perceived violation of the interests of the Russians in exclusionary sense by political parties and the non-Russians.

The Third State Duma and the State Council, 1907–1912

Unlike its predecessors, the Third Duma functioned as a regular legislative body of the empire. This became possible due to the implementation of the new restrictive electoral law and the establishment of a center-right majority.

The Third State Duma (November 1, 1907–August 30, 1912) was elected in September–October 1907. The PSR leadership boycotted the elections to the Third Duma, claiming that even "the most backward strata of the peasants expect nothing from the Duma" (Erofeev and Shelokhaev 2001, 2:32). It had 442 seats, all of which had been filled. In 1910, four more seats were allocated to Finland, following the practical abolition of its legal autonomy, but they were never filled. The Duma had five complete sessions. In 1907, by the middle of the first session, the center-right Octobrists had the largest faction (154 deputies). The Progressist Group (28 deputies) was also centrist. There were three right-wing factions: the Moderate Right (69 deputies), the National Right (26), and the Right (52). The left wing of the Third Duma was represented by the KD Faction (54 deputies), the Labor Group (14), and the SD Faction (19). There had been some changes by the end of the fifth session in 1912. In particular, the Octobrist Faction became much smaller (120 deputies). On the right, there also had been some reconfigurations, with the Russian National Faction (75 deputies) becoming the largest. All three consecutive chairmen of the Third Duma were leaders of the Union of October 17: Nikolai Alekseevich Khomiakov,[3] the son of the Slavophile A. S. Khomiakov, an official and district marshal of nobility, Aleksandr Ivanovich Guchkov, a municipal activist and bank director, and Mikhail Vladimirovich Rodzianko, a businessman and *zemstvo* activist (Figure 2.1). Despite the significant limitation of representation from the peripheries, such as the exclusion of Central Asia, the Muslim Faction was formed in the Duma again. So were the Polish Koło, the Group of Western Peripheries (which was also known in Russian as the Polish–Lithuanian–Belarusian Group), and the Siberian Group (Demin 1996, 12, 15; Shelokhaev 2008a, 618–19).

Unlike the First and Second State Duma, which, despite the then already restrictive electoral law, were treated as the "representation of the people," such a status of the Third Duma had been repeatedly put in question. The Trudovik Nikolai Iakovlevich Liakhnitskii, a lawyer, argued that the Third Duma was unrepresentative of the broad layers of the toiling population (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1908a, 164–5). The Trudovik leader Andrius Bulota,[4] a lawyer and Lithuanian national activist,



Figure 2.1 The agrarian commission of the Third State Duma under M. V. Rodzianko's chairmanship in session. Saint Petersburg, between 1907 and 1912. TsGAKFFD SPb, E19353.

for instance, questioned the legitimacy of the Third Duma in 1911, arguing that its majority was "not the representatives of the people" and made it into the Duma only because of a provocation that sent the "genuine representatives of the people" to penal servitude and that destroyed the more correct "representation of the people in Russia," meaning the circumstances of the Second Duma's dissolution and the adoption of the new electoral law (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1911b, 2194).

The SDs were especially vocal in their criticism of the Third Duma. At the start of its first session, the SD Ivan Petrovich Pokrovskii, a medical doctor, articulated his faction's stance on the Duma. Calling the events of June 3, 1907, a coup and citing the decreased representation of the peripheries, the peasants, and the workers, which made the system favorable to the privileged classes, the SDs were planning to use the Duma to reveal the arbitrariness of the Russian government and demand the representation of the whole people on the basis of universal, direct, and equal elections with a secret ballot without the distinction of religion, nationality, and gender. The SDs, Pokrovskii declared, would watch the Duma's majority and the cabinet and unmask their activity in the interests of the privileged classes and use the right to interpellation to expose the murderous policy of the government. In the SD declaration, which he read out, the Third Duma was deemed one of the

counterrevolution (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1908a, 324–8). In 1912, the Georgian SD Nik'oloz Chkheidze,[5] a municipal activist, sarcastically commented on the parliamentary developments in the country in the context of constitutional law.

> If, for example, a student wants to learn the history of constitutional law, let him, without fear and excitement, follow the transformation of his native parliament [the State Duma] into what, what do you think? Into a vermicelli sorting room [meaning the numerous minor issues submitted to the Duma] or a branch of the Police Department. (*Applause from the left; voices from the right: this is silly; Miliukov is a member of the Police Department; congratulations*). And the Upper House of Lords [the State Council] has turned into a barbed wire, as the chairman of the Budget Commission recently put it.
>
> (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1912d, 335)

Miliukov claimed that the Duma implemented "parliamentarism from the inside out," citing its dependency on the cabinet in the context of the gradual giving up of its independence and freedom and its turning into a political ornament. The arbitrariness, he argued, was not initiated by the "representation of the people," but the Duma sanctioned it (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1912d, 1515–16). The KD deputies nevertheless continued to treat the Duma as a parliament, for instance, during the discussions on procedure (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1909b, 2: no. 277:7). The KD Vasilii Alekseevich Maklakov, a lawyer, cautioned against the devolution of the Duma into a political rally, like it happened to the Second Duma during the discussion of the agrarian question (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1909c, 1: no. 17:86).

The Octobrist Viacheslav Viacheslavovich Tenishev, jurist and a *zemstvo* activist, articulated a similar position when arguing that the primary task of any legislative assembly was not giving speeches but doing fruitful work. Russia, he maintained, was in need of "solid, productive, and quick" legislative work. He concluded that the Duma "should not be a place where one speaks to voters over the heads of deputies by means of verbatim reports but a place where things are done" since providing legislation that the country needed was the "only correct way to truly pacify" it (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1909a, 1321–3). In a similar manner, Guchkov insisted that the Duma needed to be not "a diplomatic conference of representatives from warring parties, classes, and nationalities but a united Russian State Duma, a united Russian representation of the people" (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1908a, 139–40).

The decisions of the Duma depended on the Octobrists, who initially worked closely with Prime Minister Petr Arkad'evich Stolypin, although their relations spoiled during the second session, and the Russian National Faction became his new base in the Duma. The Duma attempted to alleviate the situation of peasants without affecting the interests of land owners, with the work concentrated in the agrarian commission (Figure 2.1). The center-right majority supported Russian interests in exclusionary sense, violating those of other nationalities. Since January 1911, the Duma's relations with Stolypin worsened and, on several occasions, it voted

against the cabinet's proposals. Later that year, the situation led to a constitutional crisis, and since then the coordination between the cabinet and the Duma's majority halted (Shelokhaev 2008a, 619, 622–3). During the constitutional crisis in April 1911, Nikolai Nikolaevich L'vov, a co-founder of the centrist and then already non-existent Party of Peaceful Renovation and, soon, a co-founder of the centrist Progressive Party (Progressists), claimed that the crisis had demonstrated not only the absence of a constitution and parliamentarism in Russia but also the non-existence of the Fundamental Laws, suggesting that Russia, in fact, had no organized state system whatsoever. (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1911a, 2951).

The status of the Duma as a parliament was reinforced due to its involvement in interparliamentary exchanges. Ivan Nikolaevich Efremov, a former leader of the Party of Peaceful Renovation and another co-founder of the Progressive Party, organized and headed the Russian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in 1909 and, together with other deputies, went abroad as part of the Duma's delegations and participated in receiving delegations of foreign parliaments. One deputy referred to the visit of the British parliamentary delegation in 1912 as an "exam" for the Duma carried out by the "best parliamentarians" (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1912c, 297). Miliukov participated in the Duma's library commission that sought to receive legislative materials of all of the world's parliaments (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1908b, 155–6).

The far-right Nikolai Evgen'evich Markov, an engineer and nobility activist who since 1910 was the leader of the Union of the Russian People, by contrast, celebrated the sham parliamentarism of the Duma, claiming that everything that did not rely on the "age-old consciousness of the people" was an illusion.

> In general, at the beginning of the twentieth century, we found ourselves, gentlemen, in some kind of an illusion theater [cinema], similar to such illusion theaters on Nevsky Prospekt [the main street of Saint Petersburg]; nowadays illusions are everywhere; everywhere they represent not what is; we live, undoubtedly, in an autocratic state, but people lull themselves and assure others that there is some kind of a constitution in Russia. No one sees this Russian constitution in reality, no one feels it, and, thank God, that no one sees or feels it. But dreamers talk about the constitution and not only talk about it in their everyday life but also put it on show for the real constitutionalists, the real parliamentarians [meaning the British parliamentary delegation that was visiting in 1912] and boast: we are parliamentarians and we are constitutionalists; that is, they laugh, of course, in their hearts, but the show goes on. (*Voices from the right: bravo, and applause*).
>
> (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1912c, 328)

The right also interpellation to inquiry into the Prime Minister, in which they accused liberal professors of agitating students against the government. In particular, they quoted from V. M. Gessen's published lectures on Russian state law, which he delivered at the Saint Petersburg Polytechnical Institute in 1907–1908. Gessen stated that autocracy was, in view of the new Fundamental State Laws, a

mere political ornament and a historical reminiscence due to the establishment of constitutional order and criticized the State Council as an "estate-bureaucratic" institution that because of its composition could only play a negative role and was a terrible hurdle for the State Duma. The Duma commission that considered this interpellation, however, found nothing criminal in the lectures but claimed that the opposition of professors to the government was a negative tendency (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1910b, 413–15, 1910d, 1: no. 35:3–4, 20). Maksim Maksimovich Kovalevskii and Konstantin Nikolaevich Sokolov, who was a member of the KD Party and taught at Saint Petersburg University, were among other legal scholars whom the right accused of partisanship, as they included numerous hours on parliamentarism and constitutionalism into their curricula and ostensibly "revolutionized" their students that way (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1911a, 2498–9, 2505).

In the context of the Duma's fallout with the cabinet, the Right Octobrist Nikolai Gavrilovich Cherkasov, a lawyer, businessman, and *zemstvo* activist, criticized the emerging "parliamentarism" in the legislative sphere, without its technique being mastered, and in the sphere of the relations with ministers, which turned into bullying them. In particular, he criticized the far-right Vladimir Mitrofanovich Purishkevich, previously an official, co-founder of the Union of the Russian People, and, after his departure from the organization, the founder of the Archangel Michael Russian National Union, a radical right-wing monarchist party, the Georgian SD Evgeni Gegech'k'ori,[6] an activist, and Guchkov, accusing the latter two of parliamentarism. Cherkasov then expressed his hope that there would be no parliamentarism in Russia (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1912d, 775–8).

The Duma nevertheless adopted numerous drafts that had become laws, including on construction of the Amur Railway, on parole, on police reforms, on funding educational institutions, on local court, on women's rights to take exams for higher education and receive academic titles, on copyright, and on women's equality in inheritance rights. The laws on the right of the Imperial legislative chambers to issue laws extending to the Grand Duchy of Finland, on the rights of Russian citizens in the Grand Duchy of Finland, on introducing *zemstvo* to the Western peripheries, and on establishing the Kholm Province were detrimental to the Finns and the Poles. The Duma also approved Stolypin's reform of commune land property, which had already been implemented through extraordinary decrees, in 1910 after a compromise with the State Council. The State Council rejected the Duma's drafts on extending religious freedom, on probation, on universal primary education, on the establishment of county (*volost'*) *zemstvo*, on the extension of the Duma's budget right, on municipal self-government in the Kingdom of Poland, and on allowing women to become lawyers. Overall, even the center-right majority of the Third Duma was constrained by the State Council, which followed the directions of the Tsar and the cabinet. Although the Third Duma succeeded in adopting new legislation in education, self-government, administration, military, women's rights, and agrarian matters, it did not succeed in speeding up the reforms that were anticipated during the Revolution of 1905–1907. Furthermore, some of the Duma's legislation supported the policy of Russification, thereby fueling nationalist sentiments among non-Russians (Shelokhaev 2008a, 622–4).

Liberals and moderate socialists submitted numerous proposals that pertained to civil liberties, popular representation, decentralization, national self-determination, economic welfare, and social justice. Despite the efforts of the opposition, the results of the Third Duma in progressive legislation were very limited. Although the law on extending *zemstvo* to the Astrakhan, Orenburg, and Stavropol Provinces was royally approved, the State Council rejected the 1908 draft law on the introduction of *zemstvo* to Siberia and the Arkhangelsk Province in 1912. The State Council also rejected or ignored the drafts on religious freedom and universal education. Some adopted laws pertained to social matters. However, the law on workers' insurance, for instance, included a limited number of workers and was not based on socialist proposals about laying the fees on businesses. The radical democratic proposals – universal suffrage to the State Duma, elimination of the restrictions on the Jews, the freedom of strikes, and the abolition of death penalty – did not make it past the Duma commissions dominated by center-right and right-wing deputies (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1912a, 1:App. 173–4, 186–7, 325–6, 356–9, 366–7, 382–7, 392–3, 1912b, 2:53–7, 68–78, 357–79, 385, 423–6).

Oppositional deputies remained critical. In 1912, Chkheidze, commenting on the student unrests, accused the authorities of corruption, violations of the rights of the population, and inefficiency in the economy. He implicitly criticized the Tsar himself claiming that power was in the hands of "Mitia the Blissful [Dmitrii Popov] and [Efimovich] Grigorii Rasputin," the two spiritual courtiers (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1912d, 334–6).

The articulations of particularistic interests also persisted. Roman Stanisław Dmowski,[7] a Polish activist and the leader of the Polish Koło, maintained that Russia was not a homogeneous state, that in Russia, apart from the Russian people, there were other peoples and distinct territories with differing compositions of the population, social structures, and needs. It was hence a major state task to resolve the nationalities question (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1908a, 163).

The need for integrating particularistic communities into an inclusionary Russian nation was brought up on several occasions. Nikolai Ivanovich Kareev's speech on the subject in the First Duma proved influential in the political discourse of the ensuing years. One Octobrist politician, for instance, denounced it in 1909 during his party's campaign for the election to the Moscow City Duma, claiming that it was a sign of non-Russian (ethnic) influence on the KD Party (Pavlov and Shelokhaev 2000, 2:67–8). In the Third Duma, there were tensions between the particularistic, exclusionary understanding of the Russian nation of the right-wing deputies and its composite or integrative, inclusionary understandings. After Maqsudi was interrupted by a right-wing deputy, who claimed that Maqsudi could not speak for the Russian people implying his Tatar background, he spoke of Russianness in the political sense.

> Novitskii II [Petr Vasil'evich Novitskii] says that it is not my place to talk about the Russian people; I would like to know, gentlemen, what member of the Duma Novitskii II means by the Russian people? If he understands the Russian people in the political sense, then I am as much a Russian citizen as everyone

> else (*applause from the left*); if he means it in the racial, ethnographic sense, then you are not a Russian, you are a Slav. Thus, before you define the political concept of Russian, you have no right to make such an objection to me. Politically, I am as Russian as you are, and sooner or later I will have the same rights as you. If you are speaking in the Slavic sense, then I am not a Slav, I am a Tatar, but I will ask you, are you a Slav yourself?
>
> […] at the present time almost no state consists of a homogeneous mass. In every state there is, so to speak, a political title – American, French, and so on, but in every state there are numerous nationalities that, in the name of their traditions, their way of life, which they have, defend and will defend their traditions, and in this sense I am a Tatar and I defend my way of life, my nationality, my traditions – but politically I am a Russian citizen. (*Applause from the left; voices on the right: correct*).
>
> (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1910a, 1992)

Later during the same session, Miliukov repeated the main points of Kareev's speech in the Third Duma, citing the foreign experiences of inclusionary nationalism in the USA and the Ottoman Empire as the examples for understanding the Russian nation and referring to the verbal attack on Maqsudi (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1910a, 2986–9). Miliukov also provided an inclusionary, anti-primordialist understanding of nation.

> A nation is, after all, a creation of history, a nation is not a race, a nation is not a collection of physical features that remain unchanged for centuries. A nation is flexible, it changes, it pours out into the forms of current life, it prepares for tomorrow, it goes toward the future.[8]

The right, nevertheless, continued their verbal attacks on the non-Russian deputies. When Bulat commented on the formation of the Kholm Province and the need to consider the agency of the Ukrainian people, who were neither Polish nor Russian, and read out a statement of the Ukrainian activists on the conflict between the Russians and the Poles in Ukrainian, Markov asked Bulat if he was reading in English. Bulat, however, used this remark as a proof of difference between Ukrainian and Russian languages and reminded everyone of the demands of the Ukrainian Autonomists for autonomy of Ukraine (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1912c, 222–3).

The far-right Petr Vasil'evich Berezovskii, an official and journalist, insisted that since the aliens (*inorodtsy*) – referring to a legal category that included many non-Russians and carried pejorative connotations – only spoke on local interests and were incapable of rising to the level of state-wide interests, they should not be admitted to the State Duma. He also cited the experience of Western empires, which did not have representatives of colonies in their parliaments. "In general, the more homogeneous the composition of a parliament, the more representatives of the native nation [the term used by the right-wing politicians for the exclusionary Russian nation] there are, the better the performance of this parliament" (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1912c, 3735).

There were also tensions pertaining to class-based particularism. The Octobrist Aleksandr Dmitrievich Protopopov, an industrialist and *zemstvo* activist, referred to the idea of civic peace in the class sense, which could be achieved through the equilibrium between the needs of a class and the means of satisfying them, when he spoke about the economic organizations of the workers and their compromises with business owners (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1910a, 955). Responding to this, the SD I. P. Pokrovskii strongly opposed the depoliticization of the labor movement.

> We know this sermon, this planting of heaven on earth; we know this sermon about a social peace, when industrialists and workers will get along peacefully side by side, when sheep and wolves will graze together; but we do not believe in such a peace, we think that sheep will graze peacefully when there are no toothy wolves. (*Applause from the left*).
>
> (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1910a, 967)

The Latvian SD Andrejs Priedkalns,[9] a medical doctor, also relied on class differentiation. He maintained that bourgeois governments approved legislation pertaining to the workers if they were either under direct pressure from the organized masses of the proletariat or due to the conviction of their enlightened members that exploitation must have a limit. In the case of the Russian bourgeoise, he argued, only the first motive was relevant (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1910c, 623–4).

Particularism based on regional and social-estate categories also remained. Most liberal and socialist deputies backed the abolition of privileges for the nobles and restrictions on the peasants and the Cossacks since the elimination of estates was a major step toward equal citizenship. Yet the Cossack Group pursued its estate-driven agenda, defending the Cossacks' land-use privileges and other rights. The members of the Siberian Group, which included all North Asian deputies and Siberian intellectuals outside the Duma, backed the Siberian Regionalist slogan of spreading *zemstvo* to Siberia. The problem of inadequate self-government, compared even to European Russia, was in fact shared across imperial peripheries, and representatives of different regions supported each other in the Duma. Furthermore, the Duma debates on the specific Far Eastern interests, such as, for instance, duty-free trade, contributed to the consolidation of a Far Eastern regionalist movement (Sablin 2018, 57–8, 62–3).

The cabinet, however, prioritized the interests of European Russia and the existing elites in its policies toward the peripheries. The legislative proposal, submitted by 34 deputies, including the members of the Siberian caucus and the KD Faction, on duty-free trade in the mouth of Ob, for instance, cited the interests of the Siberian population but also the state interest of fostering the colonization of Siberia.[10] It was nevertheless rejected due to, *inter alia*, the opinion of the Ministry of Trade and Industry, as there was no certainty that it would benefit Russian and not foreign businessmen.[11]

Religious particularism also retained its importance in the Third Duma. The Muslim Faction continued to defend the interests of the empire's Muslim population. Maqsudi, for instance, protested against the opening of state-sponsored bars

in Muslim villages. Xəlil bəy Xasməmmədov,[12] a lawyer and Azeri activist, protested against the special tax that the Muslims of Transcaucasia (South Caucasus) had to pay for exemption from military conscription. He suggested either its complete removal or the inclusion of Muslims in conscription (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1911b, 1795–6, 2933–5).

The Old Believers were another religious group, the interests of which had been discussed at length in the Third State Duma. Old Believer deputies insisted that the draft law on the rights of their denomination had to be discussed in a special *ad hoc* commission and not the general one on religious matters. Such a position was countered by the representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church and the far-right but supported by the Duma's majority, given that the Old Believers were considered an important part of the Russian people in exclusionary sense (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1908a, 727–40).

Despite the predominance of conservative loyalists in the State Council and its dependence on the Tsar and the cabinet, during the term of the Third Duma, many of its members continued to treat it not as a bureaucratic body but as a chamber of parliament. Nikolai Ernestovich Kramer (von Kramer), for instance, claimed that the Mariinsky Palace, which was the seat of the State Council, was too small for it, anticipating the creation of new commissions and the emergence of new groups and factions (Gosudarstvennyi sovet 1908, 288–9).

The comparisons of the State Council to foreign parliaments, especially the German Reichstag, also continued (Gosudarstvennyi sovet 1908, 1506, 1752, 2280). Petr Khristianovich Shvanebakh (Schwanebach), a high-ranking imperial official before his tenure in the State Council, treated the system of representation as different from Western parliaments.

> In the countries that have lived longer than us with a representative system, two different types of representatives have developed: on the one hand, man of the land who does not break his connection with local life but devotes part of his time to serving the country as a member of a legislative chamber; on the other, the professional politician who creates a career for himself out of representation. In the West, a close connection has long been noted between the method of remuneration for deputies and the development of politicking, and it is considered almost an axiom there that remuneration in the form of a salary is the surest way to create a class of politickers. Our young representative system is entirely based on the idea of calling to legislative work the people of the land, the people who do not sever their connection with local activities.
>
> (Gosudarstvennyi sovet 1908, 2278–9)

The Octobrist Mikhail Vasil'evich Krasovskii, previously a government official and local self-government activist, compared Russia to the USA when criticizing the excessive centralization of legislation and the consequent overload of the State Duma and the State Council with insignificant matters (which the critics of centralization often called vermicelli) (Gosudarstvennyi sovet 1910, 110, 112–13).

Some members of the State Council criticized the Russian legislative chambers for their deviation from the norms of parliamentarism (Gosudarstvennyi sovet 1908, 725). Although Nikolai Fedorovich Kasatkin-Rostovskii, a marshal of nobility and member of the Union of the Russian People, claimed to reject "parliamentary-constitutional institutions" and support a consultative Duma, he stressed that in either case, the representatives of the people had to be independent, and those who simply approved cabinet drafts, fearing the dissolution of the Duma and losing income, could hardly be independent. He also stressed the need for careful deliberation during the discussion of drafts (Gosudarstvennyi sovet 1908, 2292).

There were debates in the State Council. Many of the disagreements pertained to particularistic interests. One of the most contentious issues was that of limiting the rights of the Grand Duchy of Finland in 1910. Milewski asserted that since Finland had a special legal system, the draft law on the right of the Imperial legislative chambers to issue laws extending to the Grand Duchy of Finland had to go to their Diet first. He also argued that since the Russian chambers were incompetent in the Finnish question, the State Council could simply declare itself as such after the Tsar ordered it to consider the issue (Gosudarstvennyi sovet 1910, 3711–13). Milewski also defended Finland's special rights in a more general sense.

> I, gentlemen, by the grace of my Sovereign and by the will of my voters, have sat in the chair of a legislator in order to encourage respect for the law, love for work, thrift, culture, education where they are not sufficiently widespread, and not in order to help to destroy them where they exist thanks to the efforts of a remarkably honest people and the paternal government of five generations of sovereigns.
>
> (Gosudarstvennyi sovet 1910, 3720)

Mikhail Aleksandrovich Stakhovich and Kovalevskii, then members of the State Council, also defended Finland's special rights as set by its constitution, granted and recognized by Russian monarchs (Gosudarstvennyi sovet 1910, 3722–3, 3903–5). The opponents of Finland's autonomy among the State Council's majority, however, pointed to the lack of a written constitution (Gosudarstvennyi sovet 1910, 3922).

As for regional interests, Kovalevskii defended the duty-free regime in the Russian Far East even after a commission of the State Council supported its revocation (Gosudarstvennyi sovet 1909, 589–90). Religious particularism was evoked during the discussion of the draft law on the rights of the Old Believers. Metropolitan Arsenii (Avksentii Georgievich Stadnitskii) claimed that he opposed the draft's adoption since it threatened the special status of the Russian Orthodox Church and the supremacy of the Orthodox Russian people in Russia. The law was nevertheless adopted by both chambers and approved by Nicholas II, largely because the Old Believers were viewed as an integral part of the Russian ethno-national community (Gosudarstvennyi sovet 1910, 2837–41).

The Fourth State Duma and the State Council, 1912–1917

The Fourth State Duma was the last parliament of the Russian Empire. Its regular sessions were interrupted by the First World War and, ultimately, the Revolution of 1917. Although the elections were still restrictive and although there initially seemed to be a relatively conservative center-right majority, the Fourth Duma became the first one where a stable interparty bloc, the Progressive Bloc, opposing the cabinet was formed.

The Fourth Duma was elected in September–October 1912 and was formally in existence between November 15, 1912, and October 6, 1917, although it never assembled after February 27, 1917. The administration was involved in the elections by providing qualification to the preferred candidates, attracting priests *en masse*, and ordering them how to vote. There were also machinations with the lists of voters, but the small size of the franchise made them uncommon (Demin 1996, 30–1). As described in a report on the election to the Fourth Duma in Saint Petersburg, published in *The New York Times*, "extreme apathy and indifference" marked the voting. The report mentioned the government's control over the elections, including the barring of undesirable candidates.[13]

The government engaged in targeted "campaigning" as well. Given the importance ascribed to the Old Believers as part of the Russian people in exclusionary sense, officials attempted to rally their support. Minister of Internal Affairs Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Makarov wrote to Prime Minister Vladimir Nikolaevich Kokovtsov that the Old Believers could not get their books, icons, and other objects from the Russian Orthodox Church and connected this issue to their stance on the government. Makarov also reported that in the context of the upcoming elections to the Fourth Duma, the Old Believers "expressed doubts about the sincerity and steadfastness of the protection of their interests on the part of the Octobrists and, therefore, decided to support the KDs," but this ostensibly could be changed if the objects were returned to them. Chief Procurator of the Most Holy Synod, that is, the lay head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Vladimir Karlovich Sabler claimed that the Church did not have the practice of withholding the objects, although there could be individual cases, but promised Kokovtsov to facilitate the resolution of the matter in the context of the elections.[14]

The Duma had 446 seats, but, given the continued Finnish boycott, only 442 deputies had been elected. Furthermore, the seats that had become vacated later were not always filled. In late 1912, the Octobrists once again had the largest faction with 100 members and supporters. To the right of the Octobrists, there were the Faction of the Center (32 deputies), the Faction of Russian Nationalists and Moderate Right (88), and the Right Faction (65). To the left of the Octobrists, there were the Progressist Faction (48 members and supporters), the KD Faction (59 deputies), the Labor Group (10), and the SD Faction (14). All major caucuses remained in place as well, although the Polish Koło, the Muslim Faction, and the Polish–Lithuanian–Belarusian Group all became smaller. The Siberian Group and the Cossack Group were formed again as well. In late February 1917, the Progressive Bloc of 197 deputies was the largest organized group. The SD Faction had only six

members, with five SD deputies having been exiled to Siberia. The voting once again depended on the Octobrists, and Rodzianko was elected Chairman of the Duma (Demin 1996, 15; Shelokhaev 2008a, 676–8).

Most deputies continued to treat the Duma as a parliament. On March 1, 1913, a legislative proposal on legislative immunity for the members of the Duma and the elected members of the State Council was submitted by 88 deputies. Its authors cited Western European experience and legal experts who claimed that the principle originated in popular sovereignty – the deputies were elected to create laws and hence they were above the law when doing this. In Russia, legislative immunity was in the laws but a 1912 Decree of the Senate practically nullified it (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1913b, 2: no. 182:1–7, 17, 30). The Trudovik Aleksandr Fedorovich Kerenskii, a lawyer, explained that since parliament had no coercive power, speech was its only weapon of struggle. Without the freedom from liability for deputies, there could be no parliament, no representation of the people, he argued, and the incorrect interpretation of this by the Senate was a criminal way of destroying the representation of the people (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1914a, 807–8, 810–12).

In the context of the split of the SD Faction in 1913, the Bolshevik Faction was the one that continued to dismiss the Duma as unrepresentative. Aleksei Egorovich Badaev, a worker of peasant background and Bolshevik activist, claimed that the working class was aware of who its enemies were and interpreted the people in exclusionary class sense.

> […] it [the people] knows well that the majority of the State Duma are not representatives of the people, but enemies of the people, who have entered the Duma thanks to an ugly electoral law…
>
> […] The people knows very well that only that parliament will truly protect the people, which will be created after the complete victory of the people and with the complete democratization of the entire political system.
>
> (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1914a, 482)

The Bolsheviks also continued to threat the Duma as a rostrum for reaching the broader public. Roman Malinowski,[15] a Bolshevik and at the time also secret police agent, claimed on behalf of the SD Faction that legislation in the "current parliament" and with the "current cabinet" was not central to its work. The main task of the faction was to expose the government through inquiries (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1914a, 690). Commenting on the proposal to introduce legislative immunity, Badaev argued that the SDs were not afraid of repressions and their voice would be heard also outside the Duma (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1914a, 820).

The Mensheviks, however, also continued to criticize the Duma. Matvei Ivanovich Skobelev, an RSDLP activist (Figure 2.2), dismissed all the budget work of the Third and Fourth Duma and their attempts to compromise with the cabinet, claiming that if the latter needed the deputies, it was only as a mere "rubber stamp" on the budget, which it would show to European bankers. For this statement, Skobelev was banned for 15 meetings of the Duma (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1914c, 786).



Figure 2.2 Deputies of the Fourth State Duma M. I. Skobelev, Ak'ak'i Chkhenk'eli, and Nik'oloz Chkheidze in the Tauride Garden. Saint Petersburg, [1913]. TsGAKFFD SPb, G16039.

The right-wing deputies continued to denounce parliamentarism. Markov (Figure 2.3) was especially active in this regard. On one occasion, he decried the import of foreign experience, citing the large business lobby that "purchased" deputies (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1913a, 1028–30). On another occasion, Markov denounced the slogans of freedom voiced by the liberals and socialists when dismissing an inquiry on civil liberties. Relying on whataboutism, he claimed that in the USA, which was a republic, the poor were in *de facto* slavery and that there was also racism against the blacks. He then claimed that in France, there was no freedom of assembly for religious or monarchist groups, arguing that this was because socialists were in power there. He also cited the disappearances of those who



Figure 2.3 A group of participants in the Congress of the Union of the Russian People, dedicated to the celebration of the 300th anniversary of House Romanov, in the Columned Hall of the Tauride Palace. Saint Petersburg, 1913. Front row, left to right: N. E. Markov (second), P. F. Bulatsel' (fourth), V. M. Purishkevich (seventh). TsGAKFFD SPb, E18166.

criticized Yuan Shikai in the parliament of China. He concluded that in Russia there was in fact freedom of anti-state propaganda (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1914a, 228–9, 231–2). Georgii Alekseevich Shechkov, a jurist by training, monarchist activist, and member of the Archangel Michael Russian National Union, defined parliamentarism as a war against government and celebrated the absence of parliament and parliamentarism in Russia (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1914d, 1694).

The Progressist N. N. L'vov stressed in an interview that although the Duma had an important task, its weakened center and many right-wing groups, which wanted to destroy the representative system, made it powerless.[16]

In the State Council, during the first two sessions of the Fourth Duma, there were few debates on the Russian legislative chambers as institutions. When considering the issue of what to do with the drafts remaining from the Third Duma, Kovalevskii urged not to rely on the experience of the British Parliament, where such drafts were dismissed, as it had the broad right to legislative initiative. In Russia, he argued, the absolute majority of drafts would come from the cabinet. The majority of the State Council resolved to take up the drafts of the Third Duma (Gosudarstvennyi sovet 1913, 39–40, 44).

The Fourth Duma adopted numerous drafts but rejected several small proposals of the cabinet. It also denounced arbitrariness, repressions, and the lack of reforms and continued to openly criticize Rasputin. By the start of the second session in October 1913, most of the Duma was united in opposition to the cabinet in its then-current composition. As for the cabinet itself, most ministers acted independently, also toward the Duma. Minister of Internal Affairs Nikolai Alekseevich Maklakov considered a coup against the Duma or at least the limitation of its rights, but he was not supported by the majority of ministers. In March 1914, on the initiative of Maklakov and Minister of Justice Ivan Grigor'evich Shcheglovitov, criminal prosecution was started against Chkheidze (Figure 2.2), who ostensibly had undermined state order because in his Duma speech, he declared republic the most suitable form of government for the country's renewal. The Chkheidze affair and the general disdain of the cabinet for the Duma increased the opposition. The Duma started, *inter alia*, a "budget war" against the Ministry of Internal Affairs rejecting almost all of its new expenses, but the Octobrists promised to stop the "budget war" if Maklakov resigned. The Duma also adopted a draft law on immunity for deputies when speaking in the chamber, which was initially proposed in March 1913. Although it had not been considered by the State Council, the Chkheidze affair was stopped by Nicholas II (Shelokhaev 2008a, 677–9).

The Fourth Duma remained a site where difference was articulated, and deputies continued to speak about particularistic interests. The rights of non-Russian nationalities were addressed by both their representatives and other socialist and liberal deputies. Varlam Gelovani,[17] a Georgian lawyer, Socialist Federalist, and member of the Labor Group, for instance, defended the right of Georgia for autonomy (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1913a, 1864–6). Hrihorii Ivanovych Petrovs'kyi,[18] a Ukrainian worker, spoke on behalf of the SD Faction on the violation of the rights of the non-Russian nationalities (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1913a, 1779–84). Although he focused on the oppression of the Ukrainians, he made a general statement.

> In Russia, there are only 43 percent of Great Russians, which means less than half of the population, and meanwhile the rest of the people are recognized as aliens [*inorodtsy*]. Thus, the majority of the population in Russia does not have the right and opportunity to speak their native language and experiences endless violence and oppression. […] Russia belongs to the [countries of] most variegated national mixture. Now our Great Russian nationalism and landowner patriotism seem to have no equal in Europe, and not only in Europe but even in Asia. There is nothing worse in the whole world, nothing more shameful than what is being done to the oppressed nationalities in our country. Nowhere on the globe is there such a savage medieval institution as the Jewish Pale of Settlement.
>
> (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1913a, 1780)

The far-right deputies nevertheless continued to insist on exclusionary understanding of the Russian people. Shechkov once again evoked Kareev's speech in

the First Duma, claiming that he ostensibly denied Russia its existence and pointing out that he was still sponsored by the Russian people as a professor (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1914d, 1693).

Kerenskii provided an overview of all oppressed groups when the budget of the Ministry of Internal Affairs was discussed. Apart from the rights of the peasants and the workers, he defended the rights of the Ukrainians in the context of Stolypin's anti-Ukrainian policies and supported the slogan of Ukrainian autonomy, for which the Ukrainian people fought hand in hand with the Russian "democracy."[19] He also defended the members of those religious communities that were persecuted as "sectarians," citing their mass emigration to America as a huge disaster for Russia. He concluded that the majority of the Russian population, "the peasants, the working class, the nationalities and sectarians, the political fighters and the bourgeoise" were all oppressed and hence had to fight the then-current order and the government (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1913a, 1694–700).

The rights of the peasants were discussed in detail. During the second session, peasant deputies participated in the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the emancipation of the serfs. A group of peasant deputies were photographed with the bust of Alexander II "The Liberator" (Figure 2.4). In the Duma, the debates on this day mainly revolved around the violations of the rights of the Ukrainians, and it



Figure 2.4 A group of peasant deputies of the Fourth State Duma. Saint Petersburg, February 19, 1914. TsGAKFFD SPb, E13109.

was in this context that the issues pertaining to the peasants were discussed. Earlier during the session, however, several peasant deputies raised the matters related to the still remaining vestiges of serfdom in the Baltic region and elsewhere as well as the general matters related to the continued oppression of peasants. There were also discussions of the peasant women who continued to be oppressed, with some peasant deputies still rejecting the extension of passports to them. Ak'ak'i Chkhenk'eli (Figure 2.2), a Georgian SD activist, lamented that there were many right-wing peasant deputies in the Duma who hampered the liberation of the peasants (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1914b, 69–70, 380, 399–405, 410–11, 526–31, 540–3, 567–83, 893–6).

Il'ia Timofeevich Evseev, a peasant, teacher by training, and zemstvo official who was then a member of the Progressist Faction, highlighted the broader issue of underrepresentation of the peasants when protesting against stopping the discussion of their problems.

> Here occurs one of the characteristic phenomena that distinguishes the Fourth State Duma in general: when questions are raised concerning the regulation of relations between landowners and peasants, immediately from the right side, attempts are made either to obscure the issue or to completely stop discussing it. The issue of duty in kind concerns the peasant population not only of the Baltic region but of entire Russia; this issue concerns almost all the peasants of the Russian Empire.
>
> (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1914b, 583)

The first session of the Fourth State Duma had limited legislative results, with the most important drafts still in the commissions. During the second session, the State Council rejected the draft on municipal self-government in the Kingdom of Poland because the Duma wanted to keep the use of Polish language in it. It also rejected the draft on county *zemstvo* (Shelokhaev 2008a, 677–80). During the first two sessions, the KDs continued their strategy of submitting progressive proposals, including a series of drafts on civil liberties, women's rights, and universal suffrage to the State Duma, despite the phantom chances of their adoption. Among all these initiatives, only the draft allowing women to teach in women's agricultural colleges became a law in 1913 (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1913c, 80–2, 85, 181–2, 197–8, 336–7, 388–9, 488–91; 1914e, 90–1, 98–9, 213–16, 233–4).

The international crisis, which immediately preceded the outbreak of the First World War on July 28, 1914, and the war itself brought about major changes to the operation of the State Duma. It was convened on July 26, 1914, for one day, and all factions apart from the two SD ones had demonstrated "complete unity" of the monarch and the people, supporting the government's war effort. Although Kerenskii, as well as several KDs and Progressists, agreed that support for the cabinet should be conditional – in particular, Kerenskii wanted the persecution of Finns, Poles, Jews, and socialists to stop – no demands were made of the government. In Russia, as in other belligerent states, "internal peace" had taken on the meaning of suspending internal political struggle for the sake of victory in the "external" war.

In particular, the Duma adopted the drafts on the right of the Council of Ministers to limit budget expenses and to use funds for war, which were within two days adopted by the State Council and approved by Nicholas II (Lohr 2004, 91, 95; Shelokhaev 2008a, 679–80; Stockdale 2016, 15, 23–6). After the split of Russian and European socialists into defencists (that is, supporters of a defensive war) and internationalists, the latter repeatedly opposed "civic" or "internal peace," including at the conferences of the Zimmerwald Movement in 1915 and 1916 (Bantke 1934, 10, 17; Erofeev and Shelokhaev 2001, 2:504–5).

The third session on January 27–29, 1915, was devoted to the budget. The support for the cabinet in the Duma started to wane. The initial hopes of the KDs for the unity between the government and the people in the war effort, which was accompanied by a surge of patriotism (Smith 2017, 81), gave way to disappointment reinforced by the delay in the convocation of the Duma's session. Liberals called for the reestablishment of civic organizations under the banner of the relief effort. *Zemstvo* and municipal unions were reestablished in 1914 and coordinated their efforts with the war industries committees, which united manufacturers, workers, and intellectuals in 1915–1917. Deputies started to criticize the cabinet for its unpreparedness for the war, inadequate supplies for the Army, and insufficient concessions to nationalities, but these issues were not raised in the plenary, which continued the patriotic display and adopted the budget and several other drafts. The Russian defeats in 1915 contributed to the opposition in the Duma. The retreat in Galicia in the summer of 1915 became the turning point. After that, civic organizations increasingly surpassed the relief effort and voiced political demands calling for a cabinet of popular trust. Georgii Evgen'evich L'vov, who headed the Central Committee for Army Supply of the All-Russian Zemstvo and Municipal Unions (Zemgor), established in 1915, viewed the Duma as an intermediary between the self-organized society and the cabinet. The Duma's majority had agreed that the Imperial government could not win the war. With the cabinet's falling popularity, the popularity of the Duma among the upper and middle classes increased. The representatives of Russia's allies in the war also supported the Duma, and its deputies continued to participate in interparliamentary exchanges. It also became popular among the command and officers, thanks to the crucial role of liberal organizations – the Zemgor and the war industries committees – in the economic life of the country and supplies of the military and their orientation toward the Duma. On July 19, 1915, the Duma was convened for its fourth session; four ministers, including N. A. Maklakov and Shcheglovitov, were dismissed due to their unacceptability for the Duma (Grave 1927, vi–vii, 2, 19–22; Shelokhaev 2008a, 680).

Furthermore, in the context of Russia's losses in Poland and the Allies' discourse of liberation, Prime Minister Ivan Logginovich Goremykin declared that upon the end of the war, Poland would be granted autonomy. Although the word itself was met with applause, deputies expressed skepticism about the promise, given the practical loss of Poland and the untrustworthiness of the government. Skobelev pointed out that the Finnish Diet had not been convened for over a year. The Lithuanian Trudovik Mykolas Januškevičius[20] used this promise as a pretext for insisting on the right of the Lithuanians and other nationalities to autonomy,

which they had also deserved by fighting for Russia in the war (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1915, 9–10, 185–6, 653, 810–11, 879, 1031).

No reconciliation between the cabinet and the Duma followed. Self-organization through *zemstvos*, municipal self-government bodies, war industries committees, cooperatives, associations of peasants, workers, traders, and non-Russian nationalists mirrored the unionism of the First Russian Revolution and was supposed to strengthen the Russian imperial nation for the sake of winning the war. The idea that the support of the unions, which supplied the front, would reinforce liberal political demands was translated into the formation of a coalition in the Duma (Sablin 2018, 38, 60). In July 1915, the Progressist Efremov declared that "internal peace" for the sake of victory and further economic and cultural prosperity was not ensured by the cabinet (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1915, 91). Miliukov developed this idea arguing that instead of "forgetting strife" and "conscientious observance of the internal truce, on which the unity of the society was based," the authorities "hastened to use the extraordinary conditions of wartime in order to consolidate purely partisan positions." He then highlighted the national and social aspects of the internal peace. Miliukov maintained that the government's policy toward individual nationalities was a violation of the internal peace. He also stated that for ensuring "social peace," the propertied classes needed to "take upon themselves some of the enormous sacrifices that the whole country" was bearing (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1915, 94–95, 103, 107). A representative of the Muslim Faction also criticized the government for moving away from the "internal peace" and switching to the "persecution" of nationalities (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1915, 153).

In the State Council, the KD David Davidovich Grimm, a leading legal scholar and the head of the Left Group, defended inclusionary nation-building in the context of both the Duma and the broader societal self-organization in July 1915. He also pointed to the slogans of liberation that the Allies used.

> One cannot simultaneously serve two gods: one cannot profess the great principles of liberty and rights in international relations and ignore them in the field of domestic relations. […] It is a great blessing for Russia that at this historical moment it has a living center, the representation of the people that unites and embodies the nation. The duty of the government, preordained from the height of the Throne, is to act hand in hand with it, to listen to the voice of the land as personified by it. […] what is needed is not only verbal but real, effective unity between the people and the government, based on mutual trust, on mutual respect for the rights of both the government and the representation of the people. […] Along with this, there is [on the agenda] the expansion of the scope of societal self-organization, the removal of obstacles to the free, extensive application of labor of all the living forces of the nation, all without exception, so that everyone, feeling like a full citizen of their homeland, could put all the strength of their mind and heart in the service of the national cause of state defense.
>
> (Gosudarstvennyi sovet 1916a, 48–9)

Markov opposed partisanship during the war and the attacks on the government in the Duma. Reaffirming his opposition to parliamentarism and an accountable cabinet, he claimed that there was no connection between the state system and the events of the war (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1915, 47–9).

> On the other hand, they say: the government has brought Russia to such a state that it is not prepared for the war, this is because in Russia there is no parliamentarism, there is no government dependent on the society, there is no government that would be appointed by the majority of a parliament. Well, yes, there is no such government in Russia, and I hope that there never will be, but the point is this, the point is that in France there is a democratic republic, there the ministers are Social Democrats from the extreme left benches, in England there is complete parliamentarism, where it is not the King, but the Parliament that appoints ministers, the same is in Belgium, but, after all, the results are exactly the same as in Russia.
>
> (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1915, 48)

The right outside the Duma also attempted to stop the opposition to the cabinet. Nestor Nikolaevich Tikhanovich-Savitskii, a businessman, regional leader of the Union of the Russian People, and, then, the founding chairman of the Astrakhan People's Monarchist Party sent a telegram to several members of the Fourth Duma, claiming that the "speeches of left deputies up to the Octobrists" ignited the population against the leaders and would only lead to chaos.[21]

During the fourth session of the Fourth Duma, the Progressist leaders Efremov and Aleksandr Ivanovich Konovalov, a businessman, initiated negotiations for the establishment of a bloc in both legislative chambers. The program of the Progressive Bloc, published on August 25, 1915, stated that "a reasonable and consistent policy aimed at preserving internal peace and eliminating discord between nationalities and classes" was necessary for the sake of victory. Among the proposed measures, the program listed political and religious amnesty and a cessation of religious persecution; measures to ensure the rights of non-Russian nationalities, including autonomy of the Kingdom of Poland, a conciliatory policy in the Finnish question, and the reestablishment of Ukrainian press; restoration of trade unions' operation and the provision of workers' rights; extension of the rights of local self-government; and the introduction of *zemstvo* to Siberia, the Caucasus, and other peripheries. The program was signed by the Progressive Group of Nationalists, the Faction of the Center, the Octobrist, the Zemstvo Octobrists (which split from the Octobrists), the Progressists, and the KDs in the Duma, as well as by the Center Faction and the Academic Faction in the State Council. Given its attention to particularistic interests, the Muslim Faction, the Polish Koło, and the Caucus of Autonomists also supported the program. In September 1915, out of the 397 deputies that the Duma had by then, 236 were part of the bloc, with an additional 32 in factions that supported it. It hence became the first organized majority in the Duma's history. The bloc was chaired by the Octobrist Sergei Iliodorovich Shidlovskii, previously an official and *zemstvo* activist, but Miliukov was its *de facto* leader (Grave 1927, 26–8; Shelokhaev 2008a, 500).

Miliukov claimed shortly before the bloc's formation that the KDs halted their demands for an accountable cabinet due to the war (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1915, 194–5). In this context, the main demand of the Progressive Bloc was the creation of a cabinet of popular (public) trust that would work together with the legislative chambers to implement the bloc's program. The concept of an accountable cabinet had been hence watered down. As Miliukov put it in the Duma on August 25, 1915, the government did not have the trust of the people but needed it (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1915, 1061–2). Most ministers found the program mainly acceptable and agreed to the formation of a new cabinet, but Prime Minister Goremykin and Nicholas II did not. The session was interrupted on September 3, 1915, and those ministers who sided with the Duma were dismissed in late 1915–early 1916. Several laws were nevertheless adopted in 1915, including those on the creation of extraordinary bodies for governing the economy with the participation of the legislative chambers and on the assistance to refugees (Shelokhaev 2008a, 500–1, 680).

In January 1916, Goremykin was dismissed as unacceptable for the Duma, but no further concessions followed. Boris Vladimirovich Stiurmer (Stürmer), the new Prime Minister, was also deemed unacceptable by the Progressive Bloc. The Duma's fourth session was reconvened on February 9, 1916, with Nicholas II's first and only visit to the State Duma. It was accompanied by a monarchist demonstration but did not have any political results. The cabinet promised more concessions pertaining to local self-government and the situation of the workers, but the Progressive Bloc adopted a resolution that demanded its program to be implemented. When discussing the major strike at the Putilov Factory in Saint Petersburg, which also took place in February 1916, the Duma supported state regulation of wages, the elimination of obstacles for trade unions, and other forms of workers' self-organization (Shelokhaev 2008a, 680–2).

In the State Council, Grimm used the Tsar's visit to the chambers as a pretext for reiterating the slogan of a cabinet of popular trust (although he added the Tsar's trust to the formula) as the only government that could unite "all living forces of the nation." He also reaffirmed the criticism of the previous cabinet claiming that it stimulated strife and mistrust and instead of finding a base in the representation of the people and societal organizations, it systematically violated the rights of the former and tried to remove the latter from any real work. According to Grimm, the failures in the war demonstrated that the ruling bureaucracy was powerless to supply the Army and that the inactivity of the former War Minister (Vladimir Aleksandrovich Sukhomlinov) resulted in the occupation of large Russian territories. The way forward, he maintained, was the program of the Progressive Bloc and a constitutional government (Gosudarstvennyi sovet 1916b, 43–8).

In the context of the broader protest movement, there were major disagreements within the KD Party. Over the course of 1915, there were 1,928 strikes in Russia; in 1916, there were 2,417 strikes involving over 1.5 million workers. Already in the fall of 1915, the KDs divided over the issue of relations with socialists and further tactics. The left KDs from Moscow opposed Miliukov and called for cooperation with the SDs and the Labor Group suggesting ultimatum tactics against the cabinet. They also insisted on leaving the Progressive Bloc since its main task of

compromising with the cabinet failed. At the Sixth Congress of the KD Party in February 1916, several of the party's leaders expressed disappointment with the policy of internal peace as concessions to the cabinet. Andrei Ivanovich Shingarev, a medical doctor, journalist, and deputy of the Second, Third, and Fourth Duma, for instance, maintained, "Fighting for victory and in the name of this striving to preserve internal peace at all costs, we must not go as far as to be completely isolated from extreme left currents." The left KDs accused Miliukov of getting detached from the party's members and only focusing on the KD Faction in the Duma (Grave 1927, xii–xiii, 69–71, 74, 82; Lezhneva and Shelokhaev 2000, 3, Part 1:295; Smith 2017, 98).

The congresses of the *zemstvo* and municipal unions supported the pressure tactics in the spring of 1916. The KD Nikolai Ivanovich Astrov, a member of the Moscow City Administration, and other municipal leaders called for deeper involvement with the broader union movement. Konovalov, who was Vice Chairman of the Central War Industries Committee, backed the idea of an accountable cabinet. Together with the left KD leader Nikolai Vissarionovich Nekrasov, who suggested forming unions of cooperatives, Konovalov advocated the idea of an all-Russian workers' union – "sort of a Soviet of Workers' Deputies" – and acknowledged the rebirth of workers' organizations under the war industries committees. The idea supported by Astrov and others involved the creation of a coordinating body, the "Staff of Social Forces of All Russia" that in private was called the Union of Unions following the model of the First Russian Revolution. Cooperatives were supposed to serve as economic and "political educational" bodies of peasant self-organization. The whole plan involved unification of the Municipal Union, the Zemstvo Union, the war industries committees, the Peasant Union, the Workers' Union, the Cooperative Union, the Traders' Union, and non-Russian national organizations as the means of self-organizing the imperial Russian nation for the sake of victory and "internal renewal." It was this Union of Unions that, according to Nekrasov, could enforce the creation of an accountable cabinet or a cabinet of popular trust (Grave 1927, 94–5). In a way, the left KDs and Progressists envisioned a corporatist democratic organization to practically replace the Duma.

During the fourth session of the Fourth Duma, the right were the most vocal critics of the Progressive Bloc. Markov opposed the creation of an accountable cabinet or a cabinet of public trust, claiming that it was something close to parliamentarism, and once again engaged in whataboutism when stating that in England, some argued that autocracy was necessary during the war. Markov also lambasted the "ministerial leapfrog" under the pressure from the Progressive Bloc as a sign that "parliamentary customs actually began to take root in our country" and referred to the example of France where parliamentarism led to ministers turning into "nobodies" and bureaucracy becoming as strong as nowhere else. He also claimed that the convocation of parliaments was delayed "everywhere" due to the war. Finally, Markov argued that Bulgaria, the Ottoman Empire, Greece, and Romania were constitutional and parliamentary countries and had ministries of public trust, but this did not prevent them from falling under German influence, as the Germans had

purchased their parliaments. Hence, according to Markov, an accountable cabinet would not solve the issue of German influence in Russia either and only the Tsar could do that (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1916a, 1444–6, 1968–9, 2468, 3298–300).

Konstantin Mikhailovich Shakhovskoi, a district marshal of nobility, as well as former *zemstvo* deputy and local official who after the split of the Moderate Right Faction was in the group that opposed the Progressive Bloc, also dismissed the latter's approach to the cabinet formation claiming that the bloc's majority was situational and born out of extraordinary circumstances. He also dismissed its program as insignificant for victory and bad for the rear. In particular, he claimed that the equality of the Jews would not make the Army and empire's population happy (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1916a, 3014–16).

The discourse of liberating the nationalities of the opposing empires was important for both sides of the First World War. After discussing the 1915 massacres against the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, Mikael Papadzhanian,[22] an Armenian lawyer who was a member of the KD Faction, asserted that Russia and its allies would "bring respect for the rights of all nationalities" and for their freedom to organize their internal affairs (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1916a, 3309–23). Both members of the State Duma and the State Council acknowledged that despite the promises to the Poles, hardly anything was done (Gosudarstvennyi sovet 1916b, 48). The KD Naftali Markovich Fridman, a lawyer, summed up the lack of progress in the nationalities question.

> Gentlemen, members of the State Duma, the war has aggravated everything and exposed everything, and never before has the anti-state nature of Jewish lack of rights been revealed with such clarity and such brightness as at the present time, when on the battlefield Jewish blood merges with Russian blood, while at the same time ever new restrictions are imposed here, and from this high rostrum the vilest insults to our national dignity are permitted. The war is being waged under the sign of the liberation of small nationalities. And I ask you, what has been done for the small nationalities inside the country? (*Voice from the left: nothing*). Has the violated constitution been restored in Finland? The empty benches of the Finnish deputies here tell you about it. A lot has been promised to Poland, but what has been done for Poland? Perhaps only the representative of autonomous Poland, deputy [Sergei Nikolaevich] Alekseev, knows about this. Deputy Akhtiamov [Ibniamin Abussud uly Akhtamov][23] will tell you about the attitude toward Muslims. I can characterize the attitude toward the Jews as a mockery of an entire nationality, as a violation of the most elementary human rights (*Applause from the left*).
>
> (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1916b, 4887–8)

In a similar manner, Aleksei Ivanovich Chistov, formerly a local official and worker of peasant background, lamented that the peasants were still treated as second-rate citizens and demanded full equality for the citizens of the "great Russian Empire" (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1916b, 4889–90).

The fourth session continued until June 20, 1916. The Duma was not in session when the Central Asian Revolt started in July 1916. Overall, the Fourth Duma adopted several drafts that became laws, including those on income tax, on assistance to the families of fighters, and on limitations on meat sales. The Progressive Bloc's proposal of alcohol prohibition became a law, but the drafts on cooperatives and peasants' equality had not been considered by the State Council until 1917. In September 1916, Protopopov, the Duma's Deputy Chairman and the head of its commission on trade and industry, was appointed Minister of Internal Affairs. His program was not implemented, and he changed his loyalty from the Duma to the cabinet, cutting his ties to the Progressist Bloc in October 1916. On October 31, 1916, the Progressive Bloc rejected the slogan of an accountable cabinet, and the Progressist Faction departed from it. The next day, when the Duma convened for the fifth session, Miliukov practically accused Stiurmer and the cabinet of treason famously asking if the cabinet's obstruction to the Duma's efforts to organize the country "was stupidity or treason." Stiurmer was dismissed but Protopopov remained in office (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1917, 1:47; Shelokhaev 2008a, 501, 682).

In December 1916, Kerenskii provided an overview of the Central Asian Revolt of 1916, which was triggered by the labor conscription of Muslims there, after his trip to the region. In particular, he argued that the decree on labor conscription to the front was illegal since its adoption violated the Fundamental Laws. Given the lack of consultation before the adoption of the measure and its poor implementation, he asserted, the central government was the only one to blame for the revolt. Although Kerenskii acknowledged minor losses among the Russian population, he stressed the extreme brutality of the punitive expedition, which killed men, women, and children indiscriminately, with tens of thousands of non-Russians killed and entire villages and towns burnt to the ground. He concluded that the criminals in the government had to be punished, while the system of governing Turkestan and other peripheries of the Russian Empire had to be radically reformed (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1917, 16:95, 102, 114–15, 117–18, 122).

During the Duma's fifth session, legislation moved to the background, even though it adopted the draft on reforming the Senate, which became a law, and started the discussion of county *zemstvo*. Aleksandr Fedorovich Trepov, who replaced Stiurmer, attempted to reach an agreement with the Duma promising some reforms, but the Duma responded with a resolution that called for the removal of the "dark forces" under Rasputin from the court and demanded the formation of a cabinet relying on the Duma and implementing the program of its majority. Furthermore, the Duma rejected several extraordinary decrees adopted between its sessions. The SDs, the Labor Group, and some of the independents openly called for a revolution (Shelokhaev 2008a, 682).

The Duma discussed the issue of provisions, resolving it in favor of keeping fixed prices, of surplus appropriation, and of supplying peasants with necessities for affordable prices. It called for an increased role of *zemstvo*, to which peasant representatives needed to be attracted, and, once again, for forming a united government supported by the majority of the two legislative chambers. On the Duma's demand, the management of provisions in Petrograd was transferred

to municipal self-government in February 1917. In early 1917, Protopopov supported the dissolution of the Duma, but Nicholas II waivered. He even considered the appointment of an accountable cabinet in February 1917 but changed his mind hoping for the success of the offensive in coordination with the Allies in the spring of 1917. In the meantime, in the Duma, socialist deputies openly discussed a possible revolution, with Kerenskii arguing that historically revolutions were "a method and the only means of saving a state." During the night of February 26, 1917, most of the Council of Ministers supported a compromise with the Duma and Protopopov's resignation (or even that of all ministers who were not acceptable to the Duma) (Gosudarstvennaia duma 1917, 18:1222; Shelokhaev 2008a, 682).

Parliamentary universalism and antiparliamentarism

The debates around the State Duma and the State Council from 1907 to 1917 continued the main trends observed before the introduction of the Duma and during its first two convocations. Liberal legal scholars and commentators, many of whom were or had been members of the Duma, continued to insist on parliamentary universalism. The radical right and radical left, in the meantime, continued to reject parliamentarism. As for other socialist forces, even though they did not recognize the Duma as an institution truly representative of the people's interests, they did not reject parliamentarism entirely and included the Duma in their tactics.

Despite the frequent criticism of the Duma, for many Russian liberal legal scholars, Russia had become a constitutional state. Lazarevskii (1908, 1:117), for instance, argued that in the legal sense, the transition to a constitutional regime happened on April 27, 1906, when the First Duma was convened, although in terms of public sentiments, the transition took place with the Manifesto of October 17, 1905. Responding to the criticism of the Russian system by foreign authors, Kotliarevskii (1912, 6–7) argued that the Fundamental Laws were a written constitution, and hence Russia was a constitutional state.

> The relative limitations of the legislative and the insignificance of the budgetary rights of the Duma do not eliminate the need for a certain agreement between it and the cabinet. These limitations and insignificance, together with the possibility of very short sessions and the broad powers of the cabinet in the intervals between such sessions, only reduce the demand for an internal balance but do not eliminate it. The Duma that operates, so to speak, as a rule and not as an exception, the Duma that participates in the exercise of power, the Duma, in a word, has finally entered the everyday life of the state inevitably forces even [that] cabinet to adapt that is the furthest away from the idea that "the executive power should submit to the legislative." The result, of course, is not parliamentarism but also not that absolute dualism that the German jurisprudence depicts, which is a product of partly abstract theory, partly political fear, and party doctrinairism and which is conceivable only under a regime with a consultative representation.
>
> (Kotliarevskii 1912, 213)

Nol'de and some other authors started to use the term "constitutional law" when writing overview works on the Russian legal system, although the term "state law" remained in Nolde's own works (Nol'de 1907–1909; 1911). Kovalevskii read a lecture course on general constitutional law in Saint Petersburg, and it was later published (Kovalevskii 1908). V. M. Gessen's lectures on the theory of constitutional state, which he delivered at the Saint Petersburg Polytechnical Institute, underwent several editions (Gessen 1914). Some Russian legal scholars, in particular Sokolov and Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Alekseev, continued to write on parliamentarism specifically. Alekseev published an overview of foreign parliamentarism, defining it through the accountability of the cabinet, in 1908 (Alekseev 1908, 3). Sokolov's *Parliamentarism: An Attempt at a Legal Theory of the Parliamentary Regime*, which also relied on Western experience, was a major theoretical work (Sokolov 1912).

Russian liberal legal scholars remained connected to Western scholarship, with the works of German, British, French, and other Western scholars available in Russian translations. It is important to note that the translations of foreign works on parliamentarism acquired a practical meaning. The translator's preface to William Anson's book on the English Parliament, for instance, stated that it would be a guide for those who pay attention to the parliamentary precedents of Western states (Enson 1908).

Apart from the works of Georg Jellinek, who remained one of the most cited foreign scholars and whose works circulated widely in Russian translations, the book *The Constitutional Law: The General Theory of the State* (in its 1908 Russian edition) by Léon Duguit, a French legal scholar, became quite influential. The book, which had an introduction by Pavel Ivanovich Novgorodtsev, himself a legal scholar and KD deputy of the First Duma, offered a moderate interpretation of parliamentarism suitable for the KDs. Duguit opposed the literal understanding of separation of powers, which engendered conflict between different bodies claiming to represent the national will, and suggested the notion of cooperation of representative bodies with separate functions. Although, according to Duguit, monarchy could not be considered representation, England's political practice justified the existence of constitutional monarchy, with old and new social forces cooperating in the interest of the country. Furthermore in large countries, the dominance of parliament under a republican regime could make it tyrannical. The takeaway was, however, not that that monarchy was a superior form of government. Duguit favored strong presidential rule and decentralization. The equality between the cabinet and the parliament – like in the USA – and their ability to influence each other was an important check and a guarantee of freedom. According to Duguit, under a parliamentary regime, the head of state appointed the cabinet, which was collectively and politically accountable to the parliament but also had the right to summon, delay, and dissolve the parliament, Duguit was convinced in the unidirectional political evolution, with universally elected parliaments to be eventually adopted by all civilized peoples. He hence had an optimistic prognosis for Russia, as "the reactionary movements" did not prevent it from joining the "great democratic current, inevitably carrying away all civilized peoples."

Despite the dissolution of the First Duma on July 9, 1906, the Tsar approved universal suffrage in Finland the same month (Diugi 1908, 431, 438, 440–1, 450–2, 454, 456–8, 475, 491, 503–4, 506–7, 542–7, 549, 553–4, 560–1, 566–78).

The literature by Russian and European authors, which was published in Russia in 1907–1916, also pertained to individual aspects of parliamentary activity including the financial and budget rights of parliaments (Alekseev 1914; 1915), their dissolution (Matte 1911), and the right of interpellation (Rozegger 1911) as well as practical matters such as stenography (Plokhotenko 1911). The speeches made in foreign parliaments, including historical ones (Makolei 1909), and the State Duma (Gololobov 1910) were published as pamphlets.

As for the liberal theoreticians of parliamentarism in Russia, Sokolov argued that there was no contradiction between parliamentarism and monarchism. Like other scholars, he viewed the cabinet accountable to the majority of the lower house of the parliament as the main feature of parliamentarism but added that the system also required a one-man head of state (monarch or president), bound by constitutional norm but non-accountable to the parliament. In this respect, a parliamentary republic did not correspond to parliamentarism from Sokolov's perspective, as a neutral head of state was needed for representing the "eternal" interests of the state. Although he admitted that parliamentarism was not the summit of the whole democratic evolution, Sokolov celebrated it as capable of meeting the political needs of a country seeking a democratic order but not desiring to give up monarchy. He nevertheless repudiated the view that states could be divided into capable and incapable of parliamentary development, stressing the unidirectional political evolution. Appealing to the example of the German Empire, where Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow had to resign due to a change in the ruling coalition in the parliament without legal reasons to do so, Sokolov highlighted the inevitable evolution of dual monarchies (in which the cabinet was not accountable to the parliament) to parliamentary ones. Sokolov's work was influenced by Leon Petrażycki's[24] psychological theory of law: in particular, Sokolov argued that parliamentarism could not simply be established through codification and required a parliamentary tradition corresponding to the "popular legal consciousness" (Sokolov 1912, v–vi, 2, 7, 19, 60, 104, 122, 352–5, 378, 395–7, 403, 405–6, 408, 410–11, 414–16, 421–3, 425–30, 432).

Defending parliamentarism from those who argued that it devolved into the dictate of political parties, Kotliarevskii asserted that parliamentarism meant solidarity of the cabinet with the parliament – an authoritative representative of the people's opinion – as a whole and not with the parties, and therefore it did not imply any excessive party-centeredness (Kotliarevskii 1915, 314–15).

In his *Foundations of Constitutional Law*, finished in 1916, V. M. Gessen also understood political accountability of the cabinet to the parliament as the main feature of parliamentarism but did not view the equality between the two bodies as necessary. On the contrary, the independence of the cabinet would, according to V. M. Gessen, lead to dual power. He also supported strict separation of powers, which was best done in republics. At the same time, V. M. Gessen deemed different countries unequal in their preparedness for a republic arguing that until a monarch

remained the embodiment of the idea of the state in the "consciousness of the popular masses," republic was impossible and would be seen as anarchy (Gessen 1917, 23, 32–4, 140–1, 417–19).

V. M. Gessen also rejected the notion of popular sovereignty. For him, the people was the source of legislative authority in a representative republic but was not capable of exercising it due to the lack of a deliberate unity of wills. Legislative authority was exercised by parliament on behalf of the people and in its interests, but the election of deputies was not a delegation of legislative competence since the people did not have it in the first place. A citizen was a voter and not a lawmaker who adopted legislation through his or her representatives. According to Gessen, the parliament received its competence from the constitution and not from the people, but the elections were still needed for the will of the parliament to correspond to popular interests. Gessen concluded that popular representation implied the incapacity of the people. In his view, a parliament was not and could not be a cliché of the popular masses; it organized and created the general will, turning the anarchy of circulating opinions into one (Gessen 1917, 138–41). In this respect, he supported the notion of parliamentary sovereignty.

The issues of constitutionalism and parliamentarism were also part of the volume *Vekhi* ("Landmarks"), a collection of essays on the Russian intelligentsia, which was prepared by the literary scholar Mikhail Osipovich Gershenzon. In the volume, the Ukrainian legal scholar Bohdan (Fedir) Oleksandrovych Kistiakivs'kyi focused on the debates on constitutionalism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In particular, Kistiakivs'kyi stressed the intelligentsia's low legal culture and its disregard of individual rights and law in general. He quoted, for instance, the cynical take on parliament that Georgii Valentinovich Plekhanov articulated at the 1903 RSDLP Congress, calling it "monstrous" and emblematic of the intelligentsia's low level of legal consciousness. He found another manifestation of the "squalor of legal consciousness" in the practices of the Third Duma, which did not grant the freedom of speech equally to the dominant party and the opposition. He found this unfortunate, as the representation of the people had to at least reflect the "legal consciousness of its people," irrespective of its composition (Kistiakovskii 1909, 105–7, 112, 114).

Reports, studies, lectures, and commentary on the introduction and development of constitutions and parliaments in Japan, the Ottoman Empire, the Qing Empire, and Iran were also published (Il'in 1908; Spal'vin 1911; Zasodimskii 1911, 152, 157–9; Saval'skii 1913, 2:177). Some Russian intellectuals viewed the constitutional developments in other Eurasian empires as part of the same "constitutional movement in the Orient" (Berlin 1909, 249).

The authors of the Harbin journal *Vestnik Azii* ("Asian Herald") tended to support the universalist approach to constitutionalism and parliamentarism in their discussions of the developments in the Qing Empire, namely the Imperial decrees on the intentions to introduce a constitution, the promulgation of the Outline of the Constitution (1908), and the convocation of provincial assemblies (1909) and the Zizhengyuan (1910) (Moniz Bandeira 2020). The commentary on the August 1908 imperial decree, which intended to establish a representative government by 1916, argued

that "August 14 [27], 1908, should be noted in world history as a decisive turn from the millennial system of despotism to free self-determination and development of national forces of a quarter of all mankind" (Anon. 1909, 57). Progressive views were in fact widespread among Russian scholars of Asia (Tolz 2011).

Like other Russian proponents of constitutionalism and parliamentarism, the authors of the journal had different approaches to them. Aleksandr Vasil'evich Tuzhilin, who saw the Russo–Japanese War as the main impetus for the decision to develop a constitution in the Qing Empire, just like in the case of Russia, approved of the gradualist approach citing the negative experience with constitutionalism in Iran (Tuzhilin 1910b, 4). When discussing the public support for a prompter introduction of a constitution and a parliament, Tuzhilin implicitly criticized the haste noting that "The population, excited by the students, began to look at a constitution as a panacea for all ills and considered it possible to almost immediately open a representative assembly, judging by the fact that it even sent representatives to Beijing" (Tuzhilin 1910b, 5). He also pointed to the fact that the Qing authorities understood monarchy as the source of constitutionalism and hence anticipated that a constitution had to be promulgated before the convocation of a parliament (Tuzhilin 1910b, 6).

Aleksandr Vasil'evich Spitsyn, another author of *Vestnik Azii*, cited the 1910 petition of the deputies of the newly introduced provincial assemblies, which urged to speed up the adoption of a constitution. He implied that the people were the source of a constitution stating, "But the fact of the stubbornness of the people's representatives, who openly by their behavior prove that they do not want to limit themselves to the role of passive spectators of the course of the new history of China but want to be the actual creators of it, is significant in itself" (Spitsyn 1910, 31). The news section in the same issue also cited the argument of the provincial deputies, who stressed that the people had to insist on the prompt convocation of a parliament because in foreign countries, constitutions had not been granted by the government but introduced due to the insistence of the people (Anon. 1910a). Discussing the events in the Qing Empire, Spitsyn relied on the contemporary progressive Russian discourse (Sablin 2017), which juxtaposed a self-organized society and bureaucracy. He described the reforms in the late Qing Empire as the "great deed of renewal" in the situation of a "bureaucratic decay" (Spitsyn 1910, 12). Noting the spread of civic organizations and expressing his optimism about the future of the Chinese nation, Spitsyn argued that "The idea of a constitutional system belongs now not only to the upper classes of society, but also to its other strata; social consciousness has grown and the society is actively involved in the work of organizing its fatherland" (Spitsyn 1910, 13).

Tuzhilin was skeptical of the newly introduced provincial assemblies arguing that the one that he studied (in Fujian) had no influence on the administration (Tuzhilin 1910a, 60). The appraisal of the Zizhengyuan in the journal was also cautious. The summary of the lecture by Il'ia Amvlikhovich Dobrovol'skii on the Zizhengyuan's opening acknowledged that it was merely "a consultative body of people's representation" and hence had only moral force. It argued that the Zizhengyuan's main importance was therefore "in the educational influence on the

government and the nation: the former gets used to the control of its activities by the elected representatives of the people and the latter [gets used] to the state point of view on certain manifestations of life and tasks of the nation" (Anon. 1910b, 65–6). The summary anticipated that the new body would not satisfy the public, given the 1910 petition to speed up the convocation of a parliament (Anon. 1910b, 66). The authors of the journal hence relied on the notion of state-centered nationalism, borrowing it from the Russian political discourse.

In the context of the increased public attention to social matters and class differentiations, Western and Russian legal scholars touched upon these issues as well. Although there had been discussions of a corporatist second chamber since at least the nineteenth century, Duguit's book made a wider educated audience familiar with this idea in Russia. Suggesting that a nation was made up of both individuals and groups based on common interests and labor, he envisioned a second chamber elected by professional groups such as large industrial and art groups (Diugi 1908, 530–4). For V. M. Gessen, parliamentarism itself was a solution to class conflicts. Although, according to his 1916 text, there were many deputies in contemporary parliaments who represented class interests, the character of elections resulted in the election of one deputy by different social classes and hence held narrow class politics in check (Gessen 1917, 193).

In political terms, the extension of the franchise in Russia was a major item on the agenda of liberal and socialist politicians. The mass publication of works explaining and supporting universal suffrage,[25] however, stopped in the context of the restrictions during the "Years of Reaction" in 1907–1917. Some materials were nevertheless published abroad, for instance, a criticism of the Russian electoral system by the RSDLP in the context of the elections to the Fourth Duma (Rossiiskaia sotsial-demokraticheskaia rabochaia partiia 1912).

Despite the constraints, political activism continued. On December 10–16, 1908, the First All-Russian Women's Congress, dubbed the first Russian Women's Parliament, united over 1,000 women in the hall of the Saint Petersburg Municipal Duma (Figure 2.5). The congress included both the longtime leaders of the women's movement Anna Pavlovna Filosofova and Anna Nikolaevna Shabanova, who was one of the first female doctors in Russia, and socialist and liberal politicians like the SD Aleksandra Mikhailovna Kollontai (who had to flee abroad during the congress due to police persecution), the SR Maria Aleksandrovna Spiridonova, the KDs Ariadna Vladimirovna Tyrkova-Vil'iams and Anna Sergeevna Miliukova, and the non-party socialist Ekaterina Dmitrievna Kuskova. Women's suffrage was one of the main issues on the congress's agenda. Its resolution on the matter, nevertheless, did not include the formula of universal, direct, and equal elections with a secret ballot, proposed by the workers' group, and instead simply included women's suffrage. This implied keeping the existing qualifications, which the KD women deemed more realistic (Ruthchild 2021, 104–7).

The debates on the Duma among socialists also continued, although they often did not take place in Russia, as many of them had emigrated. The SDs once again split on the matter. In 1908, a group of Bolsheviks including Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Bogdanov (Malinovskii) and Anatolii Vasil'evich Lunacharskii sought to



Figure 2.5 Participants of the meeting of delegates of the First All-Russian Women's Congress. Left to right: A. P. Filosofova (fourth), A. N. Shabanova (fifth). Saint Petersburg, December 10–16, 1908. TsGAKFFD SPb, E7588.

recall the SD deputies from the Third Duma, claiming that the party could only work illegally (Smirnova and Trush 1973, 425). On the opposite side of the split were the Menshevik Liquidators who sought to confine the SD activities to legal forms and considered broader participation in the Duma. Speaking at the Vienna Conference of the SDs, which united the Mensheviks and other non-Bolshevik factions in 1912, the Liquidator Mikhail Isaakovich Liber maintained that the slogan of a democratic republic did not contradict the slogan of a potent Duma. The SDs hence also could facilitate the popular movement through parliamentary activity. In 1911, the Bolshevik leader Lenin claimed that the period of "peaceful parliamentarism" was coming to an end in the most advanced countries and supported establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry in Russia, while Mensheviks opposed him (Lenin 1968a, 360, 1973b, 362; Shelokhaev 2008b, 569–70, 809).

The disagreements among the SDs contributed to the split of their Faction in the Fourth Duma in October 1913, when six Bolsheviks, including Badaev, Petrovs'kyi, and Malinowski, formed their own Russian SD Workers' Faction. In November 1915, five members of the faction, with the exception of Malinowski who was a police agent, were arrested, tried, and exiled (Nikol'skaia and Polkovnikova 1973, 459–61).

The PSR boycotted the Third and Fourth Duma, but the possible participation in the latter was a matter of fierce debates within the party (Erofeev and Shelokhaev 2001, 2:420–3). Nikolai Dmitrievich Avksent'ev, an SR leader, for instance, supported the party's participation in the elections reaffirming the role of the Duma as a rostrum and an institution for political education and organization of the masses. The multi-tier elections, he argued, made it possible to criticize the Duma on multiple levels, while in the Duma itself, the possible SR Faction could be a center for the "crystallization of masses" that sympathized with the PSR (Avksent'ev 2001, 435).

Among the broader left, the reception of the Duma remained negative, but its utilization was still seen as reasonable. *Den'* related the opinion of the cooperation activist I. K. Kobylianskii who claimed that workers in Saint Petersburg had no interest in the Duma and few of them participated in the Fourth Duma elections from the workers' curia. According to Kobylianskii, some of them had expectations about the Third Duma but after its laws on social security, these expectations disappeared, and there had been discussions of boycotting these laws. All this, he concluded, would once again make the Fourth Duma a mere rostrum for the workers' deputies and not a legislature.[26]

The tactics of using the Duma for extraparliamentary goals were supported by activists who did not define themselves through a party as well. Saed Gabiev,[27] a Muslim activist and the editor of the Saint Petersburg-based newspaper *Musul'manskaia gazeta* ("Muslim Newspaper"), for instance, lamented the very small size of the Muslim Faction in the Third and Fourth Duma but claimed that the speeches of its members were backed by the 20 million Muslims whom they represented. Gabiev claimed that the deputies should use it as a rostrum and, for instance, constantly speak of the civil rights of the Kazakhs and Turkestani Muslims and their inclusion in the Duma. The Muslim deputy Ibniamin Abussud uly Akhtamov argued that "organic work" was not possible in the Fourth Duma due to its composition, and hence the Muslim Faction had to focus on informing and organizing the Muslim population locally.[28]

Although for socialists, parliamentarism was not a goal but a means of achieving socialism at best, many of them viewed the spread of the institution outside the West as a marker of global progress. The socialist Petr Eduardovich Berlin implied the benefits of parliamentarism for Asian states in his article that criticized parliaments in Europe.

> But at the very time when in Persia a wide stream of blood is shed in the struggle for parliament, at this very time in the classical countries of parliamentarism, in England and France, ink is generously shed to prove the crisis, impotence, decline of parliamentarism, and nimble French reporters are making a survey about the reasons for the decline of parliamentarism.
>
> The East, experiencing the honeymoon of the constitutional movement, is now getting acquainted with parliamentarism as a powerful and beneficial force, still completely unused and called upon to do the work of Hercules, to cleanse the Augean Stables of the old order.
>
> (Berlin 1909, 249)

Commenting on the Xinhai Revolution and the developments in the Republic of China in 1912, the Bolshevik Lenin celebrated the awakening of the "four hundred million backward Asians" to political life and stressed the importance of the convocation of the Chinese parliament – "the first parliament in the former despotic country" (Lenin 1968b). Returning to the issue in 1913, Lenin called the Chinese parliament "the first parliament of the great Asian country" and praised Sun Yat-sen's Guomindang for bringing the broad masses of Chinese peasants into politics. Lenin referred to the Guomindang as "a great factor of progress of Asia and progress of humanity" (Lenin 1973a).

On the right, there were also supporters of parliamentarism, especially in the context of the development of exclusionary yet progressive Russian nationalism. In 1912, Mikhail Osipovich Men'shikov, a political writer and founding member of the moderate right All-Russian National Union, acknowledged the benefits of political modernization for Japan. According to Men'shikov, in modern times, it was impossible to be a great power without the moral participation of the people who were to elect. Men'shikov claimed, however, that one could never vote for the "criminal parties," implying socialists, and those aliens who were the "enemies" of Russia, meaning those non-Russian groups that had their own caucuses or unofficial groups in the Duma – the Jews, Poles, Lithuanians, Tatars, and others. The elections hence were supposed to boost the resistance of the Russians in exclusionary sense to the "alien pressure," which he compared to a war with foreigners (Men'shikov 2008, 688–93).

Grigorii Aleksandrovich Evreinov, a liberal legal scholar and imperial official, nevertheless recognized the emergence of progressive Russian nationalism in the context of the expansion of constitutionalism in the country.

> Every day the practice of the representative regime increases the number of constitutionalists in our [country], and lately a party that, under the flag of nationalism, occupied the place between the Octobrists and the right reactionaries has joined them. […]
>
> Russia does not have a parliamentary system of government, that is, the mandatory election of the highest representatives of the executive power from among the majority of the lower legislative chamber, but this can only be given special significance from the point of view of bookish parliamentarism.
>
> […] The prerogatives in the field of administration are not essential because it is difficult to imagine that under a constitutional regime a cabinet could long remain in power if it were unable to obtain the consent of the lower legislative chamber to any law of any fundamental importance. […]
>
> All of this leads to the conclusion that the constitutional system established itself on the Russian national soil to a degree sufficient to recognize that in Russia, as in all other civilized countries, people's rule [*narodopravstvo*] in the realm of legislation is outside the national particularities of the Russian people.
>
> (Evreinov 1912, 10–11)

In a similar vein, the conservative writer Vasilii Vasil'evich Rozanov recognized some of the Duma's benefits on the occasion of its tenth anniversary in 1916, especially the fact that it ostensibly made Russia non-revolutionary. He nevertheless once again maintained that it would be better to have the Duma in the first half of the nineteenth century when there were no cosmopolitan interests in Russia and reaffirmed that in the Duma, there was a hegemony of parties and too little of a broad state outlook.[29]

> The thing is that the "parliament" was indeed set up according to the Western template, but nevertheless [it was] Russian people [who] entered it, and they began to try on the "template" on themselves, to pull it on themselves, and then the "template" twisted a little, skewed, and revealed the "Russian build." The St[ate] Duma is not a dead parliamentary phenomenon, it does not copy anyone, it does not imitate anything. It is a living Russian phenomenon, a living organism in a living country. […] We repeat, that day and those days are not far off when it will start making great speeches and create mighty decisions. Two or three successes in the elections: who knows who is now growing, maturing among the young, in an era of horrors, thunderstorms of war.[30]

This was certainly not a view shared by everyone on the right. Among the most prolific opponents of parliamentarism was Aleksandr Petrovich Liprandi (Volynets), a right-wing monarchist political writer. His numerous pamphlets are representative of the argumentation that was used on the right. Exceptionalism, which was articulated by the Slavophiles, persisted, with Liprandi arguing that parliamentarism had no foundations in Russia, unlike in the West, and hence it could be established not through evolution but only through a revolution. The latter, he maintained, was also impossible since parliamentarism was absolutely foreign to and incompatible with the psychology and political views of the Russian people due to historical conditions (Liprandi 1910b, 19). In a different pamphlet, Liprandi asserted that institutions could not simply be copied due to the different conditions everywhere. Russia, according to Liprandi, was incomparable to England, and constitutionalism contradicted the character and the worldview of the Russian people (Liprandi 1910a, 66).

Liprandi nevertheless also relied on the criticism of parliamentarism in general, as articulated by both Western and Russian political writers. In particular, he argued that party politics was detrimental to deliberation, as everything was decided within factions. Liprandi asserted that in free countries, corruption was freer, as corrupted administrators were protected by their parties, which would not risk losing an election by exposing their own members. Liprandi maintained that the West itself was disenchanted with parliamentarism. Citing Joseph Schöffel, Liprandi claimed that parliamentarism resulted in the fall of popular morality through, for instance, the conduct of electoral campaigns, falsification of elections as well as threats to and bribery of the voters. Citing Friedrich Nietzsche and other European intellectuals, he called liberalism the victory of the "herd" principle, as it brought

people to one poor standard, and suggested that Russia was to play a special role in the future, given the spiritual decay of Western Europe. When discussing the corruption of parliaments in the West, Liprandi used the arguments of socialist intellectuals, claiming that, for instance, in Sweden and the USA, parliaments were owned by capitalists. Furthermore, he even cited the anarchist Petr Alekseevich Kropotkin, when criticizing the corruption of Western parliaments and the lack of expertise among the deputies (Liprandi 1910a, 1–4, 5, 8, 11–14, 18–19, 31–5, 57–9, 68–70). Indeed, there was a significant number of critics of parliamentarism in Europe, who stressed the existence of a "crisis of parliamentarism."[31]

Despite his arguments about exceptionalism, Liprandi drew direct comparisons between the Russian and Western political systems. For instance, he asserted that the Duma was too slow, as its politicking did not leave much time for legislation (Liprandi 1910b, 23), and even admitted that Russia needed to catch up with the West, behind which it had been lagging since the Mongol Yoke of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries. Comparing Russia to the West, Liprandi paid particularly much attention to parliaments in empires. Countering the argument that autocracy caused the defeat in the Russo–Japanese War, he asserted that the initial British failures in the Boer Wars (1880–1881 and 1899–1902) and the Spanish defeat in the Spanish–American War (1898) demonstrated that parliament did not boost the state's military efficiency (albeit he did not comment on the USA having a parliament of its own). Furthermore, Liprandi claimed that parliamentarism was the reason why empires failed, pointing to Spain and Sweden that ostensibly lost their great power status after political liberalization and to the crisis in the Habsburg Empire. According to Liprandi, the German Empire, by contrast, came to prominence due to the efforts of Otto von Bismarck and Wilhelm II and the minimal parliamentary influence (Liprandi 1910a, 9–10, 18, 35–6, 60).

Combining chauvinism with conspiracy theories, Liprandi also argued that it was not the Russians but the "aliens," "the Finns, Poles, [and] Jews" in the first place, who wanted to establish parliamentarism in Russia as a means of realizing their separatist needs and "dismembering" Russia through self-determination of the peripheries (Liprandi 1909, 3–4). On another occasion, he argued that it was the intelligentsia, aliens, and Jews who wanted to subdue Russia through parliamentarism and deemed the KDs and Octobrists complicit (Liprandi 1910b, 41, 43, 61). Elsewhere, he also added the Free Masons to the list of those who supposedly invented the Revolution of 1905–1907. Here, Liprandi also drew parallels with the West. He, for instance, saw the titular national groups in Europe as oppressed claiming, for instance, that the French were victimized by "the Free Masons, Jews, and socialists" who pretended to be representatives of the people during the separation of the church from the state. According to Liprandi, in multiethnic contexts, like the Habsburg Empire and the Russian Empire, the combination of national and party struggle was against the very idea of empire and threatened their fragmentation. Disavowing his own statements, he nevertheless decried the lack of proportional representation of Slavic population in the Habsburg Empire and claimed that the Slavic majority in Hungary was victimized by the Hungarians (Liprandi 1910a, 11, 66–7).

Presenting constitutionalism and the rights of the non-Russians as a Western conspiracy, the far-right Archangel Michael Russian National Union went further and cautioned the representatives of the IPU from visiting Russia in 1910. Accusing them of pushing Russian state life to the "constitutional course" and pressuring Russia on its relations with the ostensibly oppressed Finland, the organization called for protest of monarchist and nationalist organizations, suggesting that if during such protests the visitors were harmed, they only had themselves to blame (Kir'ianov 1998a, 1:570).

On the far right, the notion of class oppression was combined with that of the Russian people, producing right-wing populism. The Union of the Russian People explained the differences of *sobornost'* (roughly "spiritual community") from Western parliamentarism and constitutionalism from an anti-Semitic and conspiratorial standpoint in their program documents in 1912. Parliamentarism ostensibly served God, the state, and popular needs in words only, whereas in deed it served "Mammon," revolution, and "the monstrous cosmopolitan Hydra sucking the wealth from the Russian people into the international Jewish banks, enslaving the holy Russian land and its people to the global union of the Free Masons and the 'intelligentsia' leading it." *Sobornost'*, according to the organization, was led by the tsars, embodied in the Russian *zemskii sobors*, and nourished by the unity and mutuality of all estates. European parliaments, by contrast, emerged out of enmity to supreme authority and the desire to take this authority for themselves. Every member of parliament always defended individual or group profit and the interests of the capital, deceiving the popular masses (Kir'ianov 1998b, 2:212–13).

The First World War and the formation of the Progressive Bloc further stimulated antiparliamentarism of the far right. In October 1915, the Union of the Russian People issued a proclamation claiming that the "internal enemies" of the Motherland – "constitutionalists, parliamentarians, revolutionaries, and especially Germans and Jews" – used the temporary problems with military supplies to deceive the Russian people. According to the proclamation, by demanding that the Tsar appointed ministers from among them, the "Judeo-Masons" sought to seize the power and limit the rights of the Tsar under the guise of patriotism. It once again rejected the argument that autocracy was responsible for the failures at war and pointed to the defeat of Belgium and the failures of France, which had accountable cabinets, as well as to the strength of Germany, which did not have one (Kir'ianov 1998b, 2:474–5). Speaking at the All-Russian Monarchist Conference (Nizhny Novgorod, November 26–29, 1915), the right-wing deputy Markov added that the Russian SDs were misguided and spiritually enslaved by the "Jew-German" Karl Marx (Kir'ianov 1998b, 2:497–8).

Tikhanovich-Savitskii combined far-right attitudes with left economic slogans. Criticizing the unionism of the First World War and calling for its suppression in his appeal to Nicholas II in March 1916, Tikhanovich-Savitskii suggested dissolving and abolishing the Duma for spreading panic among the population and calling for a coup at the time of war. Dismissing the "dirt of European parliamentarism" as incompatible with Russia's future, he called it a servant of "capitalists

and bourgeois intelligentsia" enslaving the people. Consequently, Russia's future was in the "Russian autocracy" relying on the "popular masses." In *Points on People's Monarchist Unions*, which he wrote in May 1916, Tikhanovich-Savitskii made even greater use of socialist discourse. Claiming that "the rich needed a constitution and parliament," he explained that it was "banks, syndicates, [and] rich industrialists" supported by the "bourgeois classes of the society" that wanted to limit the authority of the Tsar by establishing an accountable cabinet. The supposed goal of the rich was also discussed from a socialist standpoint. The document claimed that the rich would adopt such laws that were beneficial to their interests at the expense of the interests of the "middle and lower classes of the toiling population" (Kir'ianov 1998b, 2:546, 553).

Interestingly, it was a right-wing author, Sergei Fedorovich Sharapov, who returned to the *zemskii sobor* in the context of decentralization after the introduction of the State Duma. Sharapov's 1907 futuristic "political fantasy" *Dictator* was antiparliamentary, but it borrowed a lot from the democratic interpretations of *zemskii sobor*. In the text, the future dictator of Russia (working under the Tsar) immediately dissolved the State Duma, abolished the new parliamentary system, and announced the convocation of a *zemskii sobor*, which was to work out the new fundamental laws. Sharapov not only defined the *sobor* as a constituent body but suggested that it would divide Russia into large self-governing regions. Furthermore, self-government bodies were supposed to discuss legislation before its final approval by the *sobor* (Sharapov 2010, 470, 479).

Foreign commentators once again had mixed attitudes toward the Duma. An article in *Los Angeles Times*, for instance, called the Duma debates of Finnish autonomy in 1910 "a mere mockery of constitutionalism," as the Tsar's government had evidently decided to abolish it.[32] In 1915, *The Christian Science Monitor* published a special article on the Duma, accompanied by a drawing of the Tauride Palace. It noted the diversity of the deputies but criticized the restrictive elections and the Duma's limited competence and called it a "compromise between the going and the coming orders in Russia, between the decaying despotism and rising democracy."[33]

Other authors were more optimistic. An article in *The New York Times* praised the Third Duma's cooperation with Stolypin.

> The Russian Parliament has not only justified its establishment, but it has in a measure made itself necessary. For one thing, it has become an active partner with the Premier. M. Stolypin relies upon it to protect him from interference by Court intrigues. […] It is especially significant that the Duma now takes a substantial part in the finances of the empire, and that these are very greatly improved in consequence.[34]

In a similar manner, *The Washington Post* published an article that claimed that the Duma had real power despite the widespread image of constitutionalism in Russia as "a mere make-believe."[35]

In the Qing Empire, intellectuals and officials continued to use the Russian Empire as a point of reference. In 1908, a memorial drafted by Liang Qichao argued that political participation of borderland elites through parliamentary representation was a powerful instrument of political cohesion. In particular, the text cited the extension of the right to vote to the Mongols (the Kalmyks) within Russia as an example for extending political representation to the Mongols and the Tibetans in the Qing Empire (Moniz Bandeira 2020, 18–19).

Conclusion

The introduction of further restrictions during the elections to the Third and Fourth Duma made their majorities more agreeable with the cabinet. At the same time, this did not result in the complete subordination of the two Dumas. There was a fallout between the situational center-right and center-left majorities and the cabinet already in the Third Duma. In the context of the First World War, the initial demonstration of unity between the Duma and the cabinet quickly gave way to the formation of a stable oppositional majority, the Progressive Bloc, which united a broad spectrum of political forces on the basis of the moderate program of inclusionary nationalism and the watered-down demand for a cabinet of popular trust. In the context of the Fourth Duma, the left flank of the Russian liberals, however, sought more connections to the socialists and engaged in the extraparliamentary political organization of the society, which was similar to the unionism of the Revolution of 1905–1907 and had strong corporatist aspects. By the time of the Revolution of 1917, the Duma nevertheless remained an important element of both official and unofficial political structures of the Russian Empire.

The debates on the nature of parliamentarism in general and the Duma regime in Russia continued parallel to the sessions of the legislative chambers. Liberal legal scholars, many of them active or past members of the State Duma, continued to subscribe to the universalist visions of Western institutions and treated the Duma as a parliament, albeit imperfect. The two main socialist parties took a pragmatic stance on the Duma, viewing it as an amplifier of their discourse in the first place. Right and left radicals, by contrast, questioned the very necessity of a parliament. The former argued that Russia was self-sufficient and did not need Western democracy, while the representation of the diverse imperial population ostensibly threatened the Russian nation in the exclusionary sense. The latter called for other forms of political organization such as the dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry.

Notes

1 The Fourth Duma was formally dissolved on October 6, 1917.
2 He did treat the Finnish Diet as a parliament in practice since 1863 (Nol'de 1911, 10–11, 13–14, 49, 545).
3 N. A. Khomiakov declared himself non-partisan during his chairmanship of the State Duma.
4 Russian: Andrei Andreevich Bulat.

5 Russian: Nikolai Semenovich Chkheidze.
6 Russian: Evgenii Petrovich Gegechkori.
7 Russian: Roman Valent'evich Dmovskii.
8 See Gosudarstvennaia duma (1910a, 2986). Miliukov recorded his speech before or after the session. It remains the only known recording of a speech that was delivered in the Duma (Miliukov 2013).
9 Russian: Andrei Ivanovich Predkal'n.
10 RGIA, f. 1276, op. 4, d. 243, l. 3–3 rev. ("On the duty-free regime in the estuaries of the Ob and the Yenisei as a measure for reviving the North of Siberia and the establishment of the Northern Sea Route," submitted by 34 members of the State Duma on June 11, 1908).
11 RGIA, f. 1276, op. 4, d. 243, l. 13–14 (Ministry of Trade and Industry, Opinion on the draft on the duty-free regime in the estuaries of the Ob and the Yenisei, submitted to the State Duma and signed by 34 of its members, July 14, 1908).
12 Russian: Khalil-bek Gadzhibaba ogly Khasmamedov.
13 *The New York Times*, November 24, 1912: C6.
13 RGIA, f. 1276, op. 8, d. 597, l. 3–4 (From Makarov to Kokovtsov, April 26, 1912); RGIA, f. 1276, op. 8, d. 597, l. 6–7 (From Sabler to Kokovtsov, May 8, 1912).
15 Russian: Roman Vatslavovich Malinovskii.
16 *Golos* (Yaroslavl), May 22, 1914: 2.
17 Russian: Varlaam Levanovich Gelovani.
18 Russian: Grigorii Ivanovich Petrovskii.
19 The term "democracy" was used to denote the socialists and their supporters (Kolonitskii 1998).
20 Russian: Nikolai Osipovich Ianushkevich.
21 GARF, f. 605, op. 1, d. 71, l. 1 (From Tikhanovich-Savitskii to Rodzianko, July 27, 1915).
22 Russian: Mikhail Ivanovich Papadzhanov.
23 Russian: Lev Iosifovich Petrazhitskii.
24 Russian: Ibniiamin Abusugutovich (Abussugudovich) Akhtiamov.
25 See, for instance, Vodovozov (1906).
26 *Den'* (Saint Petersburg), November 4, 1912: 4.
27 Russian: Said Ibragimovich Gabiev.
28 *Musul'manskaia gazeta* (Saint Petersburg), February 7, 1913: 1.
29 *Novoe vremia* (Petrograd), April 27, 1916: 4.
30 *Novoe vremia* (Petrograd), April 27, 1916: 4.
31 *The Atlanta Constitution*, January 25, 1914: B8.
32 *Los Angeles Times*, June 5, 1910: I5.
33 *The Christian Science Monitor* (Boston), May 8, 1915: 17.
30 *The New York Times*, July 17, 1908: 6.
35 *The Washington Post*, April 22, 1909.

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3 A parliamentary revolution

Postimperial assemblies, 1917–1918

Parliamentary and quasi-parliamentary assemblies played a key role during the Russian Revolution of 1917. The Imperial State Duma was at the center of the regime change in February and March 1917, and its members formed the Provisional Government. Furthermore, then-current and former Duma deputies made up much of the revolutionary political elite. A universally elected omnipotent parliament – the All-Russian Constituent Assembly – was supposed to conclude the Russian imperial revolution (Gerasimov 2017) by resolving, *inter alia*, the land and nationality questions, establishing civil equality, and turning the tide in the First World War. While the war amplified the etatist component of imperial patriotism, the revolution shifted it to a more aspirational, progressive form that added the objective of ensuring a better future to that of keeping the integrity of the imperial space (Stockdale 2016, 10–11).

Parallel to the institutions of the Provisional Government and the new universally elected *zemstvo* and municipal authorities, numerous congresses, councils, and other quasi-parliamentary assemblies emerged in order to defend the various particularistic interests defined through gender, class, nationality, occupation, religion, social estate, and region. While some of these assemblies stressed the need to overcome the existing inequality of the former subjects as part of their transformation into citizens, others became centers for particularistic political mobilization. Class, nationality,[1] and, to a lesser extent, social estate remained especially important categories in particularistic community-building. Elected and nominated assemblies, like the Parliament of Finland and the Ukrainian Central Rada, respectively, claimed authority in parts of the empire. The soviets ("councils"), which reemerged, after their brief appearance in the Revolution of 1905–1907, as bodies of class self-government, were established across Russia. The All-Russian Conference of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies (Petrograd, March 29–April 3, 1917), the First All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies (Petrograd, June 3–24, 1917), and the All-Russian Central Executive Committee (VTsIK), formed at the latter, made these class bodies into an empire-wide organization. An empire-wide peasant organization was established with the convocation of the All-Russian Soviet of Peasants' Deputies[2] and the formation of the Executive Committee of the All-Russian Soviet of Peasants' Deputies. The number and density of peasant organizations were much smaller compared to the workers' and soldiers' soviets.

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The war and the revolution brought about major economic and public security crises, which aggravated over the course of 1917. Apart from the need to deal with the crises, the Provisional Government, which was not accountable to any parliamentary body, had been haunted by its own lack of legitimacy (Startsev 1982; Thatcher 2014, 3–4, 15). Although it originated in the State Duma, it did not allow the resumption of the Duma's session, considering it an integral part of the old regime and fearing the protests of the soviets and their supporters (Demin 1996, 83). Instead, the Provisional Government sought to gain legitimacy from political pluralism, relying on coalitional arrangements between moderate socialists, liberals, and representatives of business elites during the first major political crisis in April 1917, caused by the disagreements about the war objectives.

The summer of 1917 proved especially disastrous. The Russian offensive failed (Engelstein 2018, 179), which contributed to the revolt of the radical left during the so-called "July Days" (July 3–5, 1917). Together with its fallout with the Finnish Parliament and the Ukrainian Central Rada, all this resulted in the second crisis of the Provisional Government in July 1917. Aleksandr Fedorovich Kerenskii, a Trudovik deputy of the Fourth Duma and member of the two previous revolutionary cabinets, became Minister-President in the process. Under his leadership, the Provisional Government convened the State Conference (*Gosudarstvennoe soveshchanie*) in Moscow on August 12–15, 1917. Including nominees from different organizations, institutions, and interest groups, the State Conference was the government's attempt to build a broad public consensus in the context of the military defeats and the deep economic crisis. Major political forces, however, either approached the Conference with caution or outright rejected it. The Provisional Government also did not grant it any formal status, remaining unaccountable. Furthermore, the preparations for the Conference and the debates intensified the fissures in Russian politics, contributing to the articulation of particularistic interests based on class and nationality and to the consolidation of non-socialist groups into a new political force.

In late August 1917, the German Army took Riga and was rumored to be moving to Petrograd. The right called for a military dictatorship, which translated into the Kornilov Affair, the failed coup of Commander-in-Chief General Lavr Georgievich Kornilov, whose exact plans remain unclear. The radical left continued to campaign for a soviet, that is, class-based, government. Finnish as well as some Lithuanian and Armenian politicians advocated independence. The immediate step of the Provisional Government, which was aided by the soviets during the Kornilov Affair, was the proclamation of the Russian Republic on September 1, 1917. Although Kerenskii not only retained his position as Minister-President but seemingly strengthened his personal rule, it was the Bolshevik Party (formerly a faction of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party), which came out as the true victors. By the fall of 1917, the public moods had shifted from the initial revolutionary euphoria to anxiety, and the Bolshevik promises of ensuring provisions, transferring land to peasants, giving workers control of production, and finishing the war gave them majorities in many soviets of workers' and soldiers' deputies, including those in Moscow and Petrograd (Smith 2017, 146–7; Engelstein 2018, 179).

In the aftermath of the Kornilov Affair, moderate socialists also attempted to resolve the crises by convening a parliamentary body, the All-Russian Democratic Conference (*Demokraticheskoe soveshchanie*), in Petrograd on September 14–22, 1917. Unlike the State Conference, the Democratic Conference was particularistic and included only nominees from the "democratic" organizations, that is, those which were seen as representative of the lower social strata (Kolonitskii 1998). It was supposed to make a decision on the Provisional Government's new composition – uniformly socialist or coalitional – and establish a "pre-parliament," an assembly to which the cabinet would be accountable. The Provisional Government rejected accountability but established the consultative Provisional Council of the Russian Republic or the Pre-Parliament (*Predparlament*) (October 7–25, 1917). The Pre-Parliament included members of the Democratic Council, elected by the Democratic Conference, and representatives of non-socialist political groups and organizations. Like the State Conference, the Pre-Parliament was supposed to provide the Provisional Government with legitimacy at the time before the elections to the Constituent Assembly, which were set for November 12, 1917.

The State Conference, the Democratic Conference, and the Pre-Parliament were corporatist bodies that continued to rely on the logic of the "imperial rights regime," rooted in the imperial state's "assignment of rights and duties to differentiated collectivities." In this respect, the three assemblies continued to support differentiated citizenship, representing institutions, interest groups, and legally defined collectives rather than citizens, despite the persistence of the slogans of "uniform, individual, and equal rights" (Burbank 2006, 400). The attempts to build a composite, inclusionary Russian national community failed and the crisis of postimperial sovereignty, which started with the elimination of dynastic rule, remained unresolved in both institutional and discursive terms (Gerasimov 2017). The approaches, centered on class and nation, did not necessarily mean homogenization of the political community on these two principles, but no coherent project of inclusionary community-building prevailed. In some cases, interparty disagreements overshadowed the supposed shared interests within groups, thereby undermining the very idea of the "imperial rights regime." In others, the understanding of nations and classes as "stable collective entities pursuing common political goals" prevailed (Gerasimov 2017, 36–8).

All three assemblies were institutions of dissensus but their duration and competence did not make them parliaments (Ihalainen, Ilie, and Palonen 2016). None of the three assemblies had legislative authority or any formal influence on the Provisional Government. Their formation through nomination rather than elections made their legitimacy questionable for many contemporaries. Besides, in the context of the approaching Constituent Assembly, they were used for campaigning, prompting comparisons to political rallies.

The Constituent Assembly and the design of the future Russian government was at the center of discussions throughout 1917. Compared to the preceding decade and even to the Revolution of 1905–1907, political discourse shifted to the left. Constitutional monarchy was not on the agenda anymore, and a republic with a potent parliament became the most widely supported form of government. Numerous pamphlets and articles were published on the preferred electoral system, with

a large number of authors supporting proportional representation. There were debates on the number of chambers in the future Russian parliament. Right-wing opponents of parliamentarism were mostly quiet, but the radical left, whose popularity was growing, continued to dismiss it as a system. Vladimir Il'ich Lenin became one of the most vocal opponents of parliamentarism. Borrowing anarchists' ideas, he argued that the soviets could be at the center of postimperial self-organization.

Although a lot of people deemed the anticipated Constituent Assembly the ultimate savior of Russia, the establishment of the ostensibly soviet-backed Bolshevik–Left Socialist Revolutionary (SR) government on October 25–26, 1917, reflected the growing popularity of class-based political self-organization. The Bolshevik takeover also stimulated further development of particularisms based on nationality, social estate (in the case of some of the Cossacks), and region (in the case of Siberia), with extraordinary anti-Bolshevik governments forming in several imperial peripheries. Whereas the Finnish Parliament declared independence, most other particularistic bodies, such as the Ukrainian Central Rada, regional *zemstvo* assemblies, the Siberian Regional Council, or the Don Cossack Host Government,[3] anticipated reassembling Russia without the Bolshevik-led Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom).

The significant support for the Constituent Assembly among the population and the Sovnarkom's hopes to be legitimized by it made the Bolshevik-led government allow the election. The election was nevertheless partially obstructed, and the assembly's opening was delayed. After the election, the Sovnarkom outlawed the Constitutional Democratic (KD) Party. Whereas numerous organizations across Russia voiced their support for the Constituent Assembly, awaiting its opening, Bolshevik authors downplayed its importance, rejecting parliamentarism. The Sovnarkom allowed the Constituent Assembly to convene on January 5, 1918. However, since the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs did not have a majority there and failed to gain recognition for the Soviet government, the Bolshevik-led VTsIK dissolved it the following morning. The dissolution of the All-Russian Constituent Assembly did not mark an end to parliamentary developments, as national and regional assemblies continued to function in many parts of the former empire.

All-Russian assemblies

Despite being criticized over the preceding decade, it was the State Duma that became the organizational center of the Revolution of 1917. However, the Provisional Government answered neither to the Duma, which did not convene for formal sessions, nor to the various assemblies of 1917. The revolution itself did not get a parliamentary resolution, as the Bolshevik-led government obstructed the election to the Constituent Assembly and dissolved the body.

Bread riots, which started in Petrograd on February 21, 1917, turned into a mass movement with strikes and demonstrations on February 23. Mikhail Vladimirovich Rodzianko, the Octobrist speaker of the Fourth Duma, urged the formation of a new cabinet relying on popular trust in his telegrams to Mogilev, where the Tsar

was, on February 26. The Tsar responded by proroguing the Duma's session. On February 27, the Duma's Council of Elders, excluding the far right, decided not to dissolve the assembly. Later that day, a private meeting of Duma deputies created a special committee of 12 members. The Executive or Provisional Committee of the State Duma, chaired by Rodzianko, was initially supposed to assume authority only in Petrograd. Its members included the KD Pavel Nikolaevich Miliukov, the Progressist Aleksandr Ivanovich Konovalov, the Progressive Nationalist Vasilii Vital'evich Shul'gin, the Trudovik Kerenskii, and the Menshevik Nik'oloz Chkheidze (Rendle 2009, 34–5).

On the same day, activists from the Workers' Group of the Central War Industries Committee and Duma deputies convened the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Solders' Deputies as a revival of the 1905 institution. Both the Duma Committee and the Petrograd Soviet had their seats in the Tauride Palace. Chkheidze chaired the Petrograd Soviet's Executive Committee, while its members included the Menshevik Matvei Ivanovich Skobelev and Kerenskii. The Duma Committee attempted to reason with Grand Duke Mikhail, Nicholas II's brother, proposing to transfer power to the Duma and form an accountable cabinet. Mikhail wavered, while Prime Minister Nikolai Dmitrievich Golitsyn hesitated to act without the Tsar's order. After Nicholas II rejected Georgii Evgen'evich L'vov, a member of the First Duma and the head of the Central Committee for Army Supply of the All-Russian Zemstvo and Municipal Unions (Zemgor), as the new Prime Minister and ordered troops to suppress the revolt, the Duma Committee resolved to take state authority on February 28. On March 1, the Duma Committee created a new cabinet under G. E. L'vov in agreement with the Soviet's Executive Committee. The cabinet also included Miliukov, Kerenskii, Konovalov, the KD Andrei Ivanovich Shingarev, the KD Fedor Izmailovich Rodichev, the Octobrist Aleksandr Ivanovich Guchkov, and Mikhail Ivanovich Tereshchenko.[4]

By the time the Provisional Government was proclaimed on March 2, Rodzianko used his influence in the military command to facilitate the Tsar's abdication, which occurred on the same day. On March 3, Mikhail, in whose favor Nicholas II abdicated, agreed to accept the crown only from a universally elected Constituent Assembly and ceded authority to the Provisional Government. The new government's program, which circulated across the empire, went beyond the Program of the Progressive Bloc and included full political and religious amnesty; freedom of speech, press, association, assembly, and strikes; abolition of all social-estate, religious, and national restrictions; preparation to convene the Constituent Assembly based on universal, equal, and direct election by a secret ballot; and formation of universally elected self-government bodies. The Soviet's Executive Committee supported the Provisional Government on condition that it implemented this program. The Soviet itself went much further. On March 1, before the Provisional Government was formally established, the Petrograd Soviet promulgated Order No. 1, which ratified the election of committees in the military and practically established the Soviet's political authority over soldiers and sailors.[5]

As argued by Matthew Rendle, it is unclear whether the Duma Committee was established by the will of the Duma's majority or merely by the Progressive Bloc

leaders, but the committee's decision to form a government was undoubtedly independent of the Duma (Rendle 2009, 36, 38). The popularity of the Duma nevertheless facilitated the committee's swift recognition by the military command and in the empire's peripheries (Shelokhaev 2008, 682). The KD newspaper *Rech'* interpreted the revolution as the manifestation of "a nation in the true sense of the word," while the troops rallied around the Duma. Many politicians including Skobelev, Chkheidze, Miliukov, and Kerenskii gained empire-wide popularity thanks to the Duma.[6] A poster celebrating the revolution put Rodzianko as the Duma Chairman in the center of the composition, representing the new government.[7] The Tauride Palace itself became a potent symbol of the revolution. The text below the composition nevertheless stressed the agency of the Russian people and its individual classes rather than the Duma.

Since the first program of the Provisional Government did not explicitly mention women's rights, women's activists raised the issue of women's suffrage already in early March, organizing demonstrations on March 8. The Soviet's Executive Committee stressed that universal suffrage to the Constituent Assembly included women. The Petrograd City Duma coopted women, including Poliksena Nestorovna Shishkina-Iavein, a doctor and the President of the League for Women's Equal Rights, and Anna Sergeevna Miliukova into municipal committees. The League nevertheless organized a major demonstration in Petrograd on March 19, with up to 40,000 women marching from the Municipal Duma building to the Tauride Palace (Figure 3.1). Shishkina-Iavein addressed Rodzianko, Chkheidze, and



Figure 3.1 Women's demonstration. Petrograd, March 19, 1917. GTsMSIR, 11893/40. Slogans on the banners, left to right: "The place of women is in the Constituent Assembly," "Strength is in unity," and "Female citizens of free Russia demand voting rights."

Skobelev, demanding full civil rights for women. On March 21, G. E. L'vov confirmed that the cabinet unanimously supported women's suffrage to a delegation of socialist and liberal women activists from Moscow and Petrograd.[8]

While legislation on the election to the Constituent Assembly was being discussed, the Provisional Government reformed local self-government bodies. On April 15, the new electoral regulations for municipal dumas specified that voting rights belonged to "Russian citizens of both sexes and all nationalities and religions" over the age of twenty (Vremennoe pravitel'stvo 1917, 1:164). On May 21, county (*volost'*) and district *zemstvo* assemblies were made directly and universally elected. Provincial *zemstvo* assemblies were elected indirectly from district *zemstvo* assemblies and municipal dumas. In June and July, *zemstvo* self-government was extended to Siberia, the Arkhangelsk Province, the Urals, Central Asia, the Kalmyk Steppe, the Astrakhan Province, and the remaining parts of the Stavropol Province (Vremennoe pravitel'stvo 1918, 2, Part 1:215, 223, 279, 281–2, 292, 321, 396, 421, 426, 435).

Municipal and *zemstvo* assemblies became key sites of electoral struggle and parliamentary politics, extending beyond their self-government functions. The reformed bodies were more popular in urban than rural areas.[9] As reported in July, 2,640 deputies were elected in 121 cities and towns. Although some 40 percent of them were not members of political parties, most of the remaining deputies were elected from socialist parties and blocs. Only seven percent of deputies represented the KD Party.[10] In the Petrograd district duma elections in the summer of 1917, 24 out of 698 elected deputies were women. Twelve were elected from the socialist parties and eight from the KD Party. Shishkina-Iavein was also elected.[11] In some towns, like Kungur of the Perm Province, women nominated their own candidate lists and succeeded.[12] The Petrograd City Duma became a site of struggle between moderate socialists, liberals, and radical socialists. It is noteworthy that some of the radical SDs resolved to actively participate in the activities of the Petrograd City Duma,[13] that is, they did not see this body as a mere rostrum for propagating their ideas.

The Menshevik and SR leadership of the Petrograd Soviet was open to cooperation with the Provisional Government. The Menshevik Irak'li Ts'ereteli, a Duma deputy, who had returned to Petrograd from his exile in Irkutsk and joined the leadership of the Petrograd Soviet, was one of the most prominent proponents of the unity of all "living forces" in Russia. For Ts'ereteli, these forces were the main subject of the all-national revolution and included not only socialists, workers, and soldiers but also peasants and the progressive bourgeoisie; their unity was the main factor in establishing a stable political order (Galili 1989, 35, 40, 149–51).

There were nevertheless recurring conflicts between the Petrograd Soviet's Executive Committee and the Provisional Government on the issues pertaining to labor and land. In April 1917, Miliukov implied a continued interest in brining Istanbul (Constantinople) and the Straits under the Russian control, which went against the defensist position of the Soviet's Executive Committee and the growing antiwar sentiments among the populace. The resolution of the political crisis involved Miliukov's resignation and the formation of the second cabinet on May 5. It included more socialists in addition to Kerenskii, who became the new War and

Navy Minister. The SR Minister of Agriculture Viktor Mikhailovich Chernov and the Menshevik Minister of Labor Skobelev were, however, unable to implement their policies due to liberal opposition (Vremennoe pravitel'stvo 1918, 2, Part 1:1–2; Fitzpatrick 2001, 48–9).

Right-wing and liberal politicians suggested combining the State Duma and the Petrograd Soviet in a one-time assembly already in April (Rudneva 2000, 13–14). Some socialists spoke on the need for a revolutionary parliament in May. On July 12, following the July Days and a ministerial crisis, which manifested in the resignation of three KD ministers opposing concessions to the Ukrainian Central Rada, the Provisional Government resolved to convene "an assembly of representatives of civil society organizations." This body was supposed to support drastic policy measures, such as the reintroduction of the death penalty in the military, and ensure public consensus until the Constituent Assembly, then planned for September.[14] On July 19, Kerenskii, the new Minister-President, appointed Kornilov, a proponent of harsher policies, as Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces (Smith 2017, 145). Although the Provisional Government adopted election regulations for the Constituent Assembly on July 20, introducing universal suffrage for all citizens over the age of twenty,[15] it postponed the election and convocation until November.[16]

The State Conference brought over 2,500 people together in the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow on August 12–15, 1917 (Figure 3.2). Most seats were given to the four



Figure 3.2 The State Conference. Bolshoi Theater, Moscow, August 12–15, 1917. GTsM-SIR, 6095/188.

State Dumas (488), cooperative societies (313), trade unions (176), trade and industrial organizations and banks (150), municipal self-government bodies (147), the central executive bodies of soviets of workers' and soldiers', and of peasants' deputies (129), the Zemstvo and Municipal Unions (118), the Army and the Navy (117), the Peasant Union (100), and the soviets of workers' and soldiers' deputies (100). Many other occupational, governmental, religious, and non-Russian national organizations and institutions were also invited to send their representatives. Representation was not universal, proportional, or equal. The special representation of non-Russian national groups (58), for instance, did not reflect the fact that non-Russians were a majority in the empire's population. Members of the invited organizations had double representation if they had also voted in the local elections. The conference included such minor organizations as, for instance, the Religious Philosophical Society of Rybinsk.[17]

The Bolsheviks and other radical socialists denounced the State Conference. A strike of some 400,000 workers was organized on the day of the conference's opening, despite the fact that the Moscow Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies voted against it.[18] Some Bolsheviks nevertheless attended the State Conference.[19]

In his opening speech, Kerenskii highlighted the economic crisis, political fragmentation, and military defeats as the dangers to the Russian state. He called for creating "a free nation from the dispersed masses," which in the context of the war meant giving up particularistic, that is, "personal, group, and class interests." Kerenskii stressed that strong "unifying" authority was needed to prevent state disintegration and civil war, defending the death penalty. At the same time, he reaffirmed that "salvation" lay with the Constituent Assembly (Pokrovskii and Iakovlev 1930, 7, 9–10, 13–14).

Ahead of the conference, moderate socialists and non-socialists consolidated on the basis of two alternative platforms. On August 11, some 400 representatives of "democracy," including the VTsIK, headed by Chkheidze, cooperatives, trade unions, peasant soviets, and other organizations agreed on a joint defensist platform. It was directed against both the "internationalists-Bolsheviks" and the right while supporting further reforms.[20] The KD Party developed a non-socialist program already in July. On August 8–10, some 400 people, including the representatives of the Provisional Committee of the State Duma, the KD Party, the Octobrists, *zemstvo* bodies, business elites, institutions of higher education, clergy, cooperative societies, the Peasant Union, landowners, engineers, officers, lawyers, and other groups, convened for the Moscow Conference of Public Figures. It adopted a resolution, proposed by Miliukov. Stressing the lack of discipline in the Army and authority across the country, it blamed the new socialist-dominated committees and soviets and decried selfish interests of "individual groups" under "the slogan of class struggle." The resolution also accused "the nationalities of the Russian state" of excessive demands and secessionism in the moment of "grave danger" to the "shared Motherland." The resolution demanded that any decisions on the state system and social reforms were postponed until the Constituent Assembly.[21]

In the context of two opposing platforms, both claiming to be all-national, there were fierce debates before and during the conference and widespread doubts that any compromise was possible.[22] Indeed, the majority of the delegates seemed to agree that the consolidation of the Russian political community was the solution to the crisis of imperial sovereignty. Even those who saw class as the primary principle of political organization did not dismiss the idea of the Russian nation. The notion of unity was the main leitmotif of the speeches at the State Conference. Petr Alekseevich Kropotkin, who also stood on defensist positions, urged to "break with Zimmerwald," that is, the anti-war socialist movement, and to protect the Motherland and the Revolution. Miliukov (Figure 3.3) called for "internal peace." However, the two approaches to building a Russian political community proved incompatible. In the declaration of the revolutionary organizations, read out by Chkheidze on August 14, unity was preconditioned by further reforms. Moderate socialists, including most of the non-Russian speakers, advocated a bottom-up and composite approach to building the postimperial community, with the immediate or delayed satisfaction of particularistic interests. Non-socialists, except for non-Russian representatives, subscribed to a top-down and homogenizing approach to building the Russian nation. This opposition of coercive discipline to self-organization undermined the consensus (Pokrovskii and Iakovlev 1930, 43–4, 54, 57, 59–60, 74, 77–8, 103, 117, 119, 124–5, 131, 133, 138–40, 144–5, 163–7, 178, 180–7, 229, 232, 234, 237–8, 248, 297).

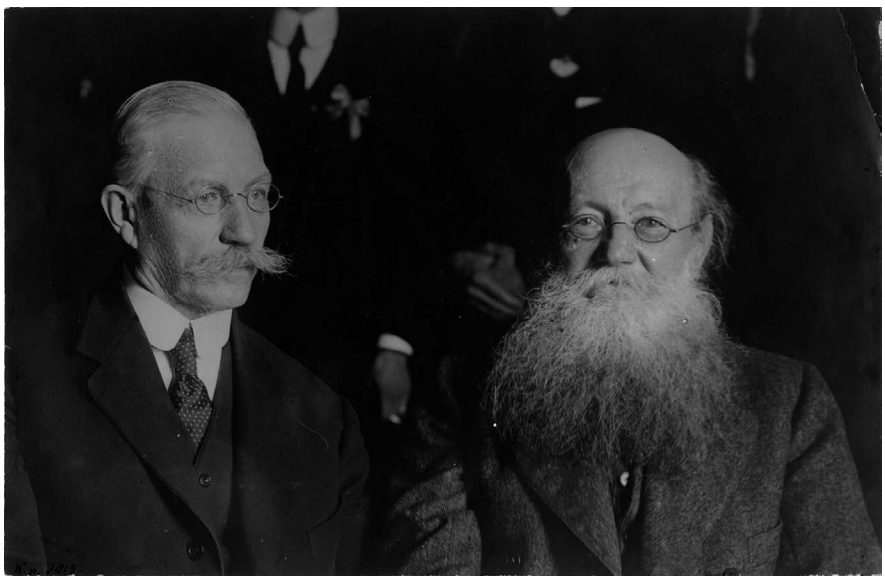


Figure 3.3 P. N. Miliukov (left) and P. A. Kropotkin (right) at the State Conference. Moscow, August 12–15, 1917. GTsMSIR, 3013/19.

The State Conference did not adopt any resolutions. In his closing speech, Kerenskii argued that the conference was important since the "citizens of the Russian [*rossiiskii*] state of all classes, parties, and nationalities" openly expressed their views on the state's needs, and the Provisional Government "got the opportunity to kind of take a snapshot of the country's political mood" (Pokrovskii and Iakovlev 1930, 301). Most of the commentators, however, were skeptical. The liberal press acknowledged the conference as a major organizing event for the moderate socialist and non-socialist camps but concluded that no common language was possible.[23] The right press celebrated the patriotism of the non-socialists and their alleged readiness for an agreement. The moderate socialist press declared a victory for the "democracy" and accused the right of taking an uncompromising position.[24] The Bolshevik press denounced Kerenskii as a dictator and suggested that once the bourgeoisie was done with him, they would install Kornilov as a new one. According to *Sotsial-demokrat* ("Social Democrat"), Kornilov's victory would destroy the soviets. It called on the proletariat to repel the attack and fight for its own dictatorship.[25] When the attempted coup did take place on August 27–31, Kerenskii turned to the soviets for support (Rendle 2009, 181; Smith 2017, 146; Engelstein 2018, 164–5).

Although only some politicians were implicated in the Kornilov Affair, socialists blamed all of the "bourgeoisie." Members of the VTsIK articulated the idea of a "provisional national assembly" to which the Provisional Government would be accountable. The VTsIK and the Executive Committee of the All-Russian Soviet of Peasants' Deputies proposed convening a new conference consisting only of "democratic" elements (Rudneva 2000, 34, 40–1). The Provisional Government did not support this but the two executive committees went ahead with convening All-Russian Conference of Democratic Organizations or the All-Russian Democratic Conference.[26]

Although non-socialists were excluded from the Democratic Conference, which gave it some features of a particularistic assembly, moderate socialists continued to appeal to unity. The invitations to the Democratic Conference, signed by Chkheidze and Nikolai Dmitrievich Avksent'ev, the SR Chairman of the Executive Committee of the All-Russian Soviet of Peasants' Deputies and the Minister of Internal Affairs between August 2 and September 15, formulated its main goals in national defensist terms. The invitations urged to gather all the forces of the country in order to organize its defense, help its internal order, and decide on a strong revolutionary authority, capable of uniting whole revolutionary Russia to repel external enemies and suppress any encroachments on the freedom it has won.[27] When Ts'ereteli proposed the formation of a coalitional Provisional Government ahead of the Conference, he cited the need to unite "all living forces of the country." The VTsIK and the SR Central Committee supported the idea of a coalition but excluded the KDs from it.[28]

The core of the Democratic Conference, which met in the Alexandrine Theater in Petrograd on September 14–22, 1917, was composed of those "democratic" organizations that participated in the Moscow State Conference but in other proportions.

Most of the 1,582 seats were allocated to municipal self-governments (300), *zemstvo* self-governments (200), workers' and soldiers' soviets (230), peasants' soviets (230), the Army and the Navy (125), "all-estate" cooperation (120), workers' cooperation (38), trade unions (100), and Cossack organizations (35). While municipal bodies had already been universally re-elected, the elections to *zemstvos* were still underway, and their delegations included both prerevolutionary non-socialists politicians and co-opted socialists. Ukrainian, Lithuanians, Belarusian, Armenian, Jewish, Latvian, Polish, Muslims, and other non-Russian organizations received a total of 60 seats. Most of the remaining seats were allocated to the specialized bodies of the Provisional Government and individual professional organizations. The SRs of different factions won 532 seats, the Mensheviks 172 seats, and the Bolsheviks 136 seats; 400 delegates registered as non-party (Raikhtsaum 1993, 383).

Speaking during the first day of the conference, Chkheidze, a member of its Presidium (Figure 3.4), argued that the revolution was meant to unleash all of the nation's creative forces to defend the country and achieve peace, but the imperialist circles and the advocates of an immediate world social revolution became an obstacle to this. According to Chkheidze, unity was possible only on the basis of



Figure 3.4 Members of the Presidium of the Democratic Conference. Petrograd, September 1917. Photo by P. A. Otsup. Left to right: Nik'oloz Chkheidze, Irak'li Ts'ereteli, L. B. Kamenev, N. D. Avksent'ev, G. I. Shreider. GTsMSIR, 11880/232.

the moderate socialist platform presented at the State Conference. The core debates pertained to the question of a coalitional cabinet and the possible formation of a pre-parliament, supporting such a cabinet until the Constituent Assembly. Some advocates of a coalition denounced narrow group, class and national demands and called for self-restraint, especially on the part of the toiling classes. Israel' Rafailovich Efroikin of the Jewish national group, Liparit Nazaryants[29] of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutyun), Aitech (Aitek) Alievich Namitokov (Namitok) of the Mountaineers of the North Caucasus and Dagestan, and several other non-Russian deputies urged to postpone the final resolution of the nationality question until the Constituent Assembly.[30]

The Bolsheviks, left SRs, and other radical left groups opposed any agreements with non-socialists. Many moderate participants, including non-party delegates, showed hesitation. The first vote on the possibility of a coalition saw its proponents win (766 votes in favor, 688 against, and 38 abstaining). The absolute majority, however, rejected a coalition with the KDs and the participants of the Kornilov Affair. A subsequent vote on a coalition with non-socialists saw its opponents prevail (813 votes against, 183 in favor, and 80 abstaining).[31] Following negotiations among the leaders of different groups, at which Kerenskii was present, the Democratic Conference adopted a resolution on forming a pre-parliament, representing the whole country, including non-socialists, with 829 votes in favor, 106 against, and 69 abstaining. The Provisional Government would be accountable to the pre-parliament. Many of the Bolsheviks did not participate in the vote.[32]

The Democratic Conference established a standing body, the Democratic Council. The issue of the pre-parliament was negotiated by the Provisional Government, the representatives of the Democratic Conference, the non-socialist Council of Moscow Conferences of Public Figures, and the KD Central Committee on September 22–24. Non-socialists and Kerenskii opposed the accountability of the government to the pre-parliament. Moderate socialists conceded despite the Democratic Council's resolution in favor of accountability. The Provisional Government announced its new coalitional composition on September 25. On October 2, the government adopted the Regulations on the Provisional Council of the Russian Republic, as the Pre-Parliament was called on Ts'ereteli's suggestion. It had 555 seats, of which 388 were unofficially reserved for "democratic" elements. The new body had consultative legislative competence and the right to interpellation. Its members were granted partial immunity from prosecution. On October 6, the Provisional Government reaffirmed November 12 as the date for the elections to the Constituent Assembly and formally dissolved the imperial State Duma and the State Council.[33]

The Democratic Council became the core of the "democratic" part of the Pre-Parliament. The non-socialist seats were distributed between the KD Party (64 seats), the Trade and Industrial Group (34), the Council of Moscow Conferences of Public Figures (12), the Union of Landowners (7), and other groups, including Cossack and non-Russian national organizations. The Pre-Parliament hence had pluralistic but unequal and irregular representation, with delegates being nominated

by political parties and groups, self-government bodies, and other organizations. According to incomplete data, there were 135 SRs, 92 Mensheviks, 75 KDs, 58 Bolsheviks, and 30 PSs in the Pre-Parliament.[34]

Kerenskii opened the session of the Pre-Parliament in the Mariinsky Palace in Petrograd, the former seat of the imperial State Council, on October 7, 1917. Avksent'ev was elected Chairman of the Presidium. Lev Davidovich Trotskii (Bronshtein), who then chaired the Petrograd Soviet, delivered a protest declaration of the Bolsheviks followed by their walkout. The declaration denounced the Pre-Parliament's origins in the "behind-the-scenes deals between Kerenskii, the KDs, and the leaders of the SRs and the Mensheviks" and its contradiction to the objectives of the Democratic Conference. It protested the inclusion of those who were implicated in the Kornilov Affair and the lack of the government's accountability, comparing the Pre-Parliament to the 1905 "Bulygin Duma."[35]

Unlike the State Conference and the Democratic Conference, the Pre-Parliament had more parliamentary features in its internal organization and procedure. Following the Duma experience, it formed the Council of Elders (Figure 3.5) and several commissions. Groups of deputies posed formal questions to the



Figure 3.5 Members of the Council of Elders of the Pre-Parliament. Petrograd, October 1917. Photo by P. A. Otsup. Front row, left to right: F. I. Rodichev, N. N. Kutler, M. E. Berezin, N. V. Chaikovskii, M. M. Vinaver, N. D. Avksent'ev, M. V. Vishniak, M. A. Natanson, I. N. Sakharov, B. O. Bogdanov, S. L. Vainshtein. Back row: R. A. Abramovich (first from right); in no particular order: B. D. Samsonov, [V. N.] Ferri, V. S. Sizikov, V. P. Chefranov, E. E. Gorovoi. RGAKFD, 4-19708.

government. The Pre-Parliament had a total of nine plenary meetings, which were mainly devoted to the discussions of defense and foreign policy. Plenary and commission meetings had problems with quorum. The Council also did not have a stable majority. After the discussion of defense, none of the five proposed resolutions was adopted. The discord made commentators and deputies argue that the Pre-Parliament was used for campaigning for the election to the Constituent Assembly.[36]

Many of the speakers, including Avksent'ev, continued to appeal to the unity of the Russian civic nation. Cossack deputies called the Bolsheviks enemies of Russia because they hindered such unity. However, the Bolsheviks themselves also appealed to patriotism. Their declaration accused the government of treason in connection to rumors of a possible surrender of Petrograd to the Germans.[37]

On October 24, Kerenskii addressed the anticipated Bolshevik insurgency in the Pre-Parliament. Two draft resolutions were put to vote. The first draft, supported by the Mensheviks, the more radical Mensheviks-Internationalists, the SRs, and the left SRs, cautioned against the insurgency but attributed its reasons to the lack of reforms. It called the Provisional Government to immediately transfer land to land committees[38] as the first step in its transfer to peasants and to propose peace negotiations to the Allies. The second draft, supported the cooperatives and the KDs, urged to fight "treason," declared full support for the Provisional Government, and demanded extreme measures against the insurgency. The socialist resolution won with 123 votes in favor, 102 against, and 26 abstaining. The members of the Provisional Government viewed this as a vote of no confidence, but Avksent'ev told Kerenskii that this was not the case and its sole purpose was to counter the Bolshevik slogans. On October 25, the Pre-Parliament was supposed to hold its tenth plenary meeting, but before it could open, the Mariinsky Palace was surrounded by the troops of the Bolshevik-led Military Revolutionary Committee.[39]

The Second Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, which convened in Petrograd on October 25–27, 1917, established the Bolshevik-only Sovnarkom under Lenin as a "provisional workers' and peasants' government," to be in power "until the convocation of the Constituent Assembly" (Protasov 1997, 72. 100, 145, 2014, 296). The All-Russian Commission on the Elections to the Constituent Assembly initially suspended its operation due to the coup but soon resumed its operation. The KD Vladimir Dmitrievich Nabokov, however, claimed on behalf of the commission that the election would take place in an atmosphere of a "civil war," threatening to "distort the representation of the people." Given that the new Soviet government was not yet firmly established in much of the former empire, the election on November 12–14[40] partially reflected the political sentiments of the population. The election was popular in rural areas, while in urban areas, the middle classes and especially the intelligentsia were disillusioned about its prospects. Members of the All-Russian Commission on the Elections, including Nabokov and the SR Mark Veniaminovich Vishniak, a legal scholar, were arrested on accusations of sabotage on November 23. Although they were released a few days later, the commission was soon disbanded. The Bolshevik Moisei

Solomonovich Uritskii, the Sovnarkom's Commissar to the commission, took over its functions (Mal'chevskii 1930, 151; Protasov 1997, 147–58, 2014, 156).

Some 48.4 million votes were counted, while up to 2 million were not. Out of the total 820 seats, 767 were filled. The results were unsatisfactory for the Bolsheviks, who received 22.5 percent of the counted votes. The SR Party led with 39.5 percent. Other major parties, the KD Party (4.5 percent), the Mensheviks (3.2 percent), and the Labor People's Socialist Party (0.9 percent), received significantly fewer votes. Another 14.5 percent of votes went to the joint socialist lists, which included many non-Russian national socialist parties. Some 9.6 percent went to the national parties and non-socialist (autonomist and federalist) lists. Finally, 5 percent of voters supported religious, cooperative, Cossack, Siberian Regionalist, right-liberal, conservative lists, and those submitted by other organizations.[41]

Due to late and failed arrivals, which happened, *inter alia*, due to the starting of the Civil War, there were only some 495 deputies in Petrograd as of December 27. The SR Faction had 247 members on January 5, 1918. The Left SR Faction, including Ukrainian Left SRs, had 40. The "right" Ukrainian SRs had their own faction of 14 registered members. Although they won at least 81 seats, the party leadership did not allow most of the deputies to travel to Petrograd due to the *de facto* war between the Soviet government and the Central Rada. The Bolsheviks had the second-largest faction with 135 members. The Mensheviks had a faction of 6 members as of late December 1917. Several KDs and "right" SRs were arrested in November but soon released. On November 28, 1917, a meeting of Constituent Assembly members took place in the Tauride Palace took place but was closed by the Bolsheviks. The same day, the Sovnarkom declared the KD Party the "enemies of the people." Several KDs were arrested, and two of them, Fedor Fedorovich Kokoshkin and Shingarev, were murdered on January 7, 1918. Among non-party groups, Muslim candidates won over 60 seats but only a few deputies arrived in Petrograd. On January 1, 1918, seven Muslim deputies formed the Muslim Socialist Faction (Novitskaia 1991, 8; Protasov 2014, 192, 258, 452, 473–6, 509, 1997, 165–6, 293). Within the SR Faction, a Siberian Group was formed.[42]

On January 3, 1918, the Bolshevik-led VTsIK adopted the Declaration of Rights of the Working and Exploited People with a program to be approved by the Constituent Assembly. According to the declaration, drafted by Lenin with the participation of Iosif Vissarionovich Stalin and Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin (Mal'chevskii 1930, 204), Russia was to be proclaimed "a republic of soviets of workers', soldiers', and peasants' deputies," in which "all power at the center and locally belonged to these soviets." The Soviet Republic was also to be established "on the basis of a free union of free nations as a federation of Soviet national republics." The Constituent Assembly was expected to abolish private property on land and support the Sovnarkom's decisions. Finally, the Constituent Assembly had to recognize its own lack of legitimacy due to being elected on the party candidate lists "compiled before the October Revolution" and recognize the authority of the Soviet government (Novitskaia 1991, 64–6).



Figure 3.6 The Constituent Assembly in session. Tauride Palace, Petrograd, January 5, 1918. V. I. Lenin is seated in the front row facing the deputies (fourth from right). TsGAKFFD SPb, Gr8644.

The only meeting (Figure 3.6) of the Constituent Assembly took place on January 5–6, 1918. It featured numerous altercations. The Bolsheviks and the Left SRs were especially vocal and disruptive. Chernov, who was elected the assembly's Chairman defeating the Left SR Maria Aleksandrovna Spiridonova argued that "Russia must, in the person of all its peoples [nationalities], represent a living, lasting, moral and political unity." He stressed the legitimacy of the Constituent Assembly. Responding to the Bolshevik claims that the Constituent Assembly did not reflect the changed political circumstances, such as the split of the SR Party, Chernov maintained that it could be reelected if the people decided so in a referendum (Mal'chevskii 1930, 13, 19, 21–2).

After the Constituent Assembly refused to discuss the VTsIK declaration, the Bolsheviks staged a walkout. The Left SRs soon followed. The remaining deputies adopted the Law on Land, which abolished private property on it, an appeal to the Allies, proposing to start talks in order to achieve a universal democratic peace, and a resolution on the state system, which proclaimed the Russian Democratic Federative Republic.[43] After this, the meeting was closed, and the Constituent Assembly was not allowed to reconvene.

Class particularism

Class became a key category on which particularistic congresses, assemblies, and other institutions relied. It also played an important role in the debates at the all-Russian assemblies. Although initially it was socialists who appealed to class, it quickly became part of broader debates.

The Petrograd Soviet was formed of delegates from factories and military units. Within the first week after its reestablishment, the number of deputies rose to 1,200; soon it reached 3,000. Mensheviks and SRs took the leading positions in its Executive Committee. In the spring of 1917, some 700 soviets with around 200,000 deputies emerged across Russia, most of them representing workers and soldiers. The soviets were described both as bodies of class self-organization and of "revolutionary democracy" in broader terms. The members of soviets were drawn almost exclusively from socialist parties, and during the first months of the revolution, moderate socialists predominated in their leadership (Tsapenko and Iakovlev 1927, 294; Smith 2017, 102, 105–6, 108).

During the first days of the revolution, groups of Russian anarchists, both within the country and abroad, reiterated their rejection of any governments, including the Provisional Government, and opposed any compromises with the "bourgeoise and capitalists." A group in Lausanne, for instance, maintained that no "Guchkovs, Miliukovs, and Plekhanovs" could stop the new revolution, that is, the world social revolution for which the Russian people had risen. The anarchists were among the first to speak of the "dual power" of the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet. Although some anarchists supported the Soviet, the Lausanne group demanded complete decentralization of the revolution that had to be realized through the creation of self-governing communes, which were to seize land and industry, expropriate the bourgeoisie, and destroy private property (Kriven'kii 1998, 2:10–11, 14, 17, 19–23).

After the All-Russian Conference of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies (Petrograd, March 29–April 3, 1917), members of other soviets were added to the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet, giving it broader legitimacy in Russia. The conference, which included 470 registered representatives of 185 organizations from 120 cities and towns (Tsapenko and Iakovlev 1927, 3–15), took place in the auditorium of the Tauride Palace, from which Nicholas II's portrait had been removed. The Mensheviks Skobelev, Chkheidze, Georgii Valentinovich Plekhanov, and Ts'ereteli were elected to the Presidium (Figure 3.7).

The conference became an assembly of dissensus where different positions on the role of the soviets in the revolutionary system were voiced. Several delegates described the Provisional Government as a class-based, bourgeois government. Many, however, deemed its program, developed under the pressure of the Petrograd Soviet, democratic. There were no articulate proposals to remove the Provisional Government and transfer all authority to the soviets. Iurii Mikhailovich Steklov, a lawyer and at the time factionless SD, left the issue of authority open, suggesting that if the liberal bourgeoisie stopped implementing its political program and satisfying the demands of the "toiling masses," then the revolutionary democracy could



Figure 3.7 The Presidium of the All-Russian Conference of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. Tauride Palace, Petrograd, [April 3], 1917. Left to right: M. I. Skobelev, Nik'oloz Chkheidze, G. V. Plekhanov, Irak'li Ts'ereteli. TsGAKFFD SPb, D19811.

seize power despite the will of the bourgeois circles. Some suggested that representatives of workers, soldiers, and peasants entered the Provisional Government, while others rejected this idea (Tsapenko and Iakovlev 1927, 9–12, 39, 111–13).

The Menshevik Anatolii Ievgeniiovych Skachko,[44] an officer, interpreted the Conference of Soviets as a parliament.

> […] we clearly see that an unwritten constitution has been created with a unicameral system and its executive body, the cabinet. The chamber of deputies is here, this assembly of all the soviets of w[orkers'] and s[oldiers'] d[eputies] (*applause*), it is our only chamber that the revolution has chosen. The only attitude on the part of this chamber toward the Provisional Government can be such that the Provisional Government is the accountable cabinet of this chamber of deputies.
>
> (Tsapenko and Iakovlev 1927, 161)

Ts'ereteli defended "class peace" and "civic peace in the sphere of foreign policy." The conference voiced its support for the Provisional Government, since it continued to follow the declared program (Tsapenko and Iakovlev 1927, 98–9, 162–3).

Lenin returned to Petrograd just as the conference had ended. The next day, on April 4, he delivered his famous April Theses. In these theses, he stressed the capitalist character of the Provisional Government, and, consequently, the imperialist character of the war. Lenin argued that the war could become revolutionary only if the power was transferred to "the hands of the proletariat" and "the poorest parts of the peasantry." Similar to anarchists, he anticipated Russia's transition into the second stage, which required the seizure of power by the proletariat and the poorest peasants. Lenin denounced the Provisional Government and insisted that the soviets of workers' deputies were the "only possible form of revolutionary government" (Lenin 1927, 313–14).

> Not a parliamentary republic – the return to it from the s[oviets] of w[orkers'] d[eputies] would be a step backwards – but a republic of soviets of workers', day laborers', and peasants' deputies in all of the country, from the bottom to the top [needs to be established].
>
> (Lenin 1927, 314)

Rejecting the accusations that he ignited a "civil war" among the revolutionary democracy, Lenin stressed that most defensists were deceived by the bourgeoisie. He also dismissed his SD opponents as "socialists-chauvinists" and representatives of the bourgeoisie. Lenin accused the Provisional Government of delaying the Constituent Assembly and claimed that it would not be convened without the soviets of workers' and soldiers' deputies (Lenin 1927, 316–17). Some of the left members of the SR Party, such as Boris Davidovich Kamkov, also opposed "civic peace" with the bourgeoisie (Erofeev and Shelokhaev 1996, 3, Part 1:245).

In the meantime, the soviet mainstream remained moderate. It was the moderate SR majority that dominated the All-Russian Soviet (Congress) of Peasants' Deputies (Petrograd, May 4–28, 1917), which included 561 delegates on its first day. Addressing the Congress, Chernov urged peasants to continue self-organizing through soviets, but noted that they already had a prominent position in the revolution through the predominately peasant Army. Remaining on class positions, Chernov stressed the importance of the "fraternity" between the toiling peasants and the urban proletariat, anticipating the formation of the "earthly trinity," that is, soviets of peasants', workers', and soldiers' deputies. Having become Minister of Agriculture on May 5, Chernov explained that "the propertied[45] Russia" felt that it was not strong enough to deal with the deteriorating situation in the country without "the democratic Russia."[46]

Skobelev, who spoke at the peasant Congress as a representative of the Petrograd Soviet's Executive Committee discussed the toilers as a single class and the main defended of Russian national interests.

> The will of a nation is the sum of the wills of the classes that make it up. There are moments a country's history, in a nation's history, when the interests of classes coincide with the interests of the nation. And now, when a new young class, the democratic class, the class of workers in the factories

> and behind the plow, has entered the organizational public life of the state, their interests coincide with the interests of the nation, and the defense of the nation from outside is the next task of the Russian revolution (*applause*).[47]

Ts'ereteli, then Minister of Post and Telegraph, called the First All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies (Petrograd, June 3–24, 1917), the "parliament of revolutionary democracy," since the socialist members of the Provisional Government were accountable to it and since it was to define their further policy (Rakhmetov 1930, 1:54). Lenin, however, did not agree with such an interpretation. He asserted that revolutionary democracy and the program of a bourgeois parliamentary republic were incompatible. Lenin located the soviets in a broader history of revolutions, citing the years 1792 (most likely the insurrection of August 10 and the radical period) and 1871 (the Paris Commune) in France and the year 1905 in Russia (Rakhmetov 1930, 1:67–8).

> The soviets are an institution which does not exist in any ordinary type of a bourgeois-parliamentary state and cannot exist side by side with a bourgeois government. This is that new, more democratic type of state that we called in our party resolutions a peasant-proletarian democratic republic, in which the sole power would belong to the soviets of the w[orkers'] and s[oldiers'] d[eputies].
>
> (Rakhmetov 1930, 1:68)

Lenin rejected Ts'ereteli's metaphor of parliament, arguing that it was pointless to listen to the reports of ministers since they could not be checked. He also claimed that the Bolsheviks would take the power if they were given the opportunity (Rakhmetov 1930, 1:68–70).

A third opinion was voiced by the Mezhraiontsy ("Interdistrictites") SDs.[48] After demanding the immediate abolition of the State Duma, as an organization harboring reactionary elements and threatening with counterrevolution, and the State Council, Anatolii Vasil'evich Lunacharskii proposed a draft resolution. According to the draft, the power had to be transferred to the Executive Committee of the All-Russian Union of Soviets of Workers', Soldiers', and Peasants' Deputies under the control of the "Provisional Revolutionary Parliament." In order to form the latter, the Congress was supposed to nominate 300 delegates, with proportional representation of all factions; the Petrograd Soviet was to delegate another 100 members and so was the All-Russian Soviet of Peasants' Deputies. The "Provisional Revolutionary Parliament" would form the Executive Committee, which would exercise executive power through ministers and a special state commission. The self-government system was supposed to be replaced by soviets, with provincial and regional soviets sending delegates (one from each) to the "Provisional Revolutionary Parliament." The Executive Committee was to be connected to regional soviets through commissars (Rakhmetov 1930, 1:84–5).

Individual delegates criticized the proposals of Lenin and Lunacharskii, although some delegates supported the idea of a revolutionary parliament, to which

the cabinet would be accountable. One Menshevik delegate, however, contended that the Constituent Assembly, uniting all classes, would be the revolutionary parliament. The resolutions of the Bolsheviks and the Mezhraiontsy were rejected. The adopted resolution, proposed by the Mensheviks and the SRs, claimed that transferring power to the soviets would weaken the revolution by alienating some interest groups. It also demanded to convene the Constituent Assembly sooner. It nevertheless envisioned a representative body of the two congresses of soviets, that is, including the peasant one, to which socialist ministers would be accountable (Rakhmetov 1930, 1:172, 198, 211–12, 252, 256–7, 264, 286–91).

As argued by Sheila Fitzpatrick, by associating with the Provisional Government, the "responsible" socialists separated themselves and the VTsIK, which was created at the First Congress of Soviets of Worker' and Soldiers' Deputies, from the "irresponsible" popular revolution. Popular hostility toward the Provisional Government had grown since late spring due to the deteriorating economic situation. During the July Days, the slogan "all power to the soviets" was widely used by protesters and directed not only against the Provisional Government but also the moderate soviet leadership (Fitzpatrick 2001, 49). Among the Mensheviks, like among the SRs, there were opponents of "civic peace" between classes (Galili, Nenarokov, and Kheimson 1995, 2:143–4).

The differentiation of the Russian public into the "democracy" and the "bourgeoisie" grew stronger in the aftermath of the July Days. At the State Conference, many speakers articulated difference and divergence of interests in terms of class. The main opposition between the "revolutionary democracy" and the "bourgeoisie" or the "propertied elements" was generally understood in terms of class. The suggestions of Sergei Nikolaevich Prokopovich, the non-party Minister of Trade and Industry, to the capitalists to "give up excessive profits" and to the workers to "give up unnecessary rest" did not lead to a compromise. Several non-socialists argued that class selfishness of workers and peasants was the main reason for the economic crisis and anarchy. General Aleksei Maksimovich Kaledin, who spoke on behalf of the Council of the Union of Cossack Hosts, called for the government's independence from party and class organizations and proposed abolishing all soviets and committees, with the exception of economic bodies in the Army. The declaration of the deputies of the Fourth Duma, which was not supported by its left members, adjured the government to prevent "class struggle." Ts'ereteli asserted that the propertied elements could count on participating in ruling Russia only in coalition with the left (Pokrovskii and Iakovlev 1930, 32, 73, 75–6, 126–7, 142–3, 161, 164, 236–8, 259).

Ahead of the Democratic Conference, the Bolsheviks were the main speakers for an exclusionary class approach to building the postimperial political community. Speaking at the meeting of the Petrograd Soviet on September 11, its new Chairman Trotskii asserted that the compromises of the SRs and the Mensheviks with the bourgeoisie resulted in the Kornilov Affair. The adopted Bolshevik resolution opposed any compromises with the "landowner and bourgeois" parties and advocated a government of delegates from workers', peasants', and soldiers' organizations. Such a government was to immediately propose a democratic peace, transfer

private land to peasant committees, establish workers' control in production and distribution, and carry out "merciless" taxation of the propertied elements and confiscation of wartime profits. The left SRs and the Mensheviks-Internationalists also opposed a coalition ahead of the conference.[49]

At the Democratic Conference, class rhetoric was used in the struggle between different socialist groups on the matter of a coalition with the "propertied elements." There was, however, increasing differentiation within the "democracy." The cooperatives and, partially, the self-government bodies made up the right wing of the "democracy," while the soviets its left wing. The delegates of soviets of workers' and soldiers' deputies and trade unions were predominantly against coalition; those of cooperatives and *zemstvos* were predominately in favor. Peasant soviet, military, and municipal groups split almost evenly. There was no unified position on the role of the "bourgeoisie," since some Russian Marxists and non-Marxists considered the Russian Revolution a bourgeois revolution. Class rhetoric was hence used by some opponents of exclusionary class-based community-building. Aleksandr Moiseevich Berkengeim, who spoke on behalf of the Central Committee of Cooperatives, stressed the "bourgeois" character of the Revolution. Other socialists, however, rejected the "bourgeois" character of the revolution. Trotskii argued that it occurred in the context of developed world capitalism, when there was no bourgeois democracy and when imperialism reigned supreme (Sablin 2023).

In the Pre-Parliament, socialists also appealed to class. The Bolshevik declaration accused the "bourgeois classes" or the "propertied elements" of plotting against the convocation of the Constituent Assembly, worsening the economic situation. The Mensheviks-Defencists also accused the propertied classes of protracting the war and pursuing imperialist goals. The SR Chernov blamed the "propertied elements" for postponing the fall of the old regime and thereby stimulating the crisis (Sablin 2023).

Concurrent with the Bolshevik-led armed uprising on October 25–26, 1917, the Second Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies "with the representatives of district and provincial soviets of peasants' deputies" convened in Petrograd. Trotskii insisted on waiting for the congress to legitimize the coup. Out of the 650 to 670 deputies at the congress, there were around 300 Bolsheviks and 80 to 85 left SRs. The Mensheviks and the "right" SRs opposed the coup and staged a walkout, joined by the Bundists. In the early hours of October 26, the Menshevik and SR party organizations joined the representatives of the municipal duma, the old VTsIK, the Executive Committee of the All-Russian Peasant Soviet, the Pre-Parliament, and the front committees in forming the Committee for the Salvation of the Motherland and Revolution. The remaining delegates to the Second Congress of Soviets passed decrees on peace and land, formed the all-Bolshevik Sovnarkom under Lenin, and elected the new VTsIK on October 26–27. Kamkov, speaking on behalf of the left SRs, explained that his party did not join the Sovnarkom in order to prevent a further fissure in the "revolutionary democracy" and still supported a "uniform democratic" government. Trotskii contended that the insurgents created a coalition with class forces (the workers, the soldiers, and the poorest peasants), while political groupings were disappearing.[50]

In November 1917, the Left SRs became a separate party and reached an agreement with the Bolsheviks on a coalition in the Sovnarkom (Protasov 2014, 171, 183, 514).

The Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Peasants' Deputies, which convened in Petrograd on November 26–December 10, 1917, was accompanied by fierce political struggle among socialists. The SD-Internationalist Boris Izmailovich Moiseev accused Lenin of dictatorship and denounced the arrests of the Constituent Assembly members. Lenin contended that the soviets were above any parliaments and constituent assemblies. The Left SRs under Spiridonova, who chaired the congress, proposed a resolution that called for merciless struggle against the enemies of the toiling people, including deputies of the Constituent Assembly, and put the soviets above the Constituent Assembly. The draft resolution of the "right" SRs denounced the arrests and the closure of the meeting of the members of the Constituent Assembly on November 28 as a criminal attack on the "all-people's parliament." The congress then split into two parts (Figure 3.8) (Protasov 2014, 87).

The Declaration of Rights of the Working and Exploited People, adopted by the VTsIK on January 3, 1918, utilized class rhetoric. Its proclaimed goals were the liquidation of all exploitation, complete elimination of class division, suppression of exploiters, the establishment of a socialist society, and the global victory of socialism. The measures of the Soviet government were explained through the prism of the liberation of the toilers, their authority over the exploiters, and the



Figure 3.8 A group of representatives of the breakaway part of the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Peasants' Deputies headed by V. M. Chernov (third row from top, seventh from right). Petrograd, November 1917. TsGAKFFD SPb, Gr78131.

elimination of the "parasitic strata." According to this reasoning, the Constituent Assembly was to transfer its power to the soviets as representative bodies of the toilers (Novitskaia 1991, 64–6).

In the predominately socialist Constituent Assembly, the appeals to the working class and the toilers were frequent. Iakov Mikhailovich Sverdlov, the Bolshevik Chairman of the VTsIK, pointed to the global character of the ongoing socialist revolution and anticipated that "genuine" representatives of the toiling people would help the Soviets end class privileges. He drew parallels between the VTsIK declaration in the socialist revolution and the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen in the bourgeois revolution. Chernov also appealed to the toiling classes but prioritized equal rights for all citizens. Bukharin claimed that the Bolsheviks declared "war on the bourgeois-parliamentary republic" and sought to create the "great Soviet republic of toilers." Isaak Zakharovich (Zerakhovich) Shteinberg, the Left SR People's Commissar of Justice, precluded peaceful development and claimed that "deep, serious, perhaps the last historical class struggle" was taking place. Responding to the Menshevik declaration on establishing a democratic republic based on universal and proportional elections, put forward by Ts'ereteli, the Bolshevik Ivan Ivanovich Skvortsov-Stepanov asserted that for a Marxist, there was no popular will but only that of the ruling class (Mal'chevskii 1930, 3–4, 18, 31, 36, 52, 59). He denounced parliamentarism.

> These parliamentary institutions play one role – they are fetishes, idols. Just as in ancient times, it was not the ruling classes who gave the law, it was the gods who gave the law in the rumble of the earth, in the shine of lightnings, in the roar of thunder, and you want [to do it] so – now, the times are not such to legislate this way, and the ruling classes, instead of these thunders, put forward the Constituent Assembly. Citizens, what is the difference between the Constituent Assembly and the soviets? The difference is clear, definite: the soviets express the will of the real majority of the population, that majority of the population that has hitherto been suppressed, enslaved (*applause from the left*), which has been exploited.
>
> (Mal'chevskii 1930, 59–60)

The Decree on the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, issued by the VTsIK on January 6, 1918, was rooted in class particularism. It presented the soviets as the mass organization of all toiling and exploited classes and the only way to political and economic liberation. The decree argued that the soviets, through their experience, recognized the futility of compromising with the bourgeoisie and the deceptive nature of "bourgeois-democratic parliamentarism," which led to the October Revolution and the transfer of all power to the soviets. It contended that those who voted for the SRs could not yet distinguish between the "right" SRs as "supporters of the bourgeoisie" and the left SRs as proponents of socialism. The decree did not explicitly label the Constituent Assembly as illegitimate. Instead, it emphasized that "not all-national" bodies, that is, parliaments, but only class bodies could overcome the resistance of the propertied classes and lay the foundation for a socialist society (Novitskaia 1991, 66–7).

Particularism based on nationality, religion, region, and social estate

Particularistic interests based on nationality, religion, region, and social estate continued to be institutionalized along the patterns of the Revolution of 1905–1907 and the Duma period. However, it was not unions but parliamentary and quasi-parliamentary assemblies that became the main form of self-organization. National difference also played a role in the all-Russian assemblies. Although region, social estate, and religion were important for self-organization as well, they had less effect on the new system of government.

In March 1917, the Provisional Government supported the formation of an independent Polish state but still expected the All-Russian Constituent Assembly to approve the changes in the Russian territory.[51] The independence of the empire's other parts was not on the government's agenda. It also was reluctant to recognize autonomous rights before the Constituent Assembly. In March, the Provisional Government reaffirmed the constitution of the Grand Duchy of Finland and reconvened the Finnish Parliament. In June, the First All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies supported the right of the Finnish people to self-determination, including independence, and demanded that the Provisional Government recognize full competence of the Finnish Parliament. The congress, however, also postponed the final resolution of the Finnish question until the All-Russian Constituent Assembly. Dominated by Social Democrats, the Finnish Parliament expanded Finland's autonomy on July 5, leaving only military and foreign policy to the Russian government. The Provisional Government responded by disbanding the Finnish Parliament on July 18. Having lost their majority in the new election in October, the Social Democrats advocated the convocation of a national constituent assembly through universal elections.[52]

Across the empire, the experience of Poland and Finland was crucial for self-organization on the basis of nationality. In the first months of the revolution, only Lithuanian politicians actively discussed the independence in the context of German occupation, while other national activists focused on autonomy or own federal unit in a reformed Russian state. Such ideas predominated despite political struggle within each nationally defined community. The Polish term *sejm*, which was also used for the Finnish Parliament, became a popular name for parliament in the anticipated territorial autonomies of in Latvia, Latgale, Ukraine, Belarus, Buryatia, the Caucasus, and the Crimea as well as the non-territorial autonomy of the Jews. Belarusian socialists called the anticipated parliament *rada* ("council"); Crimean Tatar activists used the term *kurultai* ("assembly") as a synonym for *sejm*; the Bessarabian Union of Credit Cooperatives called the future legislature of the autonomy *divan* ("council").[53]

Bodies advocating for autonomous or federated status for nationally defined territories emerged through nomination by political parties and other organizations. One such body was the Ukrainian Central Rada that formed in Kyiv on March 4 as the provisional authority for the anticipated Ukrainian autonomy. Although its members were nominated rather than popularly elected deputies, it was occasionally referred to as parliament. On June 10, the Central Rada, chaired by Mykhailo Sergiiovych Hrushevs'kyi,[54] a historian and founding member of the Ukrainian SR Party, adopted its First Declaration (*Universal*). It anticipated that a universally

elected "All-People's Ukrainian Assembly (*sejm*)" would establish the government system in Ukraine. The *sejm* would also distribute the land in Ukraine, after the All-Russian Constituent Assembly socialized it in all of Russia (Dimanshtein, Levin, and Drabkina 1930, 3:161–2; Verstiuk and Smolii 1996, 1:81, 139, 263).

The Central Rada appealed to national, class, and regional particularisms. Following the agreement between the Provisional Government and the Central Rada's executive body (General Secretariat), the Central Rada stressed the inclusionary, regional character of its authority and sought to coopt representatives of non-Ukrainians in July. The relations between the Petrograd and Kyiv authorities nevertheless deteriorated in August. The Central Rada refused the invitation to the State Conference. Although it still envisioned Ukrainian participation in the All-Russian Constituent Assembly, the Rada resolved to prepare for convening the Ukrainian Constituent Assembly (Dimanshtein, Levin, and Drabkina 1930, 3:166–7, 179–81; Verstiuk and Smolii 1996, 1:254).

The Lithuanian National Council, which included delegates from parties, declared in March that Lithuania had to be a separate self-governing unit as a single political whole in "ethnographic, cultural, and economic" sense. The Provisional Committee for Governing Lithuania, which the council formed, was also conceptualized in inclusionary, regional terms. The central role was given to the Lithuanian people but other nationalities, the Belarusians, Jews, Poles, and Russians, were invited to send representatives. The goal of the organization was to convene the Constituent Assembly of Lithuania. The committee included Duma deputies such as, Martynas Yčas,[55] a lawyer, member of the KD Faction, and part of the Provisional Government apparatus, Juozas Laukaitis,[56] a Catholic priest, and Mykolas Januškevičius,[57] a Trudovik.[58]

Territorial autonomy governed by a parliament was the predominant form of self-organization envisioned by proponents of non-national regional and social estate particularism. Siberian activists revived the idea of the Siberian Regional Duma (Sablin 2018, 101). In Cossack hosts, the Cossack *krug* ("circle" or "assembly") became a key institution, which, *inter alia*, elected the ataman. The Orenburg Cossack Host anticipated the transfer of Cossack lands, including those that had been sold, into the disposition of the *krug*. The All-Cossack Congress, which convened in Petrograd in April 1917, formed the Union of Cossack Hosts.[59] Cossacks also participated in soviets and their congresses, where some defended their social estate interests and envisioned autonomy of the hosts, with *krugs* issuing legislation and controlling economy.[60]

Following the proposal of Məmməd Əmin Rəsulzadə,[61] a founding member of the Azeri national Müsavat Party, the First All-Russian Muslim Congress (Moscow, May 1–11, 1917) adopted the plan of establishing territorial autonomy for localized ethno-national groups of Muslims and non-territorial for those that did not have specific territory. The plan also included a central all-Muslim body with legislative functions in religious and cultural matters. While individual territories with Muslim majorities were to decide their system of government individually, the broader Muslim movement was coordinated by the All-Russian Muslim Council and its Executive Committee. The three Muslim congresses,[62] which convened in Kazan in July, supported non-territorial autonomy for all Muslims to be approved by the

Constituent Assembly and feature a "national parliament." They also stressed transboundary connections of Russia's Muslims to Asia and Africa, demanding that the right of national self-determination was ensured there as well. Women were very active in the movement, with the First All-Russian Congress of Muslim Women taking place in Kazan on April 24–27. They defended their civil equality in the context of the mullahs' opposition (Dimanshtein, Levin, and Drabkina 1930, 3:294–8, 315–18).

A committee under Sadri Maqsudi, the former deputy of the Second and Third Duma, established the non-territorial autonomy of the Muslims of "Inner Russia and Siberia" in the areas where the Orenburg Muslim Spiritual Assembly with the seat in Ufa had been active. The term *millet meclisi* ("national assembly" or "national congress") was used for the autonomy's parliament. Individual territories with considerable Muslim population, the Kazan, Ufa, Orenburg, Samara, Astrakhan, Perm, Simbirsk, Vyatka, Saratov, Penza, Nizhny Novgorod, Tambov, Tobolsk, and Tomsk Provinces, and the Ural Region were to have their own parliaments (Dimanshtein, Levin, and Drabkina 1930, 3:319–20, 324–6).

The nationality question played an important role in the all-Russian assemblies. In the context of tensions with Finnish and Ukrainian politicians, Kerenskii denounced the lack of support from "some peoples" for the Russian people who fought against autocracy for everybody's rights. He reaffirmed the Provisional Government's claim to Russia's territory and vowed to keep the demands of non-Russians in check. Kerenskii referred to the possible secession of Finland as a threat to the state and implied possible betrayal by the Ukrainians, evoking the "thirty pieces of silver" from the Bible (Pokrovskii and Iakovlev 1930, 11–12). Russian non-socialists welcomed Kerenskii's stance on the issue of "separatist manifestations." Although the declaration of the First Duma, read by V. D. Nabokov, did not oppose the establishment of autonomies by the Constituent Assembly, it viewed the attempts to "dismember" the country as "conscious or unconscious assistance to the enemy" in the war (Pokrovskii and Iakovlev 1930, 49). The "democracy's" declaration, delivered by Chkheidze, also opposed secessionism. Although it left the resolution of the nationality question to the Constituent Assembly, it reaffirmed autonomist slogans and proposed immediate language reforms. The declaration also envisioned a "Council on National Affairs" under the Provisional Government, which would include representatives of all Russia's nationalities and outline the forms of resolving the nationality question ahead of the Constituent Assembly (Pokrovskii and Iakovlev 1930, 84–5).

National groups were furious with Kerenskii's words about the "thirty pieces of silver,"[63] and the relations between the Provisional Government and the Ukrainian Central Rada were strained even further (Engelstein 2018, 317). The Estonian socialist Ants Piip called Kerenskii's position "unjust." He urged the government to start restructuring the state on federative principles ahead of the Constituent Assembly, broadening the rights of Estonia (Estlandia) and other regions. Piip stressed that by participating in the war effort, the revolutionary peoples of Russia earned the right to equal treatment. Ioseb Mach'avariani[64] of the Georgian liberal National Democratic Party rejected Kerenskii's claim that the Russian people was the liberator of other nationalities. Januškevičius, who represented the Lithuanian

nationality, supported the "democracy's" declaration but left the matter of secession open, defending the right of the Lithuanian people to decide about its destiny at the Constituent Assembly of Lithuania. A joint declaration of twelve national socialist parties and groups, which mainly repeated the "democracy's" declaration, lamented that too little was done for uniting "democracies" of different nationalities and reminded the government that non-Russians comprised "half of the population" (Pokrovskii and Iakovlev 1930, 179–80, 189–91, 193–5, 197–8).

Ahead of the Democratic Conference, the Ukrainian Central Rada convened the Congress of Representatives of Peoples and Regions in Kyiv on September 8–15. Its 93 delegates represented Jewish, Latvian, Lithuanian, Ukrainian, Polish, Belarusian, Estonian, Georgian, Romanian, Muslim, Cossack, and other organizations. The congress supported immediate proclamation of a federative republic based on the principle of nationality; dispersed groups were to receive extraterritorial (personal) autonomy. National constituent assemblies were to decide on the relations with the central federal bodies. The congress urged the Provisional Government to establish the "Council of Nationalities," as it had promised, and created a standing Council of Peoples. The congress also adopted resolutions on individual groups and issues, such as decentralization in the sphere of language and military. The resolution on the Cossacks recognized them "as an independent branch of the peoples of the Russian Republic," thereby nationazing this social estate (Dimanshtein, Levin, and Drabkina 1930, 3:443–9).

At the Democratic Conference, representatives of non-Russian organizations reaffirmed most of the decisions of the Kyiv congress, supporting federative principles with territorial and non-territorial autonomy, language equality, the formation of the Council of Nationalities, and the convocation of national constituent assemblies. The Council of National Socialist Parties of Russia, which united Belarusian, Lithuanian, Jewish, Estonian, Polish, Ossetian, Buryat, Georgian, Ukrainian, and other organizations (Figure 3.9) demanded that Russia be immediately proclaimed a federative republic with the right of national minorities to personal autonomy. Iazep Varonka[65] of the Belarusian Central Rada proposed that a Minister of National Affairs was selected in the Council of Nationalities. Although the federative approach predominated, some speakers left the issue of secession open. Januškevičius urged the Provisional Government to formally recognize the right of the Lithuanian people to self-determination through the Lithuanian Constituent Assembly. Mykola Volodymyrovych Porsh[66] of the Ukrainian Central Rada supported the Finnish independence movement (there were no Finnish representatives at the Conference).[67]

When the nationality question was discussed, many seats were empty, and the Chairman even proposed to close the meeting. Commenting on this, Noi Isaakovich Baru of the Marxist–Zionist party Poale Zion acknowledged that there was a gap between the Russian "revolutionary democracy" and the "democracies" of individual peoples. The Georgian Varlam Nutsubidze[68] of the Council of National Socialist Parties denounced the shouts and ironic exclamations from the audience during the speeches of non-Russian delegates. Varonka reminded the conference that non-Russian nationalities made up a majority in Russia's population.[69]



Figure 3.9 Representatives of the Faction of National Socialists at the Democratic Conference. Petrograd, September 1917. Left to right: Dashi Sampilon (first), I. I. Shimanovich (second), Fraņcs Kemps (third), Iazep Varonka (fourth), N. I. Baru (fifth), Ants Piip (eighth); in no particular order: Varlam Nutsubidze, S. Bagiryan, M. L. Gutman. TsGAKFFD SPb, D 19727.

The Ossetian journalist Ahmæt Cælykkaty[70] of the All-Russian Muslim Council maintained that Russian Muslims grew dissatisfied with the revolutionary regime due to inadequate religious policies, with some Tsarist officials still in place. He also denounced the plans of expropriating indigenous lands, put forward by Chernov's Ministry of Agriculture. Cælykkaty condemned the continued treatment of Eastern peoples as a "lower race." In particular, he pointed to the dismissed proposals of Muslims for the Constituent Assembly election, such as mobile ballot boxes for the nomadic herders and a separate day for the Muslim women's vote. Cælykkaty also proposed forming the Secretariat on Muslim Affairs under the Provisional Government. Although he cautioned that the continued colonial practices would push the Muslims to the far left, he supported a broad coalition. He did not see the formation of a soviet government feasible, since there were few workers and soldiers among Muslims.[71]

Most non-Russian groups, however, opposed a broad coalition, combining socialist and nationalist approaches. Nutsubidze stressed that the peoples of Russia suffered in a double manner, "being deprived of civil rights and being deprived of national rights," and asserted that the struggle for social and national ideals was indivisible. The Buryat Dashi Sampilon[72] also spoke of intersectional oppression,

adding the level of race.[73] Some speakers stressed the global anticolonial implications of the Russian Revolution. Nutsubidze argued that the Russian "democracy" had to set an example for the world by liberating the nationalities of Russia.[74]

Regional and national categories intersected. Porsh described Ukraine as a region, which had its own revolutionary nation of multiple nationalities (Ukrainians, Russians, Jews, and others) represented by the Central Rada. A delegate of Belarusian servicemen spoke of "peoples-regions." Rafail Abramovich Abramovich (Rein) of the Jewish Labor Bund brought attention to minority rights in the new national-regional units. The minority issue was also raised in the declaration of the Moldavian Committee of the Romanian Front, which protested against the alleged desires of the Ukrainian Central Rada to annex Bessarabia.[75]

Following the Democratic Conference, the Provisional Government reaffirmed its intention to create the Council on National Affairs but this was never realized (Dimanshtein, Levin, and Drabkina 1930, 3:56). A commission on national affairs under the Lithuanian SR Andrius Bulota[76] was nevertheless created in the Pre-Parliament. Non-Russian groups formed a bloc in the assembly. Socialist and non-socialist Jewish deputies, which disagreed on many issues, acted jointly on the matters related to the Jews and inquired the Provisional Government about measures against anti-Jewish pogroms.[77]

The presence of non-socialist groups made the nationality question in the Pre-Parliament even more contested than at the Democratic Conference. The non-socialist Minister of Foreign Affairs Tereshchenko argued that Germany planned to separate Russia from the West by means of "peaceful secession of certain buffer units," which would lead to an economic takeover of Russia. He opposed the slogan of full self-determination of "Lithuania and Latvia" in the instructions to Skobelev, who was supposed to represent "democracy" at the anticipated Allied conference. Miliukov also denounced the instructions and rebuked the decision on independence made by the Lithuanian Sejm in Vilnius in September. He then lambasted the idea of the Ukrainian Constituent Assembly, claiming that the plan for its independence was sponsored by Germany.[78] Moderate socialists attempted to downplay self-determination slogans. The Menshevik Fedor Il'ich Dan (Gurvich) argued that self-determination did not mean independence and that being connected "to the Great Russian Revolution" was beneficial for all toilers in their class struggle. He also dismissed the decision of the Lithuanian Sejm since it was not adopted under the leadership of toilers.[79]

After the Bolshevik-led coup in Petrograd, multiple governments opposing the Sovnarkom emerged across the former empire. In November 1917, the Ukrainian Central Rada proclaimed the formation of the Ukrainian People's Republic. The same month, the Turkestan Autonomy (also known as the Kokand Autonomy) was proclaimed. In December, the Extraordinary Siberian Regional Congress in Tomsk refused to recognize Sovnarkom and established the Siberian Regional Council ahead of the convocation of the Siberian Regional Duma. In the same month, Alash Autonomy was proclaimed in the Kazakh-majority territories. Some governments were based on the Cossack hosts, such as those of Ataman Kaledin and Ataman Aleksandr Il'ich Dutov. The governments that did not recognize the Sovnarkom

established connections to each other. Their proclaimed goal was reestablishing a government for the whole of Russia (Khalid 2015, 292–3; Sablin 2018, 101). In the meantime, the VTsIK recognized the independence of Finland on December 22 (Zelenov and Lysenkov 2017, 181).

Ahead of the Constituent Assembly's opening, its SR Faction reaffirmed the slogan of "national self-determination" (Erofeev and Shelokhaev 2000, 3, Part 2:272). The VTsIK declaration also appealed to nationality, although it was combined with class. It rejected imperialism and colonialism and welcomed the recognition of Finland's independence by the Sovnarkom and its support for Armenia's self-determination. In relation to the state structure, the declaration expected the "workers and peasants of all nations" to decide on the forms of participation in Russia's federal bodies (Novitskaia 1991, 65–6).

In the Constituent Assembly, Chernov defined Russia as a union of free nationalities and claimed that in a "federative, republican, people's Russia" all nationalities were "equal members of one brotherly family." He specifically mentioned Ukraine, the Muslims, the Jews, and the toiling Cossacks of the Don. During Chernov's speech, there were shouts from the left: "Long live the Ukrainian Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies! […] Down with the bourgeois Rada, down with the counterrevolutionary Rada, down with the Kaledinites!" (Mal'chevskii 1930, 12, 14–15). Cælykkaty (Figure 3.10), who spoke on behalf of the Muslim Socialist Faction, claimed that both the Kerenskii regime and the Sovnarkom had inadequate



Figure 3.10 Ahmæt Cælykkaty, Chairman of the Muslim Socialist Faction of the Constituent Assembly. Petrograd, January 1918. TsGAKFFD SPb, D19758.

policies toward non-Russians, with the latter being unable to ensure their free development. He stressed the global scope of national self-determination, stressing that it had to apply not only to Europe but also to Asia and Africa. Cælykkaty demanded that the Constituent Assembly establish Russia as a federative republic and sanction the states, which were already being formed, meaning the Muslim territories (Mal'chevskii 1930, 57–8).

The Constituent Assembly proclaimed the Russian Democratic Federative Republic on behalf of "the peoples, constituting the Russian state" and pronounced "the peoples and regions" sovereign within the boundaries established by the federal constitution. The union, however, was deemed "indissoluble," meaning that no right to secession was included (Mal'chevskii 1930, 113).

Debates on parliamentarism

The debates on parliamentarism mainly concerned the Constituent Assembly, the electoral system, and the design of Russia's future parliament. With the spread of antiparliamentarism beyond the anarchist circles, it also became a major topic, especially in the context of the growing Bolshevik and left SR influence and their coup in October 1917.

The debates on popular sovereignty and, subsequently, on the electoral system pertained to both the Constituent Assembly and Russia's future system and unfolded both in print and in the Special Committee for Drafting the Election Law to the Constituent Assembly. The committee was established by the Provisional Government and chaired by Kokoshkin included 60 members, including legal experts and representatives from different national and religious groups, the soviets, and the Army. Its members discussed foreign parliamentary experience and its application to Russian conditions. Most socialists supported proportional representation and voting by candidate lists. According to a widely shared view, rooted in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's concept of popular sovereignty, parliament had to be "a mirror of the country." Hence the number of seats granted to the parties had to correspond to their influence (Magerovskii 1917, 20, 22). As put by Vishniak (1917, 16), parliament had to articulate rather than create a popular will.

Vishniak objected to the liberal Vladimir Matveevich Gessen, who in his *Foundations of Constitutional Law*, written in 1916 and published in 1917, rejected the notion of popular sovereignty and argued that parliament could not be a "mechanical cliché" of the masses. According to Gessen, the proportional system represented only formally organized groups. It was hence sufficient if the majority in parliament reflected the majority in the country (Gessen 1917, 290–1, 308, 311, 314, 317–18, 322). Vasilii Vasil'evich Vodovozov, a left-liberal educator and legal scholar, claimed that Russia was too large for the proportional system, that it would increase political fragmentation, and that it did not correspond to regional and ethnic diversity since deputies elected through party lists would not be connected to particular localities and groups. He proposed the majoritarian system instead (Vodovozov 1917, 11, 29–30). In the election law committee, Vodovozov evoked gradualism, claiming that although the proportional system was more

advanced, Russia was not yet sufficiently developed to use it. He also noted that the proportional system had only been used in small territories, like the cantons of Switzerland, Denmark, Serbia, and Bulgaria. Supporting the gradualist approach, Venedikt Aleksandrovich Miakotin, a historian and People's Socialist asserted that the majority of the population needed to undergo "kind of a political school" and "cultivate a taste for parliamentarism, a taste for political struggle," which could be achieved through interacting with real candidates known to the voters and not just lists of names (Vedeneev and Borisov 2009, 101–2, 104, 124–5).

The Menshevik Mechislav Mikhailovich Dobranitskii, a jurist, contended, that the Constituent Assembly was not a parliament that worked under the conditions of organized political life but an institution that had to establish a new political system. It was hence large political organizations and not local interests that needed to be represented there. Given that the proportional system also had non-socialist supporters, it was ultimately adopted by the committee and the Provisional Government (Vedeneev and Borisov 2009, 90, 93, 116, 118, 145).

Some proposed establishing national curias for the election, but this was rejected by the election law committee. The committee also did not approve mobile polling stations in Turkestan. Special electoral districts were nevertheless established for the Kazakhs and the Kalmyks. The committee also adopted V. D. Nabokov's proposal to lower the norm of representation for Siberia. A separate district was established for Kamchatka. Members of the Romanov dynasty were granted voting rights despite disagreements on the matter (Protasov 2014, 296).

After the KD Party abandoned monarchy and envisioned Russia as a "democratic parliamentary republic" in its new program in March 1917, parliamentary republic with an accountable cabinet became part of the liberal and moderate socialist consensus. The KDs also included a president elected by parliament into their program (Lezhneva and Shelokhaev 2000, 3, Part 1:400), leaving the question of the president's accountability open (Nol'de 1917, 23–4). Under the KD influence, the position of a provisional president was included in the statute of the Constituent Assembly, drafted by the Juridical Committee under the Provisional Government, but the draft was never discussed in assembly itself.[80] The SRs Dmitrii Aleksandrovich Magerovskii and Vishniak rejected the presidency altogether, proposing a collegial body fully accountable to the parliament instead. Magerovskii viewed the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies as such institution, while Vishniak drew on the experience of Switzerland where canton councils (*sovety*) were accountable to assemblies (Magerovskii 1917, 24–5; Erofeev and Shelokhaev 1996, 3, Part 1:412–14).

The number of chambers in the future Russian parliament was also debated. The KD Party did not have a single position on the matter. V. M. Gessen opposed the earlier ideas of a chamber of self-government bodies, insisting that local and minority interests would be ensured by self-government on site, and that of occupational groups, arguing that important collective interests were often not organized. Kokoshkin saw the benefits of the second chamber in safeguarding local interests but suggested to wait until the forms of decentralization were finalized (Gessen 1917, 356–8, 360–5; Pavlov 1998, 3:396–401). The SRs generally opposed the second

chamber arguing that universally elected regional and national parliaments and referenda would suffice. Such a view was, for instance, articulated by Vishniak at the party's Third Congress (Erofeev and Shelokhaev 1996, 3, Part 1:418–19). Some of the Mensheviks considered a possible federal chamber (Galili, Nenarokov, and Kheimson 1997, 3:580–1). Within the Labor People's Socialist Party, some suggested that a federal court could be formed instead of the second chamber (Sypchenko and Morozov 2003, 242, 244–6).

The issue was discussed in the Special Commission for Drafting the Fundamental Laws under the Provisional Government, which was chaired by V. M. Gessen and included Vishniak, Vodovozov, Sergei Andreevich Kotliarevskii, and other moderates, on October 20. The KD legal scholars Aleksandr Mikhailovich Kulisher and Boris Evgen'evich Shatskii presented a summary of approaches to the issue suggesting that the second chamber could include both territorial representatives and those of the most important "organized social and cultural forces," including trade and industry, cooperatives, trade unions, and academic institutions. They supported hence to the corporatist principle, as defended by Leon Duguit and used in Russia's revolutionary assemblies. Kotliarevskii supported them. Citing the positive experience of England, Vladimir Fedorovich Deriuzhinskii, a legal scholar, argued the second chamber would establish a "division labor" in legislation, which was not the case in the late Russian Empire. He proposed that the two chambers had equal rights. Gessen insisted that bicameralism was outdated. The Bundist Abram Iakovlevich Kheifets saw the second chamber as a possible hurdle for legislation. The commission resolved in favor of bicameralism with a majority of 11 to 7 votes. The corporatist element in the second chamber's design was voted down with nine to seven (Novitskaia 1991, 46–8, 50–2).

With the far right virtually disappearing from the public debates, the far left remained the main opponents of parliamentarism. Following Lenin's return to Russia, the Bolsheviks gradually supplanted anarchists as leaders of the antiparliamentary movement. The April Conference of the Bolsheviks called for transferring power to the soviets as bodies of direct workers' and peasants' rule during the second phase of the revolution, marking their departure from the 1903 SD program. The conference replaced the slogan of a "bourgeois-parliamentary republic" with one of a "democratic proletarian-peasant republic," that is, "a state without police, army, and privileged bureaucracy," in the party program (Rossiiskaia Sotsial-Demokraticheskaia Rabochaia Partiia (bol'shevikov) 1958, 258–60). Detailing the new program in April–May, Lenin proposed gradually replacing "parliamentary-representative institutions" with soviets from different classes and occupations or from different localities. He nevertheless still envisioned the "autocracy of the people" in the future Russian constitution as "the concentration of all supreme state power" in a unicameral "legislative assembly," elected universally for two-year terms in proportional elections. Lenin also included the voters' right to recall representatives (Lenin 1969b, 153–4).

Lenin rejected the separation of powers. Karl Marx's interpretation of the 1871 Paris Commune as "a working, not a parliamentary body, executive and legislative at the same time" (Marx 1933, 40) was especially important in this regard. Lenin

quoted this passage in the section titled "The Elimination of Parliamentarism" of his *State and Revolution,* written in August–September 1917. Praising Marx's criticism of parliament as representatives of the ruling class, Lenin argued, "The way out of parliamentarism, of course, is not in destroying representative institutions and electivity but in transforming representative institutions from talking shops into 'working' institutions." He claimed that real work was done behind the curtains in parliamentary countries, and that this practice was picked up in the Russian "bourgeois-democratic" republic even before it created a real parliament, accusing Skobelev, Ts'ereteli, Chernov, and Avksent'ev of "messing up" the soviets in the vein of "bourgeois parliamentarism." The way out of parliamentarism was for him in the elimination of the "division of legislative and executive labor" and "the privileged position" of deputies. Representation, however, was to remain. "Without representative institutions we cannot imagine democracy, even proletarian democracy; without parliamentarism we can and must [imagine it] […]" (Lenin 1969a, 33:45–8).

Shortly before the October Coup, Lenin defined the soviets as the new state apparatus that allowed to combine the "benefits of parliamentarism" with the "benefits of unmediated and direct democracy" by combining legislative and executive functions. Compared to bourgeois parliamentarism, this was a step of "world historical importance" in the development of democracy (Lenin 1938b, 63). Erik van Ree argued, however, that not only were Lenin's ideas non-democratic but also that he was the first political theorist to come up with a radical dictatorial project. Favoring etatism and centralization brought about by the Great War, Lenin envisioned socialism as a state-capitalist monopoly, the sole employer. In his interpretation of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's ideas, self-government was replaced by self-administration, with all citizens becoming bureaucrats. This was complemented by a highly militaristic regime and a one-party (rather than class) dictatorship that Lenin conceptualized over the course of 1917 (van Ree 2020, 21–2, 24–9).

The Left SRs also shifted to antiparliamentarism. Their First Congress (Petrograd, November 19–28, 1917) rejected the draft resolution that called for a federative republic with a universally elected unicameral parliament. Instead, it adopted the resolution proposed by Magerovskii that emphasized the mission of the Russian people "to facilitate the destruction of the yoke of class slaughter and struggle among modern peoples." The toiling people were to take power without sharing it with other classes, thereby establishing its dictatorship, and rule the country through its class organizations during the perpetual social revolution. The Central Executive Committee of representatives from the Congress of All Soviets was to be the supreme legislative authority. The Council of State Commissars, which it formed, would be the executive body responsible to the committee (Leont'ev 2000, 1:148–50). This was similar to the system that was already established by the Second Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. The practice of the Bolshevik-led regime showed, however, that the Sovnarkom also performed as a legislative body.

After the coup, the Bolshevik discourse on parliamentarism was closely connected to the Constituent Assembly and their anticipated minority there, although

there was no unity among them on the Constituent Assembly itself. In November, V. Volodarskii (Moisei Markovich Gol'dshtein) claimed that the masses never suffered from "parliamentary cretinism" and that for the Bolsheviks, the assembly was not a "fetish."[81] Trotskii argued that if the propertied elements won a majority in the Constituent Assembly, the Sovnarkom would hold new elections (Protasov 2014, 441). Lenin insisted on introducing the right to recall deputies from the Constituent Assembly in the context of splits within socialist parties, which the VTsIK did (Lenin 1938a, 298; Novitskaia 1991, 56). Steklov, who was a pro-Bolshevik VTsIK member and editor of *Izvestiia*, published a series of articles criticizing bourgeois parliaments and contrasting parliamentarism to the Soviet system. He claimed that in "bourgeois parliaments and other representative institutions" deputies were "not the servants but the masters of the people" who promised a lot to their voters but did not deliver. According to Steklov, a solution against this was the right to recall deputies and the short duration of sessions, which allowed the renewal of the membership of representative bodies (Steklov 1919b, 98–9).

Steklov attacked the anticipated Constituent Assembly using arguments against parliamentarism.

> The adoration of representative institutions has never been part of the creed of revolutionary democracy. Even in normal times, parliaments in the bourgeois society are far from expressing either the real will of the people or the interests of its toiling masses. In the epochs of social reorganization, however, this contradiction between representative institutions and the needs of revolutionary progress is especially striking. On the other hand, representative institutions, even regardless of their composition, are prone to inertia and stiffness, while the living element of the people is in the process of eternal fermentation, constant development and change – and therefore [it] does not put up with the adoration of the once [and] forever frozen parliamentary form.
>
> (Steklov 1919a, 270)

According to Steklov, since the members of the Constituent Assembly represented class interests, it could be allowed to take all power only if the "vanguard class" had a majority there. At the same time, he deemed it unnecessary, since the revolutionary people did not need a sanction of the whole population and concluded that all power had to belong to the soviets (Steklov 1919a, 270–1).

Reception of revolutionary assemblies

The revolution and the slogan of the Constituent Assembly were received enthusiastically across Russia. In the context of ongoing crises, the State Conference, the Democratic Conference, and the Pre-Parliament were widely criticized. The Constituent Assembly, however, remained a powerful symbol even after the October Coup.

In the early days of the revolution, numerous telegrams were sent to the Chairman of the State Duma, the Chairman of the Duma Committee, the Provisional Government, and the Petrograd Soviet. They welcomed the overthrow of autocracy and demanded the convocation of the Constituent Assembly, the establishment of equality, and the continuation of war until victory. Some telegrams praised the State Duma.

> The population of Simsky Zavod [in the Ufa Province] warmly welcomes and bows before the heroic feat of the State Duma and you [Rodzianko], who stood courageously at its head in the face of a terrible danger to protect the people's rights, save the Fatherland and, with the support of the people and the Army, defeated the old despotic government, the original enemy of Russia.[82]

The range of interpretations of parliamentary and quasi-parliamentary bodies in the broader public circles was similar to that in the assemblies. Although the tensions between the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet were frequently interpreted as "dual power," some socialists and liberals viewed the soviets as "legislative chambers of deputies." The Petrograd Soviet was called "a surrogate people's Duma" that replaced the State Council in the bicameral parliament of the new Russia, implying that the Duma remained the other one.[83] According to the non-socialist consensus reached at the Moscow Conference of Public Figures in August 1917, however, the rule of "collegial institutions," that is, soviets and committees, had to end.[84]

Radical socialists denounced the State Conference. The Bolsheviks called it a counterrevolutionary "plot against the revolution, against the people" and accused the SRs and the Mensheviks of supporting it. Since the Constituent Assembly was postponed, the Bolsheviks argued that the "capitalists" were afraid of the anticipated predominance of the left there and convened the State Conference to "bury" it.[85] The Bolsheviks' declaration for the State Conference, which was not delivered, stated that the government invited counterrevolutionaries and declared the "gravediggers of the revolution" to be the "living forces" (Pokrovskii and Iakovlev 1930, 336). Spiridonova condemned the attempt to establish "civic peace" (Leont'ev 2000, 1:55). Many local soviets in Moscow and elsewhere supported the boycott of the State Conference. Some workers were motivated by the worsening economic conditions, including unemployment due to fuel and raw material shortages. Others responded to the non-socialist program directed against soviets and committees in the Army.[86]

Moderate commentators, including Plekhanov's defensist newspaper *Edinstvo* ("Unity"), also had little enthusiasm about the State Conference.[87] Criticizing its composition, Chernov noted later that the distribution of seats did not correspond to the size or importance of different organizations and its sole goal was to keep an equilibrium between "labor" and "bourgeois" parties in order to allow Kerenskii to continue playing the arbiter between them (Chernov 2007, 335–6). Apollon Vasil'evich Eropkin (2016, 119), an Octobrist deputy of the First and Third State Duma, also criticized its organization in his memoirs, claiming that sole plenaries could not resolve pressing issues.

The Democratic Conference and the Pre-Parliament also attracted much criticism. The Bolshevik press denounced its composition, arguing that the Mensheviks and the SRs created this body because they were losing their positions in the soviets.[88] Lev Borisovich Kamenev (Figure 3.4) advocated participation in the Pre-Parliament. Lenin, however, opposed it, and upon his return to Petrograd in October, the Bolshevik Central Committee opted for an armed insurgency (Engelstein 2018, 174–5; Savel'ev and Rakhmetov 1929, 70–1). Anarchists dismissed the conference of "state socialists" as useless against counterrevolution and lambasted its "parliamentary trickery." The Pre-Parliament was for them a "child" of Ts'ereteli and "compromising" (*soglashatel'stvo*).[89]

Moderates were also critical. Plekhanov denounced the idea of a pre-parliament due to its legal unclarity and unrepresentative nature, pointing to the negative experience of the German *Vorparlament* ("Pre-Parliament") of 1848.[90] Liberals pointed to the Democratic Conference's lack of legal basis and opposed the government's accountability to a pre-parliament with an unclear legal basis and questionable composition.[91] Commenting on the debates in the Pre-Parliament and Russian politics in general, the Belarusian philologist and activist Iazep Iur'evich Liosik[92] criticized the "Russian (Muscovite) democracy" for its dismissal of national demands and concluded that there was no hope for the Russian Constituent Assembly and instead called for the Belarusian Constituent Assembly.[93]

As for the Constituent Assembly, up to the October Coup, it enjoyed broad support. The anarchists were the only sizable albeit heterogeneous group that outright dismissed the Constituent Assembly as a reactionary body or a compromise with the "bourgeoisie" (Protasov 1997, 115–16; Kriven'kii 1998, 2:22). The Bolsheviks and the right refrained from opposing it.[94]

Liberals and moderate socialists organized meetings, rallies, and strikes in support of the Constituent Assembly, including the rally on the day of its anticipated opening on November 28, 1917 (Figure 3.11). Despite the dwindling enthusiasm toward the end of 1917, an immense number of telegrams was sent to the Constituent Assembly, in which different organizations and groups across Russia, from Orthodox Christians to soviets, vowed to support and defend it. The assembly was widely referred to as "the master" of the Russian land and deemed the last hope for reassembling the country, stopping the Civil War, and continuing the fight against "the external and internal enemies." Moderate socialists propagated the slogan "all power to the Constituent Assembly."[95] On January 5, 1918, the rally accompanying the opening of the Constituent Assembly had over 60,000 participants. It was violently suppressed by Soviet forces (Protasov 2014, 281, 405).

Bolshevik and pro-Bolshevik commentators denounced the Constituent Assembly. Steklov demanded that its members ceased their "criminal resistance" to the Soviet government and stopped "the civil war," which they ostensibly waged against it. He denied the accusations against the Soviet government that was attacking the Constituent Assembly. "It is you who are leading the Tauride [Palace] against the Smolny [Institute],[96] where the representatives of the people sit […]" (Steklov 1919d, 279). He also cited Plekhanov's take on parliamentary institutions from 1903, claiming that only the interests of the socialist revolution mattered



Figure 3.11 Rally on the day of the planned opening of the Constituent Assembly. Nevsky Prospekt, Petrograd, November 28, 1917. Slogans on the banners, left to right: "All power to the Constituent Assembly / Greetings to the best citizens of the Russian land" and "Welcome, people's elected representatives." TsGAKFFD SPb, G192.

and implying the possible dissolution of the Constituent Assembly (Steklov 1919c, 282). Most of the assembly's Bolshevik faction under Mikhail Aleksandrovich Larin (Ikhil-Mikhl Zalmanovich Lur'e),[97] however, were against dissolving it and attempted to convene a party congress or conference to discuss the matter. On December 12, the reelected bureau of the faction adopted Lenin's theses on the Constituent Assembly that called it the banner of KD–Kaledin counterrevolution despite its socialist composition (Protasov 2014, 474).

Among the anarchists, there were those who already denounced the Soviet government. Grigorii Petrovich Maksimov, a prominent anarchist-syndicalist, argued in December 1917 that the anarchists' help to the Bolsheviks stopped where their victories started. While the Bolsheviks wanted to strengthen the state, the anarchists had to organize a third revolution and fight the soviets. According to Maksimov, having transformed into a republic of soviets, Russia did not abandon the principle of statehood: "the state remains, because the soviets are organizations of the government, a new type of parliament (class-based)." Maksimov cited Kropotkin, who claimed that any representation of the people, no matter what it was called, would try to extend its competence, and argued that participating in the soviets meant taking up parliamentary tactics. Having become state bodies, the soviets turned from revolutionary bodies into those of stagnation. At the same time, Maksimov claimed

that the anarchists would support the soviets against the Constituent Assembly because they were close to anarchism (Gr. Lapot' 1919, 5–8).

Given the fast pace of the Russian Revolution, international in-depth commentary was scarce. Writing before the October Coup, Victor S. Yarros, an American lawyer and anarchist, summed up the doubts about Russia's democratic prospects.

> Is Russia fit for freedom, for republican or genuinely constitutional government, for democratic institutions? Does not Russia, a loose, sprawling, heterogeneous empire, a veritable Babel of tongues and races, need a strong monarchical government, a potent unifying force? Has not the monarchy done great things for Russia in the past? Would Russia's wonderful expansion eastward have been possible under a weak government? And if the monarchy has been indispensable, has the time really come to overthrow it? Are not the centrifugal forces of Russia stronger and more numerous than the centripetal ones, and is there not, consequently, danger of anarchy and dissolution in advanced constitutionalism, to say nothing of republicanism?
>
> (Yarros 1917, 411)

Yarros refuted the assumptions that Russia, being "'half-Asiatic,' inefficient, corruption-ridden, indolent," was unfit for constitutionalism. In his opinion, the village commune, cooperatives, *zemstvo* and municipal self-government, trade unions, and "Western influences generally" were among the factors that made constitution and democracy possible in Russia. Yarros was optimistic about Russia taking "a worthy place in the sisterhood of free and progressive democracies of the world," albeit the transitions might not be "easy, smooth, peaceful" (Yarros 1917, 412–13, 431).

The Belgian social democrat Émile Vandervelde, who visited Petrograd and Moscow in May–June 1917, praised the institutional developments of the Russian Revolution.

> We know, moreover, that though Russia will be without a Central Parliament until the Constituent Assembly meets, she presents, nevertheless, the most varied and wonderful collection of elective bodies, deliberating night and day, in all conceivable places and on all possible questions. There is a "Soviet" of officers and soldiers in each barracks, and in each unit at the front from a company to the group of armies. There is in every town a "Soviet" of workmen and soldiers. There is at least one congress of peasants representing in its turn thousands of local assemblies. There are Doumas in the towns and suburbs, not to mention the party congresses or the congresses of nationalities or professions. In short, the political life is, as it were, broken up, scattered in a veritable "dust of parliaments."
>
> (Vandervelde 1918, 68–9)

American and British press circulated positive evaluations of Russian revolutionary assemblies. *The New York Times* noted that the VTsIK under Chkheidze was

"an all-Russian democratic parliament."[98] An article by *The Manchester Guardian*'s special correspondent, which was reprinted in *The Times of India*, described the Petrograd Soviet as "the national revolutionary parliament of Russia," claiming that the importance of the Duma in the revolution had been overestimated by the British press, and the Provisional Government as a cabinet. It referred to Lenin's program of proletarian dictatorship "the greatest possible danger" but urged not to exaggerate it.[99] The Moscow State Conference was called a "cross-section of Russian life," following Kerenskii.[100] *The Washington Post* was fascinated with the scale of the elections to the Constituent Assembly, citing the 90,000,000-strong franchise.[101] An article by *The Daily Telegraph*'s correspondent, also reprinted in *The Times of India*, commented on women's suffrage. Calling it "a curious experiment" since "intelligent voting" could not be expected from the peasant women, it lauded the inclusion of educated women in the context of Russia's advances "ahead of the West" in the issue of women's secondary and university education.[102]

International news reports became more worrisome in the fall but some commentators retained optimism. A report by Reuters, reprinted in *The Shanghai Times*, anticipated a rebirth of Russia in November 1917.[103] *The New York Times* described the postcoup VTsIK as a temporary Soviet parliament.[104] Others, however, noted that no opposition would be permitted in the Constituent Assembly in the context of the Bolsheviks' "unbridled" despotism and pointed at the arrests of the KDs and the developing Civil War.[105]

Conclusion

The State Duma played an important role during the first days of the Revolution of 1917 and enjoyed broader popularity as its symbol, but its connection to the old regime quickly made it unpopular. The Provisional Government, which initially based its legitimacy on the Duma, remained unaccountable. The convocation of the State Conference and the Pre-Parliament was the government's attempt to boost its own legitimacy through an inclusionary assembly and establish public consensus in anticipation of the Constituent Assembly. The Petrograd Soviet, the Conference and the First Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Solders' Deputies, the VTsIK, and the Democratic Conference were further attempts to establish a surrogate parliamentary body, albeit exclusionary. All of these attempts proved unsuccessful not only due to the political constellations but also because these bodies were seen as inferior to the anticipated Constituent Assembly.

Revolutionary assemblies contributed to the institutionalization of particularistic categories, especially class and nationality, and worsened the crisis of postimperial sovereignty. The unclear and occasionally tense relations of the Provisional Government with soviet and non-Russian national assemblies, on the one hand, and the articulation of particularistic interests, grievances, and programs in the broader assemblies, on the other, contributed to fissures in the Russian public. The categories of class and nationality and their increasing essentialization contributed to fragmentation of the initially united heterogeneous revolutionary civic nation and the development of exclusionary political communities. The attempt to reassemble

the broader Russian community by proclaiming a federative republic of toilers in the Constituent Assembly failed due to the weakness of the assembly after the October Coup and the Civil War.

Parliamentarism continued to enjoy support in the liberal and moderate socialist mainstream. However, the antiparliamentary discourse found a footing in a rapidly strengthening political party, the Bolsheviks, and in the soviets as a concrete institutional alternative to parliament. This discourse contributed to the theoretical background of, first, the October Coup against the Provisional Government and, ultimately, the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly.

Notes

1 Class and nationality often intersected, see Suny (1993).
2 *Delo naroda* (Petrograd), May 4, 1917: 1. This assembly did not function as a permanent soviet and therefore soon became known as the First All-Russian Congress of Peasants' Deputies or the Congress of Soviets of Peasants' Deputies, even though not all organizations of peasants and soldiers, which sent their delegates there, were called soviets at the time.
3 Its legitimacy was based on the Grand Assembly (*krug*) of the Don Cossack Host.
4 *Rech'* (Petrograd), March 5, 1917: 1–2; (Rendle 2009, 36–8; Smith 2017, 102).
5 *Rech'*, March 5, 1917: 2; (Fitzpatrick 2001, 47–8; Smith 2017, 102).
6 *Rech'*, March 5, 1917: 1.
7 RSL, IZO LbIVII01g ("The Great Liberation of Russia." Poster. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo G. i D. Alekseevykh, [1917]).
8 *Petrogradskii listok* (Petrograd), March 8, 1917: 4; March 9, 1917: 4; March 17, 1917: 4; March 20, 1917: 3; March 26, 1917: 8; (Ruthchild 2007, 16–19).
9 See Protasov (1997, 88–9). This involved not only absenteeism but also local tax evasion. See, for instance, *Novoe vremia* (Petrograd), September 30, 1917: 4.
10 *Vestnik Vremennogo pravitel'stva* (Petrograd), July 20, 1917: 2.
11 *Peterburgskaia gazeta* (Petrograd), June 4, 1917: 4.
12 *Den'* (Petrograd), July 23, 1917: 4.
13 *Petrogradskii listok*, September 7, 1917: 3; *Pravda* (Petrograd), July 8, 1917: 7.
14 *Vestnik Vremennogo pravitel'stva*, May 6, 1917: 1; July 9, 1917: 1; July 13, 1917: 1–2; (Rudneva 2000, 15).
15 Servicemen could vote after reaching the age of conscription.
16 *Vestnik Vremennogo pravitel'stva*, July 22, 1917: 1; August 10, 1917: 3.
17 GARF, f. 3529, op. 1, d. 6 (Correspondence of the organizational committee with various organizations on the convocation of the State Conference in Moscow, 1917); GARF, f. 3529, op. 1, d. 7 (List of organizations and persons invited to the State Conference in Moscow, 1917); *Delo naroda*, 15 August 1917: 3; (Pokrovskii and Iakovlev 1930, xxiv; Institut demografii Natsional'nogo issledovatel'skogo universiteta Vysshaia shkola ekonomiki n.d.). The Ukrainian Central Rada declined the invitation (Verstiuk and Smolii 1996, 1:254).
18 *Delo naroda*, August 12, 1917: 3; August 13, 1917: 1; *Narodnoe slovo* (Petrograd), August 13, 1917: 2; *Sotsial-demokrat* (Moscow), August 11, 1917: 1; *Vechernee vremia* (Petrograd), August 12, 1917: 2.
19 *Rech'*, August 13, 1917: 4.
20 *Delo naroda*, August 15, 1917: 2.
21 *Rech'*, August 12, 1917: 1, 3; (Rosenberg 1974, 214–15; Kir'ianov 2008, 85).
22 *Moskovskie vedomosti* (Moscow), August 12, 1917: 1; *Rech'*, August 10, 1917: 1; August 12, 1917: 1, 3; *Sotsial-demokrat*, August 12, 1917: 1; *Vechernee vremia*, August 12, 1917: 1.

23 *Rech'*, August 16, 1917: 1; August 17, 1917: 2; *Sovremennoe slovo* (Petrograd), August 16, 1917: 1; August 17, 1917: 1.
24 *Delo naroda*, August 17, 1917: 1; *Moskovskie vedomosti*, August 17, 1917: 1; *Narodnoe slovo*, August 17, 1917: 1.
25 *Sotsial-demokrat*, August 17, 1917: 1.
26 *Delo naroda*, September 13, 1917: 3.
27 GARF, f. 1798, op. 1, d. 1, l. 42 (To the Union of Women's Democratic Organizations from Chkheidze and Avksent'ev, 1917).
28 *Delo naroda*, September 13, 1917: 3; September 14, 1917: 1.
29 Russian: Liparit Iosifovich Nazariants
30 GARF, f. 1798, op. 1, d. 3, l. 2–4 (Report on the First Day of the All-Russian Democratic Conference, September 14, 1917); GARF, f. 1798, op. 1, d. 4, l. 14–16 (Report on the Second Day of the All-Russian Democratic Conference, September 15, 1917); GARF, f. 1798, op. 1, d. 5, l. 15–16 (Report on the Third Day of the All-Russian Democratic Conference, September 16, 1917); GARF, f. 1798, op. 1, d. 7, l. 23–4 (Report on the Fourth Day of the All-Russian Democratic Conference, September 18, 1917); GARF, f. 1798, op. 1, d. 17, l. 1–4, 15–17, 29–31, 61, 63, 83–4 (Verbatim Report of the Third Day of the All-Russian Democratic Conference, September 16, 1917); *Rech'*, September 20, 1917: 2.
31 GARF, f. 1798, op. 1, d. 8, l. 1, 3–4, 6–7, 10–12 (Report on the Fifth Day of the All-Russian Democratic Conference, September 19, 1917).
32 GARF, f. 1798, op. 1, d. 9, l. 1–2, 4–7 (Report on the Meeting of the Representatives of Factions with the Presidium of the All-Russian Democratic Conference, September 20, 1917); GARF, f. 1798, op. 1, d. 10, l. 1–15 (Report on the Sixth Day of the All-Russian Democratic Conference, September 20, 1917); GARF, f. 1798, op. 1, d. 12, l. 12 (Report on the Eighth Day of the All-Russian Democratic Conference, September 22, 1917).
33 *Delo naroda*, September 23, 1917: 3–4; September 25, 1917: 2; September 26, 1917: 2; *Rech'*, September 23, 1917: 3–4; September 26, 1917: 4; October 1, 1917: 1; *Vestnik Vremennogo pravitel'stva*, October 3, 1917: 1; October 7, 1917: 3; *Vpered!* (Moscow), 26 September 1917: 2.
34 *Rech'*, October 7, 1917: 4; October 10, 1917: 4; October 18, 1917: 4; *Vestnik Vrememmogo pravitel'stva,* October 15, 1917: 4; (Rudneva 2006, 69–70, 72, 89, 103).
35 *Rech'*, October 8, 1917: 2–3; October 18, 1917: 4; *Vestnik Vrememmogo pravitel'stva,* October 8, 1917: 3; *Vpered!*, October 8, 1917: 1.
36 GARF, f. 1799, op. 1, d. 6, l. 15 (Report on the Meeting of the Provisional Council of the Russian Republic, October 23, 1917); *Rech',* October 14, 1917: 3; October 17, 1917: 3; October 19, 1917: 2–3; *Vestnik Vrememmogo pravitel'stva,* October 11, 1917: 2; October 14, 1917: 2; October 15, 1917: 4.
37 *Rech'*, October 8, 1917: 3; October 10, 1917: 4; October 11, 1917: 4; October 13, 1917: 3; October 19, 1917: 3–4; *Vestnik Vrememmogo pravitel'stva,* 8 October 1917: 3.
38 The local bodies taht were supposed to prepare the agrarian reform.
39 *Rech'*, October 25, 1917: 2; October 26, 1917: 2; *Sovremennoe slovo*, October 25, 1917: 2.
40 In some areas, the elections started earlier, while in others, they were prolonged. In some places, they did not take place, while from others, the results were not submitted in time or at all.
41 See Protasov (1997, 164, 295–6). According to a more recent estimate, there were over 48.5 million counted votes, some 800,000 annulled, and no more than 1.5 million uncounted, however, no percentages are provided in the source (Protasov 2014, 5).
42 *Den'*, December 29, 1917: 4.
43 See Mal'chevskii (1930, 110–13). According to Vishniak (1921, 265–6), the Secretary of the Constituent Assembly, the basics of the new state system were worked by the commission on fundamental laws and state system, which the SR Faction created.
44 Russian: Anatolii Evgen'evich Skachkov (Skachko).
45 The *tsenzovaia* ("qualified") Russia included those groups that satisfied the property qualification (*tsenz*) during the imperial elections.

46 *Delo naroda*, May 5, 1917: 1–2; May 6, 1917: 1–2.
47 *Delo naroda*, May 6, 1917: 3.
48 A small faction of the RSDLP that eventually merged with the Bolsheviks.
49 *Delo naroda*, September 13, 1917: 3.
50 See Kotel'nikov and Iakovlev (1928, xxiii–xxvii, xxxviii, 1, 25–7, 79, 90–9) and Smith (2017, 149–52, 154). On the development of Lenin's views, see van Ree (2020, 26–7).
51 *Vestnik Vremennogo pravitel'stva*, March 17, 1917: 1.
52 *Vestnik Vremennogo pravitel'stva*, July 21, 1917: 1; (Dimanshtein, Levin, and Drabkina 1930, 3:67–8, 115–16, 204–5, 207, 223). It was noted in the press that all women deputies in the center and on the right supported immediate autonomy of Finland on July 5, 1917. *Peterburgskaia gazeta*, July 7, 1917: 4.
53 GARF, f. 1800, op. 1, d. 42, l. 2 (Memorandum of the Bessarabian cooperatives to the Provisional Government, received on June 8, 1917); (Dimanshtein, Levin, and Drabkina 1930, 3:140, 151–2, 162, 165, 168, 173, 224, 240, 242, 251, 260, 262–3, 269, 273, 280, 330, 334, 411, 431–2, 435, 437; Sablin and Semyonov 2020).
54 Russian: Mikhail Sergeevich Grushevskii.
55 Russian: Martin Martinovich Ichas.
56 Russian: Iosif Antonovichch Laukaitis.
57 Russian: Nikolai Osipovich Ianushkevich.
58 GARF, f. 1800, op. 1, d. 41, l. 1–2 (Resolution of the Lithuanian National Council, March 13, 1917).
59 *Den'*, December 24, 1917: 1; *Peterburgskaia gazeta*, September 15, 1917: 4.
60 *Izvestiia Petrogradskogo soveta rabochikh i soldatskikh deputatov* (Petrograd), May 25, 1917: 2–3.
61 Russian: Mamed Emin Rasulzade.
62 The Second Muslim Congress (Kazan, July 21–31, 1917) and the separate congresses of the military and of the mullahs.
63 *Vechernee vremia*, 14 August 1917: 1.
64 Russian: Iosif Konstantinovich Machavariani.
65 Russian: Iosif Iakovlevich Voronko.
66 Russian: Nikolai Vladimirovich Porsh.
67 GARF, f. 1798, op. 1, d. 5, l. 20 (Report on the Third Day of the All-Russian Democratic Conference, September 16, 1917); GARF, f. 1798, op. 1, d. 17, l. 12–15, 35–7, 66, 70 (Verbatim Report of the Third Day of the All-Russian Democratic Conference, September 16, 1917); *Sovremennoe slovo*, September 19, 1917: 1.
68 Russian: Varlam Isakovich Nutsubidze.
69 GARF, f. 1798, op. 1, d. 17, l. 20, 33, 45, 48, 50, 68–9 (Verbatim Report of the Third Day of the All-Russian Democratic Conference, September 16, 1917).
70 Russian: Akhmed (Akhmet) Tembulatovich Tsalikov (Tsalykkaty).
71 GARF, f. 1798, op. 1, d. 5, l. 23–9 (Report on the Third Day of the All-Russian Democratic Conference, September 16, 1917).
72 Russian: Dashi Sampilovich Sampilon.
73 GARF, f. 1798, op. 1, d. 5, l. 5–7 (Report on the Third Day of the All-Russian Democratic Conference, September 16, 1917); GARF, f. 1798, op. 1, d. 8, l. 1 (Report on the Fifth Day of the All-Russian Democratic Conference, September 19, 1917); GARF, f. 1798, op. 1, d. 17, l. 34, 36, 49–50, 75 (Verbatim Report of the Third Day of the All-Russian Democratic Conference, September 16, 1917).
74 GARF, f. 1798, op. 1, d. 17, l. 20–2, 36, 75–6 (Verbatim Report of the Third Day of the All-Russian Democratic Conference, September 16, 1917).
75 GARF, f. 1798, op. 1, d. 17, l. 14, 20, 39, 77 (Verbatim Report of the Third Day of the All-Russian Democratic Conference, September 16, 1917).
76 Russian: Andrei Andreevich Bulat.
77 *Rech'*, October 11, 1917: 4; October 13, 1917: 3; October 14, 1917: 3; October 22, 1917: 3; *Vestnik Vrememmogo pravitel'stva,* October 15, 1917: 4.

78 *Rech',* October 13, 1917: 2; October 19, 1917: 3; *Vestnik Vrememmogo pravitel'stva,* October 11, 1917: 2; October 17, 1917: 3–4.
79 GARF, f. 1799, op. 1, d. 5, l. 7 (Report on the Meeting of the Provisional Council of the Russian Republic, October 20, 1917).
80 GARF, f. 1781, op. 1, d. 57, l. 1–3 (Draft law on the organization of provisional executive authority under the Constituent Assembly, 1917); (Tsvetkov 2009, 70–1).
81 *Izvestiia* (Petrograd), November 9, 1917: 5.
82 RGIA, f. 1278, op. 5, d. 1258, l. 9 (From the Simsky Provisional Executive Committee to Rodzianko, March 11, 1917).
83 See Sablin (2018, 88).
84 *Rech'*, August 12, 1917: 3.
85 *Sotsial-demokrat*, August 11, 1917: 3; (Zinov'ev 1925, 240).
86 *Delo naroda*, August 15, 1917: 2; *Rech'*, August 12, 1917: 3; *Sovremennoe slovo*, August 12, 1917: 1.
87 *Edinstvo* (Petrograd), August 12, 1917: 1; *Sovremennoe slovo*, August 10, 1917: 1.
88 *Sotsial-Demokrat*, September 13, 1917: 1.
89 *Anarkhiia* (Moscow), September 18, 1917: 1; September 25, 1917: 1; October 2, 1917: 1.
90 *Edinstvo*, September 17, 1917: 1.
91 *Russkie vedomosti* (Moscow), September 22, 1917: 3; (Sablin 2023).
92 Russian: Iosif Iur'evich Lesik.
93 *Vol'naia Belarus'* (Minsk), October 26, 1917: 1.
94 *Novoe vremia* implied the possibility of an unrepresentative Constituent Assembly in September, after the Bolsheviks succeeded in the elections to the district dumas in Moscow in the context of broad absenteeism. *Novoe vremia* (Petrograd), September 30, 1917: 3.
95 GARF, f. 1781, op. 1, d. 4, l. 5 (From the Samara Executive Committee of the Soviet of Solders' Deputies to the Constituent Assembly, November 28, 1917); GARF, f. 1781, op. 1, d. 4, l. 23 (From the Pyatigorsk Soviet of Soldiers' Deputies, December 2, 1917); GARF, f. 1781, op. 1, d. 7, l. 1 (From democratic organizations of Osa to the Constituent Assembly, January 6, 1918); *Den'*, December 16, 1917: 4; December 21, 1917: 3; *Peterburgskii listok*, December 1, 1917: 2.
96 The seat of the Soviet government.
97 Also known as Iurii Larin.
98 *The New York Times*, July 11, 1917: 2.
99 *The Times of India*, June 16, 1917: 11.
100 *Boston Daily Globe*, August 25, 1917: 6.
101 *The Washington Post*, September 24, 1917: 4.
102 *The Times of India*, December 15, 1917: 9.
103 *The Shanghai Times*, November 30, 1917: 1.
104 *The New York Times*, November 30, 1917: 1.
105 *The Times of India*, December 15, 1917: 9.

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4 An antiparliamentary revolution

The RSFSR Congress of Soviets and the Central Executive Committee, 1918–1922

The state system, established by the Third All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers', Soldiers', and Peasants' Deputies (Petrograd, January 10–18, 1918), offered a class-based, exclusionary resolution of the imperial crisis (Gerasimov 2017, 36, 41). Nationality was also institutionalized through a federation but became subordinate to class. The Constitution of the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (RSFSR), adopted on July 10, 1918, detailed the system. The support of soldiers, many of whom returned home thanks to the Soviet armistice with the Central Powers in December 1917 and the Peace Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on March 3, 1918, was especially important for the Soviet regime (Smith 2017, 125, 156–7, 159). During its first years, some regional and local Soviet institutions were autonomous from the center (moved to Moscow in 1918), but this autonomy was gradually curbed. Over the course of the Russian Civil War (1917–1922), the new system expanded through the territory of the former Russian Empire with the establishment of further soviet republics and was standardized with the formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) on December 30, 1922.

In the new system, the Congress of Soviets was the supreme body of power. Between the Congresses, this role was performed by the Central Executive Committee (TsIK or VTsIK in the case of the All-Russian TsIK). The TsIK's Presidium was the supreme body between its sessions. These bodies were formed through non-universal, indirect, and unequal elections with an open ballot. The two key features of the system were the non-separation of powers, with the TsIK sharing authority with the Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom) as its derivative body, and the principle of substituting competence of one body by another.

In practical terms, the RSFSR was not a "soviet" but rather a Bolshevik single-party state after the removal of other parties from government, most notably the Party of Left Socialist Revolutionaries (SR) after their revolt on July 7, 1918. During the most active phase of the Civil War, the period of so-called War Communism in 1918–1921, the regime rested on four pillars – the Bolshevik Party, the Red Army, the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission (Cheka), that is, the secret police, and the state bureaucracy – and relied on ideologically justified terror. Following the collapse of economy in 1920–1921, accompanied by peasant revolts and the Kronstadt Rebellion in March 1921, War Communism was abandoned and the New Economic Policy (NEP) reintroduced capitalistic elements, but no

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political liberalization followed. The Bolshevik Party, which was renamed the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) or the RCP(b) in March 1918, developed into a hierarchical mass organization. Its Central Committee and the latter's Political Bureau (Politburo), established as a permanent body in March 1919, became the de facto central government, while party committees dominated over soviets locally. Discipline and purges (meaning expulsion from the party at the time) were institutionalized within the party, and political factions were banned in 1921. The party consolidated its regime in most of the former empire by the end of 1922, becoming the center of a new imperial formation (Fitzpatrick 2001, 88–90; Suny and Martin 2001; Rees 2017, 306–7).

Antiparliamentarism became central for ideological interpretations of the Soviet regime, although the word "parliament" was occasionally used for Congresses and TsIKs. Despite the repetition of Vladimir Il'ich Lenin's antiparliamentary ideas, such as the non-separation of powers, the VTsIK was systematically transformed into a nominally legislative body to the Sovnarkom was to be accountable. The Bolshevik leadership also attempted to make the VTsIK and soviets, in general, more representative of the non-party rural population. Parallel to this, however, the VTsIK was stripped of other parliamentary features. In 1918, when there were other parties in the soviets, there was some dissensus at the Congresses and in the VTsIK. The Bolsheviks, however, controlled the proceedings and had the most influential faction, which meant that dissensus did not translate into any decisions that were not approved by the Bolsheviks. With Iakov Mikhailovich Sverdlov being the VTsIK Chairman and a leading member of the Central Committee, this control was personal. With the expansion of the Central Committee machinery and the creation of the permanent Politburo mere days after Sverdlov's death in March 1919, it became institutional. After other socialist parties were purged from Soviet assemblies, only the disagreements among the Bolsheviks remained, with several minority factions, so-called "oppositions," existing within the party. These disagreements persisted over the first years of the Soviet regime, which made Plenums of the Bolshevik Central Committee and, to a lesser extent, party congresses and conferences perform as quasi-parliamentary bodies (Rakov 2022).

The Bolsheviks described the Soviet system as proletarian dictatorship and as proletarian democracy. Whenever it was criticized as being undemocratic, the former interpretation was used as a rebuttal. The strictly hierarchical nature of the regime was explained through the concept of democratic centralism. The Soviet Constitution was ostensibly dissimilar to constitutions in "bourgeois" democratic contexts. The Bolsheviks borrowed from Leon Petrażycki's "intuitive law" theory to advocate for "revolutionary sense of justice" of the proletariat. This made the Bolshevik legal system, even in theory, flexible and dynamic, allowing it to easily explain any violations of the law on behalf of the party (Gerasimov 2018, 178). Another key feature of Soviet law in terms of ideology and propaganda was the constant juxtaposition of Soviet institutions with their "bourgeois," that is, Western counterparts (Burbank 1995, 38–9). Elections, assemblies, and other elements of the Soviet system were more often than not discussed from a relational perspective.

During its early years, the Soviet project was expressly global in its outlook. This was emphasized in the RSFSR Constitution and reaffirmed with the creation of the Communist International (Comintern) in 1919. The developments in late imperial and postimperial Russia were projected on the international level, with the expectation of a world revolution unfolding along the Bolshevik path in both social and anticolonial dimensions (Sablin 2021). Foreign communist parties were supposed to adopt the same strategy toward parliamentarism that the Bolsheviks had developed since the Second Duma, utilizing parliament as a rostrum for propaganda and for exposing the existing regime. Activities during elections and in parliament were to be subservient to the extraparliamentary actions and campaigns, such as demonstrations, strikes, and propaganda in trade unions and other workers' associations. The soviets, which purportedly succeeded the Paris Commune of 1871, were intended to serve as a model for organizing postrevolutionary government. Soviets had been organized on the territories that were formally independent from the RSFSR. Outside of the former Russian Empire, soviet republics briefly existed on the territory of Hungary, Slovakia, Bavaria, Iran, and elsewhere in 1919–1921.

The Bolshevik regime was one of the first single-party regimes in Eurasia. In the context of roughly simultaneous imperial and postimperial transformations, parties as organizations of a new type took over state functions and replaced government institutions on the territories of the (former) empires. Together with the Bolshevik Party, the Committee for Union and Progress in the Ottoman Empire (one-party regime in 1913–1918) and the Anfu Club in China (parliamentary majority in 1918–1920) were among the early examples (Sablin and Moniz Bandeira 2022, 1). Among these three regimes, the Bolshevik regime was the only explicitly antiparliamentary take on building a modern state. The proclamation of the RSFSR hence launched an antiparliamentary revolution.

Like under the Anfu Regime in China and the fascist regime established in Italy in 1922, the Bolsheviks opted for representation of interest groups in a corporatist sense rather than individuals (Leung 2022, 26–7, 30–1). In the Russian case, this followed the logic of the "imperial rights regime" (Burbank 2006). In 1934, when corporatism had become a broader trend in modern state-building, Mark Veniaminovich Vishniak argued that both right and left critics of "bourgeois" parliamentarism employed the idea of group rather than individual representation to select "obedient agents." This was evident, for instance, in the curial principle of elections to the State Duma and the State Council in the Russian Empire as well as imperial parliaments elsewhere. According to Vishniak, it was in Russia where the "organic" representation of interests or classes was established following a revolution, that is, by the left rather than the right (Vishniak 1934, 347, 349).

The parliamentary element did not disappear completely from Russia's postimperial transformation. Although the main state formations of the Whites in the Civil War were dictatorial, a number of parliamentary and quasi-parliamentary institutions, including constituent assemblies, were convened on the former empire's territory. They were not necessarily tied to nation-state projects and included regional bodies like the Transcaucasian Sejm and the Siberian Regional Duma. Furthermore, it was not only the anti-Bolshevik forces that introduced parliaments;

the Bolsheviks formally established the Far Eastern Republic through the Constituent Assembly of the Far East. Some of the established states were annexed into the Soviet state during the Civil War or during the Second World War, while others continued to exist as sovereign polities. The postimperial states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were later restored based on their state continuity claim (Mälksoo 2022). The idea of reassembling the whole of Russia through the Constituent Assembly also remained potent during the Civil War, even though, in many cases, it was used merely as a slogan.

The making of the Soviet system

The Third Congress of Soviets proclaimed Russia a federation of free national republics and a federation of soviets. This system was developed over the ensuing months and years. Although the system was designed by the Bolsheviks, it was discussed with the participation of other socialist parties that were still part of the state assemblies. The decisions, however, did not deviate from those made in the Bolshevik Party.

The Third Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, which opened in the Tauride Palace on January 10, with 625 registered deputies with a decisive vote (Figure 4.1), was supposed to become a surrogate constituent assembly.



Figure 4.1 The Third All-Russian Congress of Soviets. Photo by Ia. Shteinberg. Tauride Palace, Petrograd, January 10–18, 1918. GTsMSIR, 930/8.

On January 13, it was merged with the Third Congress of (Soviets of) Peasants' Deputies. On January 16, delegates of the Cossacks who revolted against Aleksei Maksimovich Kaledin joined the congress. Altogether, 1,798 delegates were part of the congress, including 1,587 with a decisive vote. Out of 1,130 delegates who filled out a questionary, 928 were members or supporters of the Bolshevik and Left SR parties. There were also Mensheviks of various factions, "right" SRs, Social Democrats-Internationalists, SR-Maximalists, anarchists, and People's Socialists among the delegates.[1]

In his report to the congress, Lenin stressed the connection of the Soviet regime to the Paris Commune of 1871, defining them as instances of proletarian dictatorship. He also defended the concept of dictatorship, claiming that it was impossible to stop the exploitation of the toiling masses through mere persuasion. The Menshevik-Internationalist Iulii Osipovich Martov rejected the parallel between the uprising of the Paris Commune and the October Revolution, arguing that unlike the Paris Commune, the Soviet government relied on excesses and violence and restricted voting rights. He argued that by dissolving the Constituent Assembly, the Soviet government "broke the mirror" that reflected the will of the people. In another speech, Martov asserted that the elections to soviet organizations that were non-universal, indirect, and unequal, and did not always use a secret ballot were inferior to democratism in all respects (III Vserossiiskii s"ezd Sovetov 1918, 21, 23, 27, 34–5, 75–6; Galili, Nenarokov, and Pavlov 1999, 118–20). Polemicizing with the opposition, Lenin dismissed democracy altogether.

> Democracy is one of the forms of the bourgeois state, for which all the traitors of true socialism, who now find themselves at the head of official socialism and who claim that democracy is contrary to the dictatorship of the proletariat, stand. As long as the revolution did not go beyond the framework of the bourgeois order, we stood for democracy, but as soon as we saw the first glimmers of socialism in the whole course of the revolution, we took a position firmly and resolutely defending the dictatorship of the proletariat.
>
> […] Democracy is formal parliamentarism, but in reality, it is ceaseless cruel mockery, soulless, unbearable oppression of the bourgeoisie over the toiling people.
>
> (III Vserossiiskii s"ezd Sovetov 1918, 41)

Lenin drew parallels between anarchism and the views of the Bolsheviks but stressed the necessity of a revolutionary state until the oppression of the bourgeoise would be completely overthrown (III Vserossiiskii s"ezd Sovetov 1918, 42).

On January 12, the Third Congress, which then did not yet include the peasant part, approved the modified Declaration of Rights of the Toiling and Exploited People, proclaiming Russia a republic of soviets, in which "all power in the center and locally" belonged to the soviets, and a "federation of soviet national republics" based on a "free union of free nations" (Obichkin et al. 1957, 1:340–3). The Soviet state system departed from the exclusively class-based design, which Lenin supported in June 1917 (Rakhmetov 1930, 1:72).

The design of the state system was debated. People's Commissar of Nationalities Iosif Vissarionovich Stalin explained that national self-determination applied only to the toiling masses and was subordinate to the goal of building socialism. He argued that the Congress of Soviets should be the supreme body of the Soviet federation, while the VTsIK was to have its functions between the Congresses and proposed a resolution on the central government. The Left SR had proposed "a permanent federative legislative soviet body" or a "federative convent" ahead of the congress. At the congress, Vladimir Evgen'evich Trutovskii, one of their leaders, reaffirmed the need to create a council of representatives of soviet national republics, even though he supported Stalin's draft resolution. The anarchist-communist Aleksandr Iul'evich Ge (Golberg) rejected the federation; the SR-Maximalist A. A. Selivanov opposed the establishment of national republics; Martov criticized the obligation to form soviet rather than democratic national republics. The Bolshevik Evgenii Alekseevich Preobrazhenskii contended that in Ukraine and in the Caucasus, "bourgeois parliamentarism" was obsolete. Concluding the debate, Stalin noted that the proposed resolution was merely an outline of the future constitution and once again rejected parliamentarism, citing the negative experience of France and the USA.[2]

According to the resolution on federal bodies of the Russian Republic, adopted on January 15 as the "basic provisions of the constitution," the supreme authority belonged to the "Congress of Soviets of Workers', Soldiers', Peasants', and Cossacks' Deputies." The inclusion of the Cossacks as a constituent group added the category of social estate despite its abolition. The Congress was to convene at least once every three months. Between the Congresses, the VTsIK was the supreme body. The Sovnarkom, "the government of the federation," was to be elected and dismissed by either the Congress or the VTsIK. The division of competence between federal and republican bodies was to be decided by the VTsIK and the republican TsIKs. On January 18, the congress approved the Third VTsIK, comprising 160 Bolsheviks, 125 Left SRs, 2 [SD]-Internationalists, 3 anarchists-communists, 7 SR-Maximalists, 7 "right" SRs, and 2 Mensheviks. In his closing speech, Lenin anticipated the unification of all toilers of the world into a global state for constructing socialism. The soviets were, in this context, one of the forms of the starting world revolution (III Vserossiiskii s"ezd Sovetov 1918, 81–2, 85–7, 90, 93–5; Obichkin et al. 1957, 1:350–1, 557).

It is unclear if the Third Congress of Soviets instructed the VTsIK to adopt a constitution or to develop the basic provisions of the constitution. Lenin reaffirmed the principles of the Soviet government, outlined in *State and Revolution* (Lenin 1969), when drafting the new party program for the Bolsheviks' Seventh Congress (March 6–8, 1918). He stressed the need to strengthen and develop the federative republic of soviets as a "higher and more progressive form of democracy than bourgeois parliamentarism" and the only type of state that suited the transition from capitalism to socialism, the dictatorship of the proletariat. Lenin reaffirmed the need to destroy parliamentarism as the separation of legislative and executive powers. At the Party Congress, Lenin warned about the possibility of returning to the "bourgeois" parliamentary system under the pressure of "enemy forces."

He emphasized that the Soviet regime would be firmly established only after the international movement (in Europe) supported it (Rossiiskaia kommunisticheskaia partiia 1962, 146, 159, 177, 182–3).

The VTsIK did not deal with the constitution until April 1918. The Fourth Extraordinary Congress of Soviets (Moscow, March 14–16, 1918) was convened to ratify the Brest-Litovsk Treaty. According to O. I. Chistiakov, the immediate reason for the development of a proper constitution was the conflict between the Sovnarkom of Soviet Russia and the Sovnarkom of the Moscow Region, which had parallel bodies to the all-Russian ones. On March 30, the Bolshevik Central Committee resolved to abolish the regional Sovnarkom and to develop a constitution, entrusting Sverdlov to establish a commission through the VTsIK (Chistiakov 2019, 22–5).

The Fourth VTsIK elected the constitutional commission on April 1. Its leading Bolshevik members, Sverdlov and Stalin, outlined the main principles of the constitution before the commission convened. Following Lenin, Sverdlov explained that the main principle of the Soviet government was the elimination of "parliamentary" separation of legislative and executive authority. The Sovnarkom, hence, had legislative, executive, and administrative competence. At the same time, Sverdlov stressed the need to divide concrete issues between the VTsIK and the Sovnarkom and competence between different levels of Soviet government, providing Siberia as an example where regional bodies competed with their central counterparts. Among other principles, Sverdlov mentioned the proximity of the Soviet government to the masses, which manifested in the frequent elections and the involvement of toilers in ruling the country. Sverdlov explained that while the VTsIK's core remained the same, every three months it could release a cadre of educated administrators (Vserossiiskii Tsentral'nyi ispolnitel'nyi komitet 1920, 67–9; Sverdlov 1960). Stalin focused on the federal design of the Soviet state. Discussing the USA and Switzerland, he noted that federalism led to the establishment of a bicameral system there but argued that such a system was unacceptable for the Soviet state, rejecting a second chamber. He added that in Russia federalism was an intermediary stage toward future socialist "unitarism." Unlike Sverdlov, Stalin called the Sovnarkom an executive body (Stalin 1947, 70–3).

Despite the Bolshevik majority in the constitutional commission, there were heated debates on the main principles of the constitution. The Bolshevik Mikhail Nikolaevich Pokrovskii, a historian, proposed building the system in a bottom-up manner, considering local soviets sovereign. Sverdlov, who chaired the commission, proposed to move in a top-down manner by defining the competence of the central bodies. Mikhail Andreevich Reisner, who represented the People's Commissariat of Justice, supported Sverdlov. The issue of federation caused further disagreements. The Left SR Dmitrii Aleksandrovich Magerovskii pointed to the inner contradictions of the system, with both nationalities and local soviets being interpreted as the federal subjects. Citing the ideas of anarcho-syndicalists, Reisner argued that the federation had to be based on economic rather than national features, with soviets overwhelmingly representing interests and socio-economic groups rather than individuals. Reisner defined "the Russian Socialist Federative

Soviet Republic" as "a free socialist community" of different groups of toilers, which could potentially join a larger federative union of united socialist federative republics.[3] In this respect, Reisner's project was reminiscent of Mikhail Aleksandrovich Bakunin's idea of a bottom-up federation, which he articulated in his 1867 work *Federalism, Socialism, Anti-Theologism* (Bakunin 1972).

Reisner's project faced sharp criticism. The Armenian Bolshevik Var'lam Avanesov (Sowren Martirosyan)[4] reminded the commission that the Third Congress had established the Russian Republic as a union of free nations. He argued that Reisner's project of unions of cities, republics, and communes was inapplicable to the Caucasus, which historically consisted of small nationalities. Stalin referred to regions, with their distinct "spirit" and "national composition," as "objective" units of the federation. He emphasized that regions already existed in practice and that their "toiling elements" demanded broad autonomy. Stalin opposed including a federation of interests (trade unions and cooperatives) in the constitution, as it would create a parallel structure and institutionalize the existing local chaos. In his view, what was required was strong authority, as socialist was still a distant future. The state, therefore, needed to be organized around the central authority of the VTsIK and the Sovnarkom. Without a centralized economy and politics, the state would not survive with the bourgeoisie still in existence.[5]

Stalin's own project expanded on the decisions of the Third Congress. It defined the Russian Republic as a "free socialist society of all toilers of Russia, united into municipal and rural" soviets of workers and peasants. It also included autonomous regional republics that united into the Russian Socialist Republic on the principle of federation. Russia was headed by the All-Russian Congress of Soviets or its substitute, the VTsIK, along with their executive body, the Sovnarkom. The objective for the transitional period was to establish the dictatorship of the urban and rural proletariat "in order to completely suppress the bourgeoisie, abolish the exploitation of human by human, and establish socialism, where there will no longer be any classes or apparatus of government."[6] Stalin's scheme of a federation of regions relied on his earlier approach to regionalism (Stalin 1946).

Sverdlov and Avanesov supported Stalin, while Iurii Mikhailovich Steklov and M. N. Pokrovskii sided with Reisner. Pokrovskii argued that the national federation became irrelevant after the Brest-Litovsk Treaty. In his opinion, Russia could only be a fictitious federation, as the territory with a Russian majority would always suppress the independence of the other territories, the "colonies of Great Russia." Stalin emphasized that his project was a federation of regions in the economic sense, not based on nationalities. The commission backed Stalin's project with five votes to three. During the introduction of amendments, "toiling peasants" were replaced with "poorest peasants" as one of the two constituent groups. Pokrovskii suggested adding the toiling Cossacks, but Stalin rejected it, arguing that the Cossacks were not a class category and there was no need to enhance their social estate self-esteem. Despite Pokrovskii's warning that creating a national federation would perpetuate nationalism, Stalin insisted on keeping it. Regarding supreme authority, Stalin considered the possibility of creating a VTsIK "bureau"

to serve as the leading body when the VTsIK was not in session. He also insisted on detailing the voting rights in the constitution.[7]

On June 17, 1918, the commission adopted the section that dealt with the voting rights. It excluded from the franchise all those who relied on hired labor for the sake of making profits, those who lived on non-labor income, private traders, clergy, agents of the former police and secret police, members of the House of Romanov, those who were legally declared insane, the deaf and dumb, and those who were sentenced for "acquisitive or defamatory crimes."[8] For the Bolsheviks, the members of the old privileged classes were counterrevolutionary by definition as class enemies, and their mere existence was a threat. Hence, it was necessary not only to eliminate the old pattern of class inequality but also to reverse it (Fitzpatrick 2001, 91). There were also some debates on the representation of peasants.[9]

The discussion of central bodies led to further disagreements. The Latvian Bolshevik Mārtiņš Lācis[10] and Georgii Semenovich Gurvich, a legal scholar, proposed eliminating the Sovnarkom and establishing the Council of the VTsIK instead. Steklov opposed this, fearing that it would reduce the Bolsheviks' influence. Lācis pointed out the parallel bodies in the VTsIK and the Sovnarkom, and the lack of collegiality, as the people's commissars acted as ministers. Sverdlov also supported transforming people's commissariats into VTsIK departments and noted that most of the parallel departments had already been merged. He nevertheless proposed keeping the Sovnarkom's name.[11]

Since June 1918, the People's Commissariat of Justice, then headed by the Latvian Bolshevik Pēteris Stučka,[12] formerly a lawyer, also worked on a draft with the participation of Reisner. According to Sverdlov, Lenin and others in the Bolshevik Central Committee considered postponing its adoption, but Sverdlov managed to convince them that the finished parts could be adopted. According to Steklov, Sverdlov entrusted him and Iakov Semenovich Sheinkman, the Chairman of the Kazan Soviet, to complete the draft. Steklov received instructions from Lenin. After the draft was finished, Lenin and Sverdlov made further amendments. On July 3, a special commission of the Bolshevik Central Committee considered two drafts – one from the VTsIK and one from the People's Commissariat of Justice – and adopted the former with some amendments.[13]

The next day, the Fifth Congress of Soviets of Workers', Peasants', Soldiers' (Red Army), and Cossacks' Deputies opened in Moscow (Figure 4.2) opened with 1,035 registered delegates with a decisive vote and 240 with a consultative vote. Among the delegates with decisive votes, there were 678 Bolsheviks, 269 Left SRs, around 30 SR-Maximalists, and 5 or 6 SD-Internationalists.[14] Sverdlov suggested not spending too much time discussing the details of the draft constitution and proposed forming a commission of nine people to consider the VTsIK draft or work out a new one. The commission was elected proportionally to the factions of the Congress. The Congress was interrupted by the uprising of the Left SRs on July 6–7, 1918, prompted by their opposition to the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty. After the uprising was suppressed by the Sovnarkom, the Congress reconvened on July 9 and expelled the Left SRs from soviets (V Vserossiiskii s"ezd Sovetov 1919, 5, 20, 105, 208–9).



Figure 4.2 Ia. M. Sverdlov (wearing a bright-colored cap and a necktie) in a group of delegates of the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets in front of the Bolshoi Theater. Moscow, July 4–10, 1918. RGAKFD, D-415.

On July 10, Steklov presented the draft constitution on behalf of the Congress commission. He claimed that all previous world constitutions were bourgeois, while the Soviet one was the first to end inequality (V Vserossiiskii s"ezd Sovetov 1919, 184).

> And just as the ancient Germans, armed warriors, worked out their law, gathering in the forests and fields, as our ancestors who established state law at their *veches* ["assemblies"] in the interests of the toiling masses, it can be said that this constitution was worked out by the Russian proletariat and the revolutionary peasantry in the fire of clashes and battles for the people's right. This armed people has drawn up its charter, in which it shows an example of a new social construction to all other peoples who have not yet reached our position but are undoubtedly approaching this stage.
>
> (V Vserossiiskii s"ezd Sovetov 1919, 184)

Steklov emphasized that this was a constitution for the transition from the bourgeois system to socialism and from the autocratic system to a communist one. He argued that during this period of struggle against the bourgeoisie and its agents, proletarian dictatorship and a strong central government were necessary. Steklov explained that the constitution established the principle of democratic centralism and eliminated the "artificial" separation of powers seen in bourgeois constitutions. He clarified that it differed from "bourgeois centralism" as it functioned as a

weapon of the majority to suppress the bourgeoisie and the propertied classes. Regarding voting restrictions, Steklov noted that the bourgeoisie had not yet granted voting rights to peasants and workers everywhere. He called these restrictions progressive, as they were part of the struggle for human rights and the socialist system. Comparing the Soviet constitution to others, Steklov emphasized its flexibility, with the VTsIK being able to amend it if necessary. He regarded it as a milestone in global history, following the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, the 1791 Constitution of France, the Jacobin Constitution of 1793, the 1796 Manifesto of the Equals, the 1848 Manifesto of the Communist Party, and the 1864 Inaugural Address of the International Workingmen's Association (V Vserossiiskii s"ezd Sovetov 1919, 185–90).

Steklov explained the inclusion of federalism into the "partially outdated" Declaration of Rights of the Working and Exploited People and the constitution with a reference to Ukraine, where the workers and peasants had ostensibly expressed their desire to join the Soviet federation. He argued that this inclusion was of global importance, as it would soon lead the Russian Soviet Republic to be surrounded by "daughter-republics" and "sister-republics," forming a federation first in Europe and then worldwide. Another factor, according to Steklov, was the different levels of development among nationalities. While most of them understood democratic centralism and solid government, there were other nationalities that feared the use of old Tsarist policies and were concerned about their national rights (V Vserossiiskii s"ezd Sovetov 1919, 186–7).

The debates included only one other speaker, the SR-Maximalist N. Polianskii, who proposed amendments on behalf of his faction. In particular, he opposed unequal representation at the All-Russian Congress and suggested sending delegates from district instead of provincial congresses there. Polianskii opposed dividing toilers into groups and proposed naming the state the All-Russian Labor Commune and not the Russian Federation. Steklov explained the need for different norms of representation in urban and rural areas, as most people in the cities and towns were adults, and hence, it was not a privilege for them. He justified the representation of provincial rather than district congresses based on convenience for the congresses themselves. According to Steklov, listing individual groups in the constitution was necessary for clarity, ensuring that even "uneducated, backward" peasants understood that they participated in the government. Steklov proposed adopting the draft at the Congress and delegating its further editing to the new VTsIK. This proposal was unanimously adopted (V Vserossiiskii s"ezd Sovetov 1919, 191–5). On July 18, the VTsIK Presidium made final edits, and on July 19, the Constitution was published, entering into force (Chistiakov 2019, 29–30).

The Constitution included the modified Declaration of Rights of the Working and Exploited People as its first part. The second part declared the transitional character of the document and claimed that the RSFSR was a "free socialist society of all toilers." All power in it belonged to "the entire working population of the country, united in urban and rural soviets." The soviets of regions, which had peculiar economy or national composition, could unite into autonomous regional unions. The latter entered the RSFSR on the principle of federation (Vyshinskii 1940, 23).

The third part discussed the government system. The All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers', Peasants', Red Army, and Cossacks' Deputies was the supreme authority. It comprised representatives from urban soviets (1 deputy per 25,000 voters) and representatives from provincial congresses of soviets (1 deputy per 125,000 inhabitants). If more recent, district and regional congresses could send deputies (also called delegates) instead of provincial congresses. The All-Russian Congress was to convene at least twice a year. The VTsIK, with a maximum of 200 members, was elected by the All-Russian Congress and accountable to it. Between Congresses, the VTsIK served as the supreme body, setting the general direction of government policy, coordinating legislation and administration, and supervising the implementation of the Constitution and decrees. The VTsIK considered and approved draft decrees, submitted by the Sovnarkom or individual agencies, and issued its own decrees and orders. The VTsIK formed the Sovnarkom for general administration and departments (people's commissariats) for governing individual spheres. The Sovnarkom issued its own decrees, orders, and instructions but had to inform the VTsIK of all decisions, which the VTsIK could revoke or halt. Decisions of "significant general political importance" by the Sovnarkom required approval by the VTsIK, while extraordinary measures could be implemented directly by the Sovnarkom (Vyshinskii 1940, 24–5).

Regional congresses consisted of deputies from urban soviets (1 per 5,000 voters) and district soviets (1 per 25,000 inhabitants). They could also include deputies from provincial congresses in the same proportion if these congresses happened more recently. Provincial congresses of soviets comprised deputies from county soviets (1 per 10,000 inhabitants) and urban soviets (1 per 2,000 voters). Again, deputies could be sent by district congresses if these happened more recently. Rural soviets sent deputies to district (1 per 1,000 inhabitants) and county (1 per 10 members of a rural soviet) congresses. Regional congresses were to convene at least twice a year, provincial and district congresses once every three months, and county congresses once a month. Each level of congresses established executive committees, which substituted for congresses. In urban areas, soviets of deputies comprised 1 deputy per 1,000 inhabitants, while in settlements, the norm was 1 deputy per 100 inhabitants. The term of local soviets was three months, and they also formed executive committees (Vyshinskii 1940, 27–8).

The fourth part of the Constitution dealt with voting rights. Those eligible to vote included all citizens aged 18 and above who earned a living through productive or socially useful labor as well as those engaged in housekeeping that enabled others to work productively; soldiers of the Soviet Army and Navy; and citizens of the two preceding categories who lost their capacity to work. Non-citizens working in the RSFSR and belonging to the working class had voting rights as well. The franchise excluded those who employed hired labor for profit; those who had income without active work; private traders and commercial brokers; clergy of all denominations; employees and agents of the former police and secret police; members of the former reigning dynasty; those who were legally declared demented or mentally deficient, and those under guardianship; and those who were sentenced for self-serving or

dishonorable offenses for the period fixed by the sentence. The specific election procedures were determined by local soviets according to VTsIK instructions. Voters had the right to recall deputies at any time (Vyshinskii 1940, 28–9).

Institutional developments in the RSFSR

The Soviet political practice was not determined by the Constitution. The central bodies of the Bolshevik Party, a non-constitutional organization, became the *de facto* government, and there were also numerous extraordinary bodies. The party assemblies, the VTsIK, and, to a lesser extent, the All-Russian Congresses of Soviet were nevertheless sites of dissensus.

The Soviet system remained in flux. The disenfranchised group was larger than stated in the Constitution, thanks to arbitrary interpretations of the Constitution and the VTsIK instructions (Fitzpatrick 2000, 117). The government bodies that were not part of the Constitution included the Revolutionary Military Council, the Cheka (formally, a body of the Sovnarkom), the Council of Workers' and Peasants' Defense (reformed into the Council of Labor and Defense), the Small Sovnarkom, local committees of the poor, revolutionary committees (instead of soviets) in the areas taken or retaken by the Bolsheviks during the Civil War (Vyshinskii 1940, 32, 35, 38, 41, 62, 82–4, 86, 88, 90–1, 101, 123).

The Soviet system initially had some multiparty features but lost them over the course of 1918. After the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, the Left SRs left the Sovnarkom in protest, although they remained in the assemblies, referring to the Congress of Soviets as the "toiling parliament" (IV chrezvychainyi Vserossiiskii s"ezd Sovetov 1920, 41, 43). In the Fourth VTsIK, Martov protested against the unfair treatment of the opposition, claiming that his faction could get the floor. "Believe me, even the reactionary parliaments understood that the speeches of the opposition were necessary for the fruitful work of the majority itself." Trotskii contended that the regime was formally a dictatorship and not a democracy. The SD-Internationalist Solomon Abramovich Lozovskii (Dridzo) responded to this that the most important issues were adopted without the Soviet "parliament." The Menshevik Fedor Il'ich Dan called the VTsIK a "non-parliament," pointing to the absence of preliminary discussions of drafts. Speaking at a joint session of the VTsIK with the Moscow Soviet and the representatives of trade unions and factory committees on May 14, the SR Matvei L'vovich Kogan-Bernshtein denounced the "October counterrevolution" and claimed that the return to democracy was inevitable, reaffirming the slogan of national revival under the Constituent Assembly (Vserossiiskii Tsentral'nyi ispolnitel'nyi komitet 1920, 167–8, 172, 182, 184, 278).

On June 14, following the revolt of the Czechoslovak Legion and the start of the active phase of the Civil War, the VTsIK expelled Mensheviks and "right" SRs from the Soviet assemblies for ostensibly supporting counterrevolution. The Left SR Vladimir Aleksandrovich Karelin opposed this decision, claiming that there was no evidence that two parties were implicated in the uprisings as a whole and that only the Congress could expel them from the VTsIK (Vserossiiskii Tsentral'nyi ispolnitel'nyi komitet 1920, 426–7, 439). On November 30, 1918, the VTsIK briefly



Figure 4.3 M. A. Spiridonova heading to the Bolshoi Theater for the session of the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets. Moscow, July 5, 1918. RGAKFD, V-1719.

readmitted the Menshevik Central Committee into the soviets, as they ostensibly stopped cooperating with bourgeois parties (Borisov et al. 2010, 65).

At the Fifth Congress of Soviets, the Left SR Mariia Aleksandrovna Spiridonova (Figure 4.3) made an anti-Bolshevik speech, reiterating her party's opposition to the Brest-Litovsk Treaty and insisting on spreading the revolution abroad. She promised that the Left SRs would fight the Bolsheviks, who had a majority at the Congress but ostensibly not in the country (V Vserossiiskii s"ezd Sovetov 1919, 27–30). The SR-Maximalist Ferdinand Iur'evich Svetlov (Shenfel'd) criticized the rally-like atmosphere of the Congress and the lack of substance in Lenin's report (V Vserossiiskii s"ezd Sovetov 1919, 81). When the expulsion of the Left SRs was being discussed after their revolt, the Left SR Grigorii Davydovich Zaks, who, as Deputy Chairman of the Cheka, was not informed of his party's plans and was not arrested, demanded an investigation of the whole party's role in the revolt and the release of its faction members (V Vserossiiskii s"ezd Sovetov 1919, 196).

The Soviet system continued to be discussed by the Bolsheviks. The crisis of soviets, allegedly being replaced by executive committees in the context of broader bureaucratization, was a major topic at the Eighth Congress of the RCP(b) held on March 18–23, 1919 (Figure 4.4). Lenin's solution to the problem of bureaucratism was to involve the entire population in administration, but he acknowledged that this required long-term "upbringing" due to the low cultural level of the toiling masses (Rossiiskaia kommunisticheskaia partiia 1959, 62, 200). In his updated

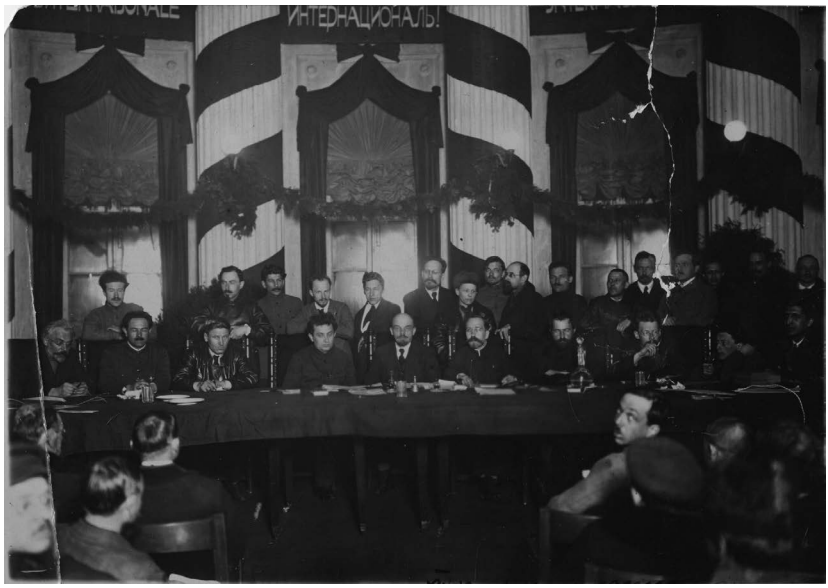


Figure 4.4 Presidium of the Eighth Congress of the RCP(b). Sverdlov Hall, the Kremlin, Moscow, March 18–23, 1919. Photograph by L. Ia. Leonidov. Left to right, seated: P. G. Smidovich, Jacques Sadoul, G. E. Evdokimov, G. E. Zinov'ev, V. I. Lenin, L. B. Kamenev, E. A. Preobrazhenskii, H. L. P'iatakov, Karl Radek, Var'lam Avanesov; standing: ? , G. Ia. Sokol'nikov, I. V. Stalin, N. I. Bukharin, V. V. Shmidt, M. F. Vladimirskii, K. T. Novgorodtseva, N. I. Stukov, N. N. Krestinskii, F. A. Sergeev, L. S. Sosnovskii, P. A. Krasikov, Abel Enukidze, ? , V. P. Miliutin, [Ia. S. Ganetskii]. GTsMSIR, 37185.

draft of the party program, Lenin added a corporatist understanding of the soviets, claiming that the Soviet Constitution made the state apparatus closer to the masses by making a production unit – a factory or a plant – as the constituency rather than a territorial district (Lenin 1938e, 174). In fact, the Constitution said nothing specific on the matter, merely stating that elections were to be carried out according to the "established customs" of the local soviets (Vyshinskii 1940, 29).

A further issue was the VTsIK's composition and inefficiency. Grigorii Evseevich Zinov'ev claimed that among the 200 VTsIK members, there were very few workers and peasants who worked amidst "the broad masses," with most being involved in administration (Rossiiskaia kommunisticheskaia partiia 1959, 288).

> We conceived the TsIK as a workers' and peasants' parliament, which should be as close to the masses as possible, which should most of all capture the pulse of life and, at any given moment, most accurately reflect the true mood of the broad circles of workers and peasants. To this our TsIK has so far been little adapted.
>
> (Rossiiskaia kommunisticheskaia partiia 1959, 288)

Zinov'ev argued that the VTsIK needed to include local activists who did not necessarily have to be party members and could include the non-party peasant poor. The economist Valerian Valerianovich Osinskii (Obolenskii), a leader of the party's Left Communist Faction, criticized the VTsIK from a different angle. He proposed dividing it into sections in order to transform it into a "working collegium," discussed by Karl Marx in relation to the Paris Commune, and to revive it without turning it into a parliament. He argued that the work in standing commissions would solve the problem of one-man decision-making by people's commissars. Osinskii also proposed specialization within local soviets. Zinov'ev disagreed, contending that the VTsIK already worked through sections and that further specialization would only increase bureaucratism (Rossiiskaia kommunisticheskaia partiia 1959, 288–9, 307, 324).

According to the RCP(b) Program, adopted at the Eighth Congress, each member of a soviet was to perform specific administrative tasks, subject to change for the purpose of expanding expertise. The program once again contrasted the Soviet system to parliamentarism, asserting that toilers could more easily elect and recall deputies while also reaffirming the non-separation of powers in the Soviet state. Lenin's corporatist understanding of soviets was included without a direct reference to the Constitution. A separate resolution on "soviet construction" stated that the VTsIK needed to be primarily composed of local activists, and the competence of the VTsIK Presidium had to be properly defined by the subsequent Congress of Soviets. The resolution also highlighted the need to eliminate the tendency of transferring decisions from soviets to executive committees. The objective was to involve all toilers in the soviets, gradually extending the franchise based on local conditions (Rossiiskaia kommunisticheskaia partiia 1959, 396, 427–8).

The Eighth Congress also addressed the party's central bodies, including insufficient deliberation within the Central Committee. Lenin emphasized that it served as a "fighting organ" during the Civil War and that a parliament would not align with the era of dictatorship (Rossiiskaia kommunisticheskaia partiia 1959, 25–6). Osinskii advocated for collegial over one-person decision-making. "We do not need a parliament where people are constantly talking and sitting […], we need a collegium that would be able, through comradely discussion and the clash of opinions, work out the party line in a general sense" (Rossiiskaia kommunisticheskaia partiia 1959, 28). The congress restructured the Central Committee, stipulating two plenary sessions per month and establishing the Politburo, the Organizational Bureau, and the Secretariat within it. The Politburo was responsible for all urgent decisions and reported to the Central Committee. The congress also resolved that all national communist parties in the formally independent soviet republics on the former empire's territory were to be fully subordinate to the Central Committee of the RCP(b) (Rossiiskaia kommunisticheskaia partiia 1959, 424–5).

The decisions of the Eighth Congress were contradictory. While pushing for more active soviets, the resolution on "soviet construction" required the party's "undivided political domination" in the soviets and "control of all their work," achieved by appointing its loyal members to all positions. It encouraged purging

undesirables from both the soviets and the party. At the same time, it cautioned against conflating the functions of the party and state bodies and warned against substituting the latter with the former (Rossiiskaia kommunisticheskaia partiia 1959, 428–9).

The Politburo became the main body curating the VTsIK and the All-Russian Congress of Soviets as well as elections.[15] In December 1919, Adol'f Abramovich Ioffe conveyed the following view on the Soviet elections in a letter to Lenin and the Central Committee: "According to our unwritten constitution, all elections to the central soviet and party institutions are conducted according to lists actually drawn up by the Central Committee of the RCP" (Kvashonkin et al. 1996, 111). The Politburo set the dates of the Congresses of Soviets, approved the agendas and speakers, and reviewed their talking points.[16]

Several non-Bolsheviks, approved by the Bolshevik leadership,[17] spoke at the Seventh All-Russian Congress of Soviets (December 5–9, 1919). Martov delivered a Menshevik exposing numerous violations of the Constitution, such as infrequent convocation of the All-Russian Congresses of Soviets and the non-convocation of the VTsIK in 1919. The VTsIK did not discuss or vote on any decrees and was always represented by its Presidium; legal acts were adopted by the Sovnarkom or non-constitutional bodies. Similar patterns were observed locally, where executive committees effectively replaced soviets. Non-Bolshevik parties were marginalized, and elections were entirely unfree. The declaration asserted that soviets and their congresses had transformed into mere appendages of RCP(b). Coupled with press restrictions, this eradicated self-government of the masses, contributing to bureaucratism, mass apathy, and the surge of uncontrollable terror and arbitrariness. According to the declaration, the *de facto* abolition of the Constitution endangered the revolution despite the Red Army's accomplishments in the Civil War. The Mensheviks proposed revitalizing and democratizing the Constitution, ensuring proper accountability of all bodies to workers and peasants, the proper functioning of the soviets, and their regular reelection; introducing equality of urban and rural toilers; reinstating civil rights; and abolishing extrajudicial persecution and government terror. Mariia Iakovlevna Frumkina, a left-wing Bundist, supported this criticism, claiming that soviets convened irregularly and turned into ineffective (VII Vserossiiskii s"ezd Sovetov 1920, 60–5).

Lenin dismissed Martov's criticism, asserting that VTsIK members were at the frontlines of the Civil War. He also contended that the frequency of soviet meetings was inconsequential in times of war. Lenin countered the accusation of disregarding the Constitution by referencing the clause on the suspension of rights for the benefit of the working class. Regarding the inequality between workers and peasants, he asserted that among the latter, there were supporters of a return to the bourgeois system (VII Vserossiiskii s"ezd Sovetov 1920, 77–80).

The Seventh Congress of Soviets nevertheless reformed the VTsIK, which, since March 30, 1919, was headed by the Bolshevik Mikhail Ivanovich Kalinin. Presenting the reform, Lev Borisovich Kamenev reaffirmed that the VTsIK was not a bourgeois parliament and that its members were not just legislators but also implementors. For this reason, it could not meet permanently, and the Bolsheviks

proposed making it sessional to assemble at least once every two months. The VTsIK Presidium was to be formalized as the "leading center," which represented the VTsIK, prepared drafts, granted pardons, gave out awards, and had the right to approve and suspend the Sovnarkom's decrees between the VTsIK sessions. The Seventh Congress also made small amendments to the electoral system and competence of soviets, congresses, and executive committees (VII Vserossiiskii s"ezd Sovetov 1920, 261–2, 271; Vyshinskii 1940, 67–70). The reforms were approved without any debate, although there were dissenting voices within the Communist Faction of the Congress.[18]

After the renewed persecution of the Mensheviks in 1919, all parties other than the Bolsheviks were effectively excluded from the debates. At the Ninth Congress of the RCP(b) (March 29–April 5, 1920), Nikolai Nikolaevich Krestinskii suggested merging the Sovnarkom and the VTsIK Presidium to prevent tensions between these bodies. Aleksei Semenovich Kiselev of the Workers' Opposition highlighted a conflict between the Central Committee and the VTsIK Presidium over closing a newspaper. Trotskii responded that the VTsIK represented the RCP(b) and therefore had to remain under the Central Committee's control. Timofei Vladimirovich Sapronov of the Group of Democratic Centralism accused the Sovnarkom (including Lenin) and individual people's commissars of disregarding the Seventh Congress of Soviets and the VTsIK. Although Sapronov denounced the "dictatorship of party bureaucracy," he did not contest the party's supreme authority and the Central Committee's right to revoke VTsIK resolutions. The party leadership was also criticized for acting in a dictatorial manner, such as making decisions over the telephone. Kamenev defended this practice, pointing to the lack of time for doing it the "parliamentary way" (Rossiiskaia kommunisticheskaia partiia 1934, 45–7, 56–7, 67–8, 77, 82, 149).

Some of the intraparty debates were alluded to during the Eighth All-Russian Congress of Soviets (December 22–29, 1920). Zinov'ev reasserted the importance of fighting bureaucratism but cautioned against excesses. He noted that "Belarusian comrades" had suggested transforming the VTsIK into a permanent parliament of 500 members, but he affirmed that the party would reject this proposal (VIII Vserossiiskii s"ezd Sovetov 1921, 219). Overall, however, there was hardly any disagreement at the Congress. In fact, Kamenev emphasized its role in fostering countrywide unity, once again highlighting the superiority of Soviet institutions compared to their "bourgeois" counterparts.

> We have come from different parts of the vast territory of our Soviet Russia, which embraces up to 150 million people of different regions, different languages, different histories. And here, at this assembly, the representatives of these 150 million who have just freed themselves from the yoke of capitalism attest to the greatest unity on all major issues. Not a single parliament in the world, of course, could present this picture of unity, for there, in any representative assembly of the bourgeois world, a struggle of interests is in full swing. But we do not have this struggle, because we all – all these 150 million of the toiling population, [including] the Russians, Ukrainians,

> Chuvashs, Kalmyks, Azerbaijanis, and all other nations that have representation here – we all have the same interest, and this interest is the victory of labor, the victory over all the hostile forces of capitalism. We started this struggle, we have waged it for three years with weapons in our hands, and now we will see this struggle through to the end, to the complete victory of the toiling masses throughout the world. (*Applause*).
>
> (VIII Vserossiiskii s"ezd Sovetov 1921, 261–2)

Kalinin reaffirmed the integrative function of the Congress, pointing to the participation of non-party peasant deputies in the meeting of the Communist faction (VIII Vserossiiskii s"ezd Sovetov 1921, 262).

The Eighth Congress extended the formal rights of the VTsIK Presidium granting it the right to repeal the Sovnarkom's decrees and issue decrees on behalf of the VTsIK, with the obligation to report to the latter. The VTsIK was extended to 300 members (Vyshinskii 1940, 91–2). Opening the Eighth VTsIK on December 31, Kalinin emphasized the body's significance. Among its functions, he listed its connectivity to the population: VTsIK members traveled through Soviet Russia and received petitioners (Vserossiiskii Tsentral'nyi ispolnitel'nyi komitet 1922, 15).

> It should be noted, comrades, that the reception of visitors in the supreme legislative body of the Republic is extremely peculiar. People come here with various questions, for example, about the division [of belongings] in a peasant family, when a father and his son have a dispute over a sheep during the division. And so they come here, to the VTsIK Presidium with this sheep, bypassing all [other] bodies. And at the same time, comrades, here legislative acts are decided [upon], which are published for all the citizens of the republic to implement.
>
> (Vserossiiskii Tsentral'nyi ispolnitel'nyi komitet 1922, 15)

Kalinin also noted that members of the Presidium also controlled people's commissariats and participated in rallies. This range of activities made Soviet bodies different from European parliaments, and they represented a new era in public administration. Kalinin called the VTsIK a primitive body that had news tasks, with its interaction with citizens developing through practice. Acknowledging that the Soviet government was week locally, he praised the direct contact between the supreme body and peasants, which changed their psychology and increased the VTsIK's political influence among the masses (Vserossiiskii Tsentral'nyi ispolnitel'nyi komitet 1922, 15–17). Kalinin's personal approachability, despite his status as the highest Soviet official, contributed to his image as the All-Russian Elder (*starosta*) (Fitzpatrick 2017, 29).

The Ninth VTsIK returned to the issue of soviets being in crisis. In February 1921, it once again noted that in the context of the Civil War, the work was concentrated in committees and demanded that, with the fighting ending, broad popular masses had to be better involved, for which soviets were to be reelected on time (Borisov et al. 2010, 81). A major challenged to the Bolshevik regime came the

next month during the Kronstadt Rebellion. Sailors and soldiers demanded that the single-party dictatorship be dismantled and that freely elected soviets become the true government. The rebellion was suppressed by the Red Army, but together with the Tambov Rebellion of August 1920–June 1921 and other peasant uprisings, it contributed to the introduction of the NEP at the Tenth Congress of the RCP(b) (March 8–16, 1921) (Smith 2017, 254–8, 263).

Within the party, there were also suggestions for political reforms. The participants of the so-called Trade-Union Debate of 1920–1921 proposed making soviets subordinate to trade unions, as the former, uniting all toilers, had ceased to be class organizations of the proletariat (Rossiiskaia kommunisticheskaia partiia 1933, 221–2, 481, 794–5). Polemicizing with the Group of Democratic Centralism and the Workers' Opposition at the Tenth Party Congress, Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin opposed extending workers' democracy to soviets and defended the limitation of peasant representation. The congress resolved that the party was to work in the countryside through the "non-party masses," controlling their conferences and agitating during elections (Rossiiskaia kommunisticheskaia partiia 1933, 221–2, 481). Lenin's group defeated oppositional factions at the congress, securing a loyal majority in the new Central Committee, and got a resolution, banning factions within the party, adopted. In the fall of 1921, a large-scale purge of the party followed (Fitzpatrick 2001, 101).

The debates within the party nevertheless continued (Smith 2017, 212). Gavriil Il'ich Miasnikov of the Workers' Opposition suggested creating the Peasants' Union and democratic reforms to the Central Committee in 1921. Lenin agreed on the need for "civic peace" but rejected press freedom. Furthermore, the Organizational Bureau barred Miasnikov from promoting his ideas, and in 1922, he was expelled from the party (Galili, Nenarokov, and Pavlov 1999, 538). Ilarion Mgeladze[19] of the Cheka proposed legalizing some of the socialist groups in April 1921 to more efficiently fight them and counter the slogan of "party dictatorship," thus preventing a new rebellion (Borisov et al. 2010, 434–5). Sapronov advocated for reforming the Soviet system in his letter to Lenin. In his view, peasants were becoming stronger due to the NEP and would soon defend their political rights, attempting to take control of soviets or even demanding a constituent assembly. According to Sapronov, keeping the state apparatus under Bolshevik control required loyal non-party soviet official and a semblance of political concessions.[20]

> These concessions can be expressed in a game (if you like) of parliamentarism, in which the petty bourgeoisie should be admitted, not, of course, in the person of the Mensheviks and SRs (that would be a good rostrum for them), but a dozen or two, or maybe even three dozen (out of three hundred) bearded men [independent peasants] we could put in the VTsIK. This would be the representation of the petty bourgeoisie, the village. And for practical matters, if only for developing the issues of trade in the countryside, agriculture, and so on, it would be more useful than our c[omrades'] articles on corn and other things.[21]

Sapronov warned of the risks, but a governing collegium, established by the Central Committee in the VTsIK, would mitigate them. He also suggested fewer VTsIK sessions. Independent peasants, he noted, could join commissions on agriculture, local budget, and cooperation.[22]

The plan was not implemented, but some reforms were introduced at the Ninth Congress of Soviets (December 23–28, 1921). The frequency of all congresses was changed to once a year. VTsIK sessions were set to occur thrice a year. When presenting the reform, Sapronov argued that frequent elections were time-consuming and made executive committees inefficient. Holding frequent VTsIK sessions was impractical due to long distances. Instead, sessions were extended and standing commissions were creating for drafting legislature. Additionally, due to the enlargement of the RSFSR, the VTsIK was expanded to 386 members (IX Vserossiiskii s"ezd Sovetov 1922, 6:47–8, 50, 52).

Discussing the VTsIK at the Eleventh Congress of the RCP(b) (March 27–April 2, 1922), Lenin urged to make it more efficient through regular and longer sessions, divided into sections and subcommissions, and proper deliberation of drafts with input from local officials. Osinskii criticized the excessive competence of the Politburo, which discussed even minor issues. He linked this to an inadequate government system, tracing the Sovnarkom's roots as a legislative body to the Provisional Government that did not have a "parliament." He argued that officials could not impartially address issues and suggested making the VTsIK the only legislative body, with the Sovnarkom becoming an executive, an accountable "cabinet." The congress did not support the separation of powers, but its resolution addressed some of Osinskii's concerns. The VTsIK, uniting local soviets, was to engage more actively and systematically in establishing the foundations for "state and economic construction" as well as overseeing individual people's commissariats and the Sovnarkom. For this, its sessions were to be extended (Rossiiskaia kommunisticheskaia partiia 1936, 47, 83, 92–3, 553–4).

Adjustments to the Soviet system were also made due to the diversity of the postimperial space. At the Tenth Party Congress, Stalin advocated creating soviets of toilers (rather than workers' and peasants' deputies) in "backward" peripheries that had not passed through the capitalist stage, which was adopted (Rossiiskaia kommunisticheskaia partiia 1933, 496, 580). While Stalin opposed the creation of a second chamber, such a body was formed within the People's Commissariat of Nationalities. On May 19, 1920, the VTsIK established the Council of Nationalities, comprising representatives of all nationalities, as the primary body of the People's Commissariat. On May 26, 1921, it was formalized as a consultative body, limited to representatives of institutionalized nationalities. On July 27, 1922, it was transformed into the Large Collegium, including representatives of autonomous republics and regions, along with officials from the People's Commissariat. The Large Collegium was to convene at least once a year and formed a standing Presidium and an executive body, the Small Collegium. The Large Collegium discussed and resolved "all general issues of principal importance pertaining to nationalities," including matters of budget and taxation (Vyshinskii 1940, 82, 107, 135).

Soviet leaders noted the development of the VTsIK into a more regular legislative institution. Closing the Ninth VTsIK's third session in May 1922, Kalinin noted its distinction from previous ones due to its "practical legislative character." While earlier sessions predominantly issued general resolutions and directives to the government, the third session actively developed several important laws. Kalinin also listed instilling "legality into the consciousness of the masses" among the VTsIK's objectives.[23]

Despite the reforms, the Politburo continued to make all major decisions and curate Soviet assemblies, which did not properly deliberate on any important matters.[24] There was occasional criticism of individual officials or agencies, particularly within the VTsIK, but it did not result in any significant decisions. Mikhail Aleksandrovich Larin proposed prosecuting the collegium of the People's Commissariat of Provisions for not following a VTsIK resolution in October 1921, but the matter was merely transferred to the Presidium. Many issues were not discussed in the VTsIK plenaries and at the Congresses, as they had been already resolved in the assemblies' Communist factions (Vserossiiskii Tsentral'nyi ispolnitel'nyi komitet 1922, 353, 362–4; X Vserossiiskii s"ezd Sovetov 1923, 199–200). When criticism and disagreements went too far, the Politburo removed specific segments from verbatim reports.[25] Communists also risked reprimand for their speeches in the assemblies.[26]

Even such a crucial issue as the formation of the USSR was not subject to debate within the Soviet assemblies. Stalin presented the unification of Socialist Soviet Republics (SSR) at the Tenth All-Russian Congress of Soviets (December 23–27, 1922) as inevitable and proposed entrusting the RSFSR delegation, comprising Kalinin, Trotskii, Stalin, Kamenev, Sapronov, and other Bolsheviks, with shaping the union's legislative and executive bodies, which was adopted unanimously after celebratory speeches by representatives from other republics (X Vserossiiskii s"ezd Sovetov 1923, 185, 188, 199).

Civil War alternatives

The Soviet government faced challenges throughout the former Russian Empire during the Civil War. While the Bolsheviks and their allies established regional Soviet authorities and, in many cases, republics, their opponents formed alternative regimes based on nationality, region, religion (in the case of the Volga Muslims), social estate (in the case of Cossack governments), or a combination of several categories.

The dissolution of the All-Russian Constituent Assembly and the formation of Soviet Russia became a major trigger for declarations of independence, even though some organizations still anticipated the establishment of a non-Bolshevik federative Russia. The predominantly socialist Ukrainian Central Rada declared the independence of the Ukrainian People's Republic on January 9, 1918. The republic had conceived both as a national state of the Ukrainians and as a regional postimperial polity, as the Rada adopted a law on national personal (non-territorial) autonomy. Later the same month, the Ukrainian Red Army took Kyiv, extending

the sphere of the competing Ukrainian People's Republic of Soviets, which had been proclaimed in Kharkiv in December 1917. The Soviet Republic declared independence in March 1918 but was soon liquidated due to German advances. The Central Rada reestablished itself as a government in Kyiv, although its relations with the German command proved contentious (Liber 1987, 28; Smele 2016, 54–5, 61, 267).

The Constitution of the Ukrainian People's Republic, adopted by the Central Rada on April 29, 1918, stated that sovereignty belonged to all citizens and was exercised through the universally elected People's Assembly, called the "supreme body of power" and granted supreme legislative power. The Council of People's Ministers and the General Court were granted supreme executive and judicial power, respectively. The cabinet, accountable to the People's Assembly, was formed by the assembly's Chairman in agreement with its Council of Elders. The Constitution affirmed non-territorial autonomy for non-Ukrainian nationalities (Pryliuk and Ianevs'kyi 1992). It never entered into force due to the dissolution of the Central Rada by the new dictatorial regime of Pavlo Petrovych Skoropads'kyi[27] on the same day (Smele 2016, 61). The Constitutional Democrat (KD) Mykola Prokopovych Vasylenko,[28] who headed the cabinet under Skoropads'kyi, noted, however, that convening the "State Sejm (parliament)," which would then adopt fundamental laws, was on the agenda.[29]

Parliamentary and quasi-parliamentary bodies, defined through nationality operated in other parts of the former empire. It was these bodies or their nominated derivatives that, in most cases, proclaimed new independent states. The Council (*Taryba*) of Lithuania, formed at the Vilnius Conference of delegates in September 1917, proclaimed the independence of Lithuania on February 16, 1918. Germany recognized it on condition of a "perpetual" alliance between the two states. After a brief attempt to establish a monarchy in July 1918, the Council of Lithuania returned to a republican constitution in November 1918. The Estonian Salvation Committee, formed by the Estonian Provincial Assembly (*Maapäev*), declared independence on February 24, 1918, the day before German troops entered Tallinn. The Belarusian People's Republic, formed on March 9, 1918, was declared independent by its Rada on March 25. The People's Council (*Tautas padome*) of Latvia declared the country's independence on November 18, 1918 (Hiden and Salmon 1994, 28–9, 31–2; White 1994, 1357; Smele 2016, 57–8, 93, 157–8).

While in most cases, the projects of independent statehood appealed to a national category, in Transcaucasia, an attempt was made to preserve the integrity of the postimperial region through a quasi-parliamentary body. The Transcaucasian Commissariat, which was established in Tiflis by moderate socialist parties in response to the Bolshevik-led coup in November 1917, convened the Transcaucasian Sejm on February 23, 1918. It comprised the Transcaucasian members of the All-Russian Constituent Assembly and nominees from political parties. The Georgian Menshevik Nik'oloz Chkheidze, the former VTsIK Chairman, chaired the assembly. The Georgian Mensheviks, who formed their own party in 1918, the Azeri Müsavat Party, and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutyun) had

the largest factions. Opening the Sejm, Chkheidze stressed the significance of forming a parliamentary institution as a legacy of the Russian Revolution (Zakavkazskii sejm 1918, 1:1).

Although its members still emphasized the importance of Russia as a shared space, the Sejm focused on the region, such as the tensions and violence between the Muslims (Azeris) and the Armenians and the nationality question. The Dashnak Yovhanne's Qajaznowni,[30] a member of the All-Russian Constituent Assembly, argued that "internal peace" and prosperity in the region depended on its "correct" division into national cantons and their unification into the Transcaucasian Federation (Zakavkazskii seim 1918, 3:17, 4:7). On April 22, the Sejm proclaimed Transcaucasia an independent democratic federative republic, following the demands of the Ottoman Empire. The latter's invasion, however, resulted in a collapse of the federation, and the Sejm dissolved itself on May 26. The Democratic Republic of Georgia, the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, and the Republic of Armenia were proclaimed instead of Transcaucasia. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the fall of 1918, the three republics reasserted their independence (Smele 2016, 63–5).

By the end of 1918, Finland, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine, Belarus, Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan had all proclaimed independence. In several new states, constituent assemblies were convened. However, by the end of 1921, most of Ukraine, Belarus, Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan were brought under Soviet control (Brüggemann 2003; Matsaberidze 2014; Eidintas 2015; Minnik 2015).

The organization of the White Movement involved particularistic quasi-parliamentary assemblies. The Siberian Regional Duma, a nominated assembly, was supposed to convene in Tomsk in January 1918, but the Tomsk Soviet hampered a proper session, arresting some of its members. In response, the delegates who escaped arrest formed the Provisional Siberian Government, dominated by the SRs. Following the Allied Intervention (1918–1922), a new Provisional Siberian Government under the non-socialist Petr Vasil'evich Vologodskii was established in Omsk in June 1918, and in August the Duma reconvened in Tomsk. As the slogan in the Duma's meeting hall read, the ultimate goal of the Siberian polity was to facilitate Russia's reunification: "Through autonomous Siberia to the revival of free Russia" (Figure 4.5). In the fall, however, the Omsk government dissolved and abolished the Duma (Sablin 2018, 103, 110, 112).

There were several attempts to reestablish the All-Russian Constituent Assembly. Its members, mainly SRs, convened for conferences and formed committees, with the Committee of Members of the Constituent Assembly (Komuch) being the most prominent one. The Komuch established a government in Samara in the summer of 1918. In September, it signed a treaty with the Government of Bashkiria, agreeing to fight together for Russian Federative Democratic Republic and the Constituent Assembly.[31] Later the same month, the Komuch, the Provisional Siberian Government, and several other anti-Bolshevik governments formed the Provisional All-Russian Government (Directory) in Ufa. The Directory was entrusted with convening the Constituent Assembly. After the Directory fell to a coup that brought



Figure 4.5 Meeting of the Siberian Regional Duma. Tomsk University Library, Tomsk, [August 15], 1918. I. A. Iakushev is seated at the center. A'li'han Nurmuhamed-uly Bo'kei'han is seated to the right of him. G. N. Potanin is seated on a large chair to the left of the podium. P. V. Vologodskii is seated in the box on the left in the front row, second from the podium. GTsMSIR, 5944/7.

Aleksandr Vasil'evich Kolchak, its War and Navy Minister, to power in November 1918, the Constituent Assembly persisted as a slogan. This slogan, however, was not universally supported. For instance, the Kharkiv Conference of the KDs in November 1919 opposed its immediate reconvening and instead supported dictatorship for the period of the country's unification (Kanishcheva and Shelokhaev 2000, 3, Part 2:145). Some KDs sided with right-wing and conservative politicians in supporting monarchy for future Russia (Rendle 2009, 228–9).

Although the most prominent White governments were autocratic, they included quasi-parliamentary consultative institutions, such as the Special Conference under Anton Ivanovich Denikin's regime or the State Economic Conference under the Kolchak regime. The legal scholar Georgii Konstantinovich Gins chaired the State Economic Conference. This was a corporatist body, divided into trade and industrial, cooperative, Cossack, academic, and *zemstvo* and municipal groups rather than parties. Its members proposed to replace it with "a body of people's representation," a consultative "State Conference." Kolchak's government agreed to convening such a body, named the State Zemstvo Conference, which was to precede the convocation of the National Constituent Assembly (Krol' 1921, 179–80, 182).

Some anti-Bolsheviks revived the idea of *zemskii sobor* in its democratic interpretation. In July 1919, the SR Ivan Aleksandrovich Iakushev, the former Chairman of the Siberian Regional Duma who opposed Kolchak, advocated for a *zemskii sobor* as a parliamentary body. Later that year, SR *zemstvo* activists in Irkutsk declined participation in the State Zemstvo Conference and instead called for a legislative *zemskii sobor* and a democratic "buffer" state in Siberia. The Siberian Regionalist Viktor Nikolaevich Pepeliaev, who became Kolchak's Prime Minister in November, also called for the immediate convocation of a *zemskii sobor*. The same month, Iakushev took part in organizing an uprising in Vladivostok, intended to conclude with the convocation of a *zemskii sobor*, but it was suppressed by Kolchak's subordinates. In the monarchist sense, the idea of *zemskii sobor* was evoked by anti-Bolshevik politicians in Manchuria and the Russian Far East in 1921–1922, with the mythology of the Time of Troubles (1598–1613) playing a pivotal role. Some participants of the nominated Priamur Zemskii Sobor, held in Vladivostok on July 23–August 10, 1922, did not aim at reestablishing monarchy, but its conservative part, aspiring to find a new Romanov Tsar, predominated. No candidate for the throne was, however, provided by the Romanovs (Sablin and Kukushkin 2021, 117–19, 129).

Soviet regimes that emerged across the former empire in 1918 were also diverse. Soviet republics took national, regional (such as the Amur Toilers' Socialist Republic or the Donetsk–Krivoy Rog Soviet Republic), and local (such as Odessa) shapes. Eventually, nationality prevailed as the organizing principle. Individual governments were not necessarily subordinate to the Bolshevik center, while anarchists and SR-Maximalists played an important role in some soviets.[32] The formal relations between Bolshevik-controlled governments and Soviet Russia were also unclear. Stučka, for instance, saw the Soviet polity that existed in part of Latvia from late 1917 to February 1918 as an autonomy within Russia (Swain 1999, 669–70).

The policy of creating independent Soviet states on the territories captured by the Red Army aimed to counter accusations of Soviet occupation and the White slogan of Russia "one and indivisible." Stalin also justified the need to form an independent SSR in Belarus with the objective of expanding the socialist revolution globally. In this context, the second Soviet government in part of Latvia, which existed between late 1918 and early 1920, was recognized as independent. Led by Stučka (Figure 4.6), it operated with Soviet Russia's backing, enacted Soviet Russian decrees, and sent representatives to the All-Russian Congresses of Soviets. The Communist Party of Latvia submitted to the Bolshevik leadership.[33]

Soviet republics had similar systems of government. The Constitution of the Ukrainian SSR, adopted in March 1919, for instance, institutionalized the All-Ukrainian Congress of Soviets of Workers', Peasants' (Villagers'), and Red Army Deputies, the All-Ukrainian TsIK, and the Sovnarkom as the central government. Although the disenfranchised groups corresponded to those in the RSFSR Constitution, the mechanism of electing the Congress was not stipulated and left for the TsIK to decide. The latter, however, did not have the right to amend the Constitution, unlike the VTsIK. The Constitution institutionalized dependence on the



Figure 4.6 Pēteris Stučka (in the center), Ia. M. Sverdlov (second from left), and others at the Constituent Congress of Soviets of Latvia. Riga, January 1919. RGAKFD, V-1333.

RSFSR, including a vow that Ukraine would join the united international SSR in the future and a declaration of solidarity with the existing Soviet republics (Ukrainskaia sotsialisticheskaia sovetskaia respublika 1919, 3, 5–7, 11).

In May 1919, during the Polish–Soviet War (1919–1921), the Politburo resolved to create a military and economic union of the RSFSR and Soviet Ukraine. The planned union was asymmetric: the command and several government bodies, but RSFSR commissars became union commissars, while Ukrainian commissars became their representatives. On June 1, the Politburo resolved to create such a union of the SSRs of Russia, Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania, and Belarus. Their communist parties and governments were subordinate to the Central Committee of the RCP(b). There was no strict delimitation between the republics. Several territories of Ukraine, for instance, were "temporally" transferred to Soviet Russian administration. The RSFSR and Ukraine operated on a shared budget.[34]

In some contexts, the Politburo backed the establishment of regional rather than nationality-based Soviet republics, such as a federation of Transcaucasian republics.[35] The Khorezm People's Soviet Republic and the Bukharan People's Soviet Republic, which were formed in Central Asia in 1920, were not based on ethno-national categories and encompassed territories that were not formally part of the former Russian Empire. The Khanate of Khiva and the Emirate of Bukhara were Russian protectorates until 1917 when they became formally independent.

Following the military successes of the Red Army and pro-Bolshevik forces, they became Soviet dependencies. Even though organized resistance to the Bolsheviks continued in parts of Central Asia beyond 1922, the "supreme bodies" of the two people's soviet republics, which were called *kurultai* ("assembly") and TsIK, subordinated to the Bolshevik leadership in Moscow.[36]

Another regional entity, the Far Eastern Republic, was established in 1920 with the approval of the Politburo as a means of avoiding direct conflict with Japan, part of the Allied Intervention. One of the regional polities that were eventually merged, the Provisional Government of the Far East in Vladivostok, was accompanied by a partially elected parliamentary body, the Provisional People's Assembly of the Far East (a "pre-parliament"). This body included Bolsheviks, moderate socialists, liberals, conservatives, and even monarchists in the summer and fall of 1920, making it unique in the history of the Civil War. The unified Far Eastern Republic was institutionalized through the universally elected Constituent Assembly of the Far East (Chita, February 12–April 27, 1921), and its government included non-Bolsheviks. The Constitution, adopted on April 27, was an important milestone in the legal development of the informal Soviet empire. Unlike the RSFSR Constitution, it proclaimed popular rather than class-based sovereignty and introduced universal elections. However, the state systems had similarities. The People's Assembly had legislative power, but the Administration (a "collective president") had the right to adopt provisional laws between parliamentary sessions. This potent Administration facilitated the control of the Bolshevik Party over the republic (Far Eastern Republic 1921, 7, 10, 28–31; Sablin 2018, 135, 150, 182–5).

By 1922, the Bolshevik leadership established control over the governments of Soviet republics and the Far Eastern Republic. On February 22, 1922, The Protocol of the Azerbaijan SSR, the SSR of Armenia, the SSR of Belarus, the Bukharan People's Soviet Republic, the SSR of Georgia, the Far Eastern Republic, the Ukrainian SSR, and the Khorezm People's Soviet Republic granted the RSFSR full representation rights at the upcoming Genoa Conference. This document explained that although the eight republics were "independent," they had "inseparable brotherly and union ties" with the RSFSR[37] and, in practice, laid the foundation for the USSR. The same year, Stalin suggested annexing Ukraine, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia into the RSFSR, but Lenin criticized the idea. He insisted on a union, although the Far Eastern Republic, Bukhara, and Khorezm were to be left aside. Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia joined the union as the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic, despite concerns of the Georgian Communists. Bukhara and Khorezm formally remained outside of the union state. The Far Eastern Republic was merged with the RSFSR in November 1922 after the Japanese withdrew from the continental part of the Russian Far East.[38]

The basic points of the USSR constitution were adopted by the Central Committee of the RCP(b).[39] The First USSR Congress of Soviets (December 30, 1922) was a one-day assembly comprising delegates from the RSFSR (1,727 people), the Ukrainian SSR (364), the Belarusian SSR (33), and the Transcaucasian Federative Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (91), of whom 1,667 had decisive vote. Bolsheviks were in absolute majority. The Congress adopted the Declaration and

the Treaty on the Formation of the USSR and elected the joint Union TsIK. For the All-Union Congress of Soviets, the Treaty established the same norm of representation as in the RSFSR: 1 deputy per 25,000 voters from urban soviets and 1 deputy per 125,000 inhabitants from provincial congresses. The deputies were elected at provincial congresses. The USSR Congress was to convene once a year. The Union TsIK was to have 371 members and meet thrice a year. Between the TsIK sessions, its Presidium was the supreme body. The Declaration and the Treaty were adopted unanimously without any debates and passed to the USSR TsIK for further development with the participation of the union republics. The Union TsIK was also elected unanimously (I S"ezd sovetov SSSR 1922, 8–9, 12–13, 19, 23).

The experience of Russia's transformations was projected to territories beyond the former empire, but the failure of the Spartacist Uprising in January 1919 dimmed the immediate prospect of turning the German Revolution of 1918 into a socialist one. In 1919, several Soviet regimes emerged on the territory of the former Central Powers in Hungary, Bavaria, and Slovakia, with little to no direct Bolshevik involvement. However, due to their distance from regions under the Red Army's control, Moscow could not provide military aid. The Soviet defeat in the Polish–Soviet War undermined the attempts of establishing Soviet regimes in Europe even further (Smele 2003, 222, 240, 250; Newman 2017, 96, 103–4, 110).

In Asia, the Bolsheviks facilitated the establishment of the Persian SSR (or the Soviet Republic of Gīlān) within the Iranian province of Gīlān in June 1920. However, they abandoned their support of it following an agreement with the Iranian government in February 1921. On the territory of the former Qing Empire, Soviet dependencies did not have the word "Soviet" in their names but rather relied on the example of pre-Bolshevik Ukraine. The People's Republic of Tannu-Tuva was established in 1921 in the region that was a protectorate of the Russian Empire in 1914–1917. Mongolia, where a pro-Soviet government was established in 1921 as well, remained a constitutional monarchy until 1924 when it also became a people's republic. The 1921 Constitution of Tannu-Tuva established dependency on Soviet Russia in foreign relations (Dubrovskii and Serdobov 1957, 295; Smele 2016, 148–9, 222–3, 240–1).

Soviets and parliaments in Bolshevik discourse

The Bolsheviks insisted that soviets were a new, universally applicable, and the only correct institution for the period of transition to socialism. They continued to dismiss parliamentarism, but the word "parliament" was used for Soviet assemblies. Besides, in the Comintern instructions, parliaments were still treated as useful for propaganda.

Following Lenin's 1917 texts and speeches, especially *State and Revolution* (Lenin 1969), other Bolshevik authors insisted that the Soviet system represented "the highest state form in comparison with bourgeois parliamentarism." Steklov argued that for revolutionary Russia, it was the best form of political exitance, aligning with the correlation of social forces and manifesting a genuine people's

government. He asserted that in the era of "exacerbated social contradictions," within the context of the First World War and imperialism as the highest form of bourgeois exploitation, any revolution in a capitalist country would inevitably be a socialist one. Such a revolution would establish bodies of power in the form of soviets or one similar to them. Steklov defined soviets as an intraparty representation of toilers in which the proletarian, revolutionary-communist ideology predominated (Steklov 1919a, 109–11).

Bolsheviks occasionally used the word "parliament" (usually "workers' parliament") for Soviet assemblies.[40] Steklov described the Third Congress of Soviets as "the true constituent assembly of the toiling people" and the "genuine workers' parliament" (Steklov 1919b, 49). Zinov'ev referred to the VTsIK as a "parliament" in the talking points on fighting bureaucratism, which he prepared for the Eighth Congress of Soviets.

> The workers' and peasants' state, for the same reasons (the fiercest civil war, requiring the exertion of absolutely all forces), still could not afford the luxury of having a regularly functioning workers' and peasants' parliament, which the All-Russian Central Executive Committee should now be.[41]

Lenin opposed such use. He circled the word "parliament" in Zinov'ev's text, placed three question marks next to it, and wrote: "the word is wrong."[42]

As for Lenin himself, he reiterated his earlier ideas, adapting them to specific contexts. Discussing the need for further development of the Soviet system in March–April 1918, he cautioned against the "petty-bourgeois tendency" of turning members of soviets into parliamentarians or bureaucrats. His solution remained the same: better integrating soviets into administration, with their departments functioning as commissariats, and ensuring broad participation in them, with every toiler contributing through unpaid administrative work. Lenin reaffirmed that the right to recall deputies and other forms of control from below were essential in fighting bureaucratism, but he nevertheless supported one-person decision-making in certain aspects of the work (Lenin 1938b, 137–9). In August 1918, Lenin once again referred to the soviets as a new, supreme type of democracy, a form of proletarian dictatorship, and a means of governing the state without the bourgeoisie and against it (Lenin 1938c, 146).

In October–November 1918, after the launch of the Red Terror, Lenin stressed that during a revolution there was no opposition but only the enemy in a civil war and cited Plekhanov's 1903 statements on taking the voting rights from capitalists and dispersing any parliament if it became counterrevolutionary (Lenin 1938f, 149, 154). As for Russia's own Civil War, the Conference of Communist Organisations of the Occupied Territories (Moscow, October 19–24, 1918), which brought together communists from Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Finland, and Belarus, adopted a resolution condemning parliamentary tactics. It dismissed "*radas*, *tarybas*, *Landtags*" as "institutions without a shadow of independence, serving only as a means by which the local bourgeoisie, with the help of the occupying powers," could "enslave the proletariat" (White 1994, 1353, 1356–7).

Writing in January 1919, during the institutionalization of the international communist movement, Lenin reaffirmed that the Soviet government was the second step after the Paris Commune in the development of the dictatorship of the proletariat in world history. He reiterated his view of a bourgeois parliament as a mere machine for oppressing millions of toilers by a handful of exploiters as the capitalists retained their property. He nevertheless called socialists to use bourgeois parliaments as a rostrum under the bourgeois order but stressed that limiting one's activism to parliamentarism was a treason of the proletariat (Lenin 1938d, 168).

At the First Congress of the Comintern (Moscow, March 2–6, 1919), Lenin and the Finnish Communist Eino Rahja,[43] a former Red commander in the Finnish Civil War (January–May 1918), presented *The Points on Bourgeois Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, which largely repeated the main ideas of *State and Revolution*. They reaffirmed that the "deepest revolution in human history" could not occur within the bounds of "bourgeois, parliamentary democracy" and required "new forms of democracy" and new institutions. Since the dictatorship of the proletariat was ostensibly relied on the majority, it had to reshape democracy for the benefit of the toiling classes. *The Points* already identified this in the Soviet government in Russia, the *Rätesystem* ("council system") in Germany, Shop Stewards' Committees in Britain, and "similar Soviet institutions in other countries." These institutions provided the toiling classes with unprecedented democratic rights and freedoms, unseen even in the "best" democratic bourgeois republics. The mass organization of formerly oppressed classes – workers and "half-proletarians" (peasants who did not exploit others and at least partially sold their own labor) – provided the foundation for the Soviet government (Kommunisticheskii internatsional 1933a, 185–6).

Based on *The Points* and reports from different countries, the First Comintern Congress declared that in countries without a Soviet government, the main tasks of communist parties were explaining to the broad masses the significance of a new proletarian democracy to replace bourgeois democracy and parliamentarism; organizing and spreading soviets among workers, soldiers, sailors, and poor peasants; and achieving a solid communist majority within the soviets (Kommunisticheskii internatsional 1933a, 188). Other communist parties were, hence, supposed to rely on the Bolshevik experience in 1917 as a universal model. Discussing the new Bolshevik Party Program in March 1919, Bukharin emphasized that the revolutions in Germany and Austria showcased the soviets as the "universal form of proletarian dictatorship." Thus, it was crucial to thoroughly discuss and juxtapose the Soviet-type state to the bourgeois democratic republic in the program (Rossiiskaia kommunisticheskaia partiia 1959, 41). However, the collapse of soviet republics beyond the former Russian Empire's territory, namely, in Bavaria, Hungary, and Slovakia, in 1919 cast doubt on the immediate export of the Soviet government.

Apart from praising the soviets, *The ABC of Communism*, coauthored by Bukharin and Preobrazhenskii in 1919, argued that the notion that a democratic republic could be established by a constituent assembly and governed by a parliament was proven erroneous. The authors then contrasted bourgeois democracy and

the Soviet system, asserting that the former's reliance on the all-national, extra-class will was a lie, given the irreconcilable nature of classes, while the bourgeois minority controlled all economic resources. In contrast, proletarian democracy, embodied by the Soviet government and deemed superior, relied on transferring the means of production to the toilers. They further emphasized the only representatives of the bourgeoisie were elected to parliaments, after which deputies disregarded voters for years, and once again praised the voting limitations and the right to recall deputies in the Soviet system. Calling parliaments "talking shops" without any executive authority, they lauded the non-separation of powers in the Soviet system. Bukharin and Preobrazhenskii defined the VTsIK as a "working collegium" that, similar other Soviet bodies, relied on mass organizations of workers, such as the Communist Party, trade unions, factory committees, and cooperatives. They also reiterated Lenin's notion that soviets were elected not in territorial districts but in the workplace or "production units" (Bukharin and Preobrazhenskii 1920, 130–3, 141–4).

In 1920, the Bolsheviks developed a more nuanced approach to parliaments. In *"Left-Wing" Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, written in April–May, Lenin argued that participating in bourgeois parliaments was useful for explaining to the masses why parliaments needed to be abolished (Lenin 1938a). The Manifesto of the Second Comintern Congress (Petrograd and Moscow, July 19–August 7, 1920) argued that due to their role as "a noisy patriotic cover for the ruling imperialist cliques" during the First World War, parliaments "fell into a state of complete prostration" after the war, with serious issues being resolved outside them. The Comintern, as "the international party of the proletarian uprising and proletarian dictatorship," knew no "universal recipes and incantations" of revolutionary struggle but drew from the experience of the working class globally. Among possible forms of struggle, the Manifesto listed "parliamentary and municipal elections" and the use of "the parliamentary rostrum," alongside professional organization, economic and political strikes, and legal and illegal agitation. The Soviet system was defined as "the class apparatus" tasked with abolishing and replacing parliamentarism through struggle, but this struggle could also occur within and around parliaments (Kommunisticheskii internatsional 1920, 26, 52–3).

In a detailed resolution on parliamentarism, the Second Comintern Congress reaffirmed the crisis of bourgeois parliamentarism. Stressing that reforms for the benefit of the working class could not be achieved through parliament, it urged to move the center of struggle outside it. The working class needed to take parliaments from the ruling classes, "break them, destroy them," and create new bodies of proletarian power in their place. The "revolutionary staff" of the working class, however, required "intelligence" within parliamentary bodies of the bourgeoisie to facilitate their eventual destruction. The resolution defined parliamentarism as "a state system that became the 'democratic' form of domination of the bourgeoisie," which needed the fiction of the "representation of the people." Appearing as the organization of the "extra-class 'people's will,'" in essence, it was an instrument of suppression and oppression wielded by "the ruling capital." Consequently, parliamentarism had no place in a stateless communist society, nor could it serve as a

form of proletarian government during the transition from the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie to the dictatorship of the proletariat (Kommunisticheskii internatsional 1933b, 113–15).

Asserting that the parliamentary rostrum could be used to undermine the bourgeois state and parliament from within, the resolution mentioned the activities of Karl Liebknecht in the German Reichstag, where he voted against military credits, as well as those of the Bulgarian Communists. However, it primarily focused on the Bolshevik experience in the State Duma, the Democratic Conference, the Pre-Parliament, the Constituent Assembly, and municipal dumas. Communists were expected to utilize parliaments for revolutionary propaganda, exposing opponents, and ideological consolidation of the masses. The resolution cautioned against "parliamentary illusions," stressing that all parliamentary activities must be subordinate to the work among the masses outside parliament. The goal of election campaigns was not to maximize the number of seats but to mobilize the masses for a proletarian revolution. This approach was contrasted with the "dirty politicking" of the social democratic parties, which ostensibly aimed to either support or conquer parliaments. Simultaneously, the resolution denounced "antiparliamentarism" as the absolute rejection of participating in the institution, referring to it as "an infant doctrine." Participation in elections and sessions was to be contingent on the situation (Kommunisticheskii internatsional 1933b, 116–17).

In practice, the approach to parliamentarism was flexible. Despite dismissing social democratic parties, the Bolshevik leadership opted for a united workers' front policy in late 1921. Zinov'ev advocated a united revolutionary front with social democrats during the "lull in the labor movement." He supported the German Communists backing the Social Democrats in Thuringia and advised the French Communists to form a united workers' front, though he noted the risk of "opportunism" in the latter case (Zinov'ev 1921, 4794, 4797). Semen Markovich Dimanshtein explained that while an agreement with the leaders of the social democratic workers' movement was on the agenda, the communists would not cease "exposing them." He also pointed out that no unification with the Mensheviks was planned in Soviet Russia because they had no following.[44]

Despite the theoretical developments, Soviet press continued to use the word "parliament" for the VTsIK, although usually juxtaposing it to its "bourgeois" counterparts and underlining the superiority of the Soviet institution. *Gudok*, for instance, lauded the "businesslike manner" of a VTsIK session in August 1922 that did not include a single "parliamentary" speech in the sense of a program statement. Despite some substantial disagreements, there were no "scandalous" speeches, as was common in "bourgeois parliaments."[45] In October, *Izvestiia* noted the absence of factional struggle in the VTsIK. Commenting on its swift legislative work, which did not involve any "tedious" readings of drafts, it underscored the flexibility of Soviet legislative apparatus, suggesting that if errors were made, they could be amended later.[46]

While most propagandist and theoretical works on the Soviet political system placed the soviets at the center, some Bolshevik authors analyzed the practical situation. As early as 1918–1919, Reisner redefined the role of the Bolshevik Party

as a public institution and the *de facto* government in his lectures on the Soviet Constitution at the Red Army General Staff Academy.

> The party becomes the state. It merges directly with the revolutionary people. […] it is as if the Bolshevik Party had ceased to be a party. It is, in fact, no longer a party organization, but a sort of revolutionary commune of the proletariat, a select detachment, a leading group that has emerged from the ranks of the working population of the country. And of course, the meaning and role of such a party in state life are completely different. Looking closely at our state machinery, one cannot fail to see that the most important functions of legislation and supreme administration have been essentially relegated to this organization. And if our soviets and the Soviet system are predominantly an organization of communist self-government, then the supreme legislative power that formerly belonged to parliament has moved into the framework of the party. One should not think that the Party Congress is now deciding matters that concern the party exclusively. On the contrary, if we take a closer look at the work of the party organization and its central body as well as at the work of the All-Russian Party Congresses, we will see that they decide the most important matters of the RSFSR, which concern the whole of Russia and are important for the revolution of the proletariat not only at home but also abroad. And if we do not find an analogy between the soviet and the European parliament, then some similarities can be established between the Party Congresses and the legislative assemblies there.
>
> (Reisner 1920, 170–2)

This prompted Reisner to advocate for the inclusion of the party into the legal constitutional framework of the state as a public institution.

> The party that has become the state and that leads the proletarian class must strive with all its might for [the highest] possible openness, public responsibility, and public control of its actions and deeds. […] I will allow myself, as a scholar of the state, to say that it might still be not an unreasonable step forward toward the improvement of our constitutional order to supplement our fundamental laws with corresponding provisions. Why should we leave our great party in the position of some fact not enshrined in the constitution[?] This is appropriate in a bourgeois state, where in general the written order is one thing, and the actual one is something else. […] Perhaps, from this point of view, it would be necessary to introduce the very provision on the party into the constitution and not only to place the most important provisions of the party program in the fundamental laws, but also to link the party inseparably and definitely with our state machinery, and in particular to ensure its existing dominance in the legislative activity. Then the party would not only in fact, but also by law itself, become an accountable and definite state factor. This would strengthen its responsibility and perhaps give perfection to its broad and powerful organization.
>
> (Reisner 1920, 172–4)

With the party being the *de facto* supreme authority and legislator, Reisner saw a different task for the soviets: to lead the economy and cultural construction in general. The soviets, as "businesslike agencies," were to take over the diverse activities that were previously divided between the state and the "hundreds of thousands of different capitalists," entrepreneurs, and specialists. Reisner concluded that the soviets hence had no time to hold political discussions, which was done by the party. For their optimal performance, their composition had to be selected in such a way that the most important economic interests of an area and the most capable individuals were in the soviets (Reisner 1920, 185–6).

Reception of the Soviet system

Most contemporary commentators viewed the Bolshevik-dominated government critically but did not necessarily reject the system as a whole. While moderate socialists and some liberals continued to support a parliamentary regime, there were also those who opposed parliamentarism, advocating either for monarchy or for peace with the Bolsheviks.

Writing during the Third Congress of Soviets, the Menshevik Boris Isaakovich Gorev, a member of the First VTsIK in 1917, argued that the Bolsheviks attained their majority by relying on violence during soviet elections and by dissolving those soviets where they failed to gain a majority. After disbanding the Constituent Assembly and suppressing workers' rallies in support of it, the Bolsheviks were losing popularity and consequently rushed the convocation of the congress. Gorev expected the congress to be an obedient "voting herd," similar to the Second VTsIK (Galili, Nenarokov, and Pavlov 1999, 118). The SR Peasants' Kogan-Bernshtein highlighted the dissolution of peasant soviets locally and the Third All-Russian Congress of Peasants' Deputies in Petrograd. He also noted that the speeches of the opposition at the Bolshevik-controlled Third Congress of Soviets were met with "mockery and abuse," facilitated by its biased Presidium. Kogan-Bernshtein pointed out that all decisions were adopted with "lightning speed, without unnecessary words, without criticism, and without debate" and called the congress a "sheep parliament" (M. K.-B. 2000).

Moderate socialists did not view the Bolshevik regime as the dictatorship of the proletariat. The Menshevik Solomon Mariusovich Lepskii, for instance, emphasized that the Bolsheviks relied not on the organized force of the working class but on the peasant army, especially its "declassed elements," and hence their regime was a simple military dictatorship, with the soviets in their system serving as a mere cover.[47] Anarchists also criticized the Soviet system. The anarchist-communist Apollon Andreevich Karelin, who participated in Soviet assemblies, continued to denounce parliamentarism but admitted that there was no freedom in the Soviet republic either, deeming the institution of elections incapable of representing the will of society (Karelin 1918, 28–9, 54–5).

The KD *Nash vek* ("Our Age"), which was published in Petrograd instead of *Rech'* for several months in late 1917 and 1918, noted the chaos of the Soviet system. Rejecting the notion of the Soviet constitution as something new,

the newspaper located it in the "distant past," almost the "pre-state period," when the first basics of statehood started to emerge from chaos.[48] After the closure of oppositional newspapers in the RSFSR, public discussions continued on the White-controlled territories and in the rapidly expanding Russian émigré press.

The absolute majority of émigré authors denounced the Bolshevik regime. The KD Boris Emmanuilovich Nol'de, for instance, described the system as "completely primitive" and inconsistent with "modern culture" and as a "Bolshevik oligarchy" (Nol'de 1920, 75–6). The historian Sergei Sergeevich Ol'denburg characterized it as the dictatorship of a party which was highly organized and isolated from the population, emphasizing that it was not a national but rather an occupational government due to its goal of world social revolution. Discussing Soviet elections, Ol'denburg argued that since the summer of 1918, the Bolshevik relied not so much on demagogy but on "electoral geometry" and "primitive pressure," such as leaving a single candidate list. Their results were hence indicative not of the public sentiment but the party apparatus's efficiency (Ol'denburg 1921, 225, 233). *Poslednie novosti*, a leading liberal newspaper, argued that the Bolshevik regime had long become a "dictatorship of Soviet bureaucracy," with central bodies controlled by a handful of select Communists.[49]

Nikolai Sergeevich Timashev, a legal scholar who left Soviet Russia in 1921, argued that the country lacked a true proletarian dictatorship. It had a simple dictatorship, with powerless soviets and no genuine workers' representatives due to the absence of the freedom of assembly and the press as well as massive government propaganda. Proposing oppositional candidates was risky, and peasants faced selective disenfranchisement. Timashev deemed the soviets too large to be efficient; their meetings were spectacles with scripted speeches from officials. Due to the absence of substance, the soviets were degrading. The All-Russian Congresses became less frequent and were treated as rallies by Bolshevik leaders. They did not discuss significant issues and became mere bureaucratic bodies. In the context of no real elections, with candidates pre-appointed, all power belonged to the party (Timashev 1922, 136–7, 140–2).

Dismissing the Soviet system altogether, Vishniak criticized the slogans of the Kronstadt Rebellion and advocated democracy for everyone. He did not see any higher stage of democracy in the soviets, claiming that they emerged as primitive bodies and had always been a surrogate of absent political institutions (Vishniak 1921, 357–9). The SR Aleksandr Isaevich Gukovskii supported the democratic route to socialism, highlighting successes of socialist parties in several European elections and in Georgia (before the Bolshevik takeover). He argued against proletarian dictatorship, seeing it as detrimental to the transition to socialism, as it eroded its material foundation and tarnished the entire system. Gukovskii also rejected a united front with the communists, as the democratically elected socialist parties were responsible for the entirety of their respective countries (A. Severov 1922, 372–3).

Petr Alekseevich Kropotkin, who remained in Soviet Russia but had his criticism of the regime published abroad, denounced the party dictatorship, expecting the attempts to introduce communism through it to fail. He praised the idea of

soviets but argued that, as long as the single-party regime persisted, they would lose all their significance. In particular, Kropotkin claimed that the soviets ceased to be free and valuable advisers when there was no free press and elections. He also criticized the bureaucratization of soviet Russia and cautioned Western "working men" against following its example, stressing that the "immense constructive work that is required from a Social Revolution cannot be accomplished by a central government."[50]

Émigré intellectuals discussed the possible post-Bolshevik system. Sergei Aleksandrovich Korf, a liberal legal scholar, supported the establishment of a federation in Russia in which each part would have the right to its own state system. The federal parliament would be bicameral, with the lower chamber being universally elected and the upper chamber representing parts of the federation. The Head of the federation would govern through a cabinet accountable to the federal parliament. Korf considered parliamentary cabinets desirable in all parts of the federation (Korf 1921, 187–8, 190).

Aleksandr Dmitrievich Bilimovich, an economist, conservative author, and former member of Denikin's Special Conference, expected that post-Bolshevik Russia would reject universal, direct, and equal elections with a secret ballot yet still have a "representation of the people." Considering its forms, he dismissed the soviets as a deceitful form of tyranny, criticized the party-based election to the Constituent Assembly, and deemed the State Duma's election system no longer suitable. Bilimovich envisioned a future Russia with a peasant parliament formed through multistage indirect elections based on *zemstvo* bodies. Direct elections would only take place at the county level to ensure personal familiarity between voters and candidates. The People's Assembly at the top would be formed by provincial *zemstvo* assemblies (Bilimovich 1922, 195–6).

Some émigré authors supported reestablishing monarchy.[51] Timofei Vasil'evich Lokot', an agronomist and deputy of the First Duma, embraced antiparliamentary slogans when defending this position.

> Let power be in the hands of a minority – in fact, under any state system, it can only be in the hands of a minority. Republicanism and parliamentarism, if interpreted as "the power of the majority," are only a form of political deceit and self-deception, and not always with any beneficial consequences for the state and the people as a whole. Monarchy does not hide or obscure the fact that power is in the hands of a minority, it does not deceive the people with the slogan "power of the majority."[52]

Starting with a 1920 book by Nikolai Vasil'evich Ustrialov (1920), a legal scholar as well as former KD politician and close associate of Kolchak, a new intellectual trend developed among some émigré authors. They discussed the merits of the Bolshevik regime and viewed it as a new period in Russian national history. Aleksandr Vladimirovich Bobrishchev-Pushkin, a lawyer and former Octobrist, for instance, argued that the peasants benefited from the Soviet system and should not be seen as potential supporters of parliamentarism and democracy. He also

asserted that the February Revolution relied on outdated slogans, including those of parliamentarism and universal suffrage, citing general disappointment in parliamentarism. Bobrishchev-Pushkin contrasted parliamentarism as centralization with the Soviet system, which he perceived as "decentralization," hoping that the latter would bring freedom to the people. Although Bobrishchev-Pushkin admitted that the Soviet system had shortcomings and needed further development, he claimed that it was more advanced compared to parliamentarism since it eliminated "economic slavery" (Bobrishchev-Pushkin 1922, 95, 102, 116–17). Similarly, Iurii Nikolaevich Potekhin (1922, 173), a former KD politician and supporter of Kolchak, maintained that the Soviet regime was "a form of democracy [*narodovlastie*]" that best fitted the Russian conditions, while its "imperfections and deformities" would be corrected when the intelligentsia joined the people.

The international press monitored the developments in Russia. In-depth analyses were rare, but the foreign press occasionally published critical opinions about the Soviet system. Ethel Snowden, a socialist and feminist activist who visited Soviet Russia in 1920, reportedly stated that there was no socialism or communism there. "The Soviet [government] makes no pretence of being a democratic dictatorship of the proletariat; it means a dictatorship by about six men."[53]

American newspapers covered political developments in White-controlled territories, especially in the context of the Allied Intervention, and the opinions of Russian émigré circles. In 1919, numerous reports focused on the potential reconvening of the Constituent Assembly or the convening of a new National Constituent Assembly by the Kolchak and Denikin governments.[54] *The Cristian Science Monitor* published the opinion of Ariadna Vladimirovna Tyrkova-Vil'iams, who opposed reconvening the old Constituent Assembly. She argued that the election, in which she participated, was conducted under conditions that contradicted the very idea of popular representation.[55]

The Soviet system, however, also had numerous admirers abroad. Arthur Bullard (1919, vii), an American journalist, noted that the discussion of the events in Russia was "passionately bitter," with "many liberal-minded persons" who were "always on the side of democratic progress at home, taking up arms for" the Bolsheviks, although the sympathy was partly explained by "simple misinformation." Foreign newspapers published interviews with Lenin and their summaries, in which he promoted the Soviet system.

> Our further political aims are to promote knowledge regarding our own Soviet Constitution which has the misfortune to please more than 1,000,000,000 inhabitants of the Earth belonging to the colonial subjects and oppressed, rightless nationalities more than do Western European or American constitutions of the bourgeoisie "democratic" states […].[56]

The Bolsheviks also published in English and other languages and actively contributed to the circulation of pro-Soviet information.

Discussions were especially intense among socialists, with the formation of the Soviet state boosting the popularity of the antiparliamentary path to socialism.

Jacques Sadoul (Figure 4.4), a French lawyer and one of the founders of the Comintern, supported the Bolshevik's antiparliamentary stance, approving of the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly. He dismissed bourgeois parliaments as "veritable collective sovereigns, absolute and uncontrollable, led by a handful of men too frequently sold to the powers of industry or finance." While, according to Sadoul, parliaments were "only a caricature of popular representation," he lauded the soviets as institutions "peculiarly suited for the workmen and peasants." He regarded the soviets as a superior form of government and a model for the French "workmen and peasants." Although Sadoul admitted that many peasants and some workers were dissatisfied with the Bolsheviks, he asserted that they all sought to preserve the Soviet system (Sadoul 1918, 6–7). Eden and Cedar Paul (1920, 13, 64), British social activists, not only supported Bolshevik antiparliamentarism but also proposed to replace democracy with "communist ergatocracy," that is, "workers' rule."

Li Dazhao, a Chinese intellectual and revolutionary, who co-founded the Chinese Communist Party in 1921, included the concept of "ergatocracy" into his discussion of democracy in 1922. Citing Lenin's speech at the First Comintern Congress, Li also criticized parliamentarism and bourgeois democracy. He argued that while the system of representation was indispensable for democracy, the parliamentary system was not. Furthermore, he maintained that true democracy could only be realized by discarding this "hypocritical parliamentary system." Li concluded that modern democracy was evolving from bourgeois democracy to proletarian democracy.[57]

> In essence, although proletarian democracy is also a kind of democracy, communist political theorists replaced this term of democracy, which has been so very much abused by the bourgeoisie in the capitalist era, by a new term of their own, the ergatocracy, thus opening a new era. […] In time of revolution, to put down counter-revolution and to strengthen the basis of the new system and new ideal, a period of the dictatorship of the proletariat is necessary. In this period, the power of the proletariat replaces the power of the bourgeoisie; working-class' rule replaces bourgeois oligarchy. In this period, ergatocracy involves "rule," nay, a severe kind of rule; all power is concentrated in the central government, which rules over other classes by strict measures. Under the socialist system, the socialist spirit will be promoted so that it will penetrate the masses until the characteristic feature of bourgeois democracy, namely, the system of private property, is entirely abolished, without any possibility of being revived. Then the state of the dictatorship of the proletariat will pass away, the class system will be eliminated and the content of ergatocracy will undergo a great change. "Rule" will gradually disappear and the management of things will replace the rule over persons. Then, ergatocracy will be the administration of the workers, for the workers, by the workers, then, apart from the children and the invalids everyone will be a worker and there will be no ruling class. This alone is real proletarian democracy.
>
> (Li Dazhao 1965, 62–3)

M. Philips Price, a British journalist, also lauded the Soviet system. He referred to the All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions as "the real labor parliament, where the internal affairs of the different industries are attended to and reconciled to the public interest." Price also repeated the Bolsheviks' claims about the soviets. He emphasized that they were elected "not territorially but industrially," hence representing differentiated economic interests, unlike in a democratic state. He pointed out that they were "continually elected," citing the right to recall deputies (Price 1919, 20–2).

While some authors saw a "tidal wave toward Sovietism" among European and American socialists (Walling 1920, 194), non-communist (including socialist) authors who discussed the Soviet system in detail tended to be critical. Karl Kautsky, a respected Czech-Austrian Marxist, was a prominent critic. He rejected the idea that the Bolshevik dictatorship could lead to socialism. Kautsky insisted that when Marx wrote about the dictatorship of the proletariat, he did not mean a form of government. Kautsky praised the soviets as institutions of class struggle with potential beyond Russia but found them inferior to parliaments as governing bodies. "In the Soviet all hostile criticism is excluded, and the weaknesses of laws do not come so easily to light. The opposition which they arouse amongst the population is not learned in the first instance." He argued that this prompted the Soviet government to modify the enacted norms through "supplements and lax administration." He criticized the "vote by occupation" system for narrowing electors' outlook and the "elastic" provisions on voting limitations, which made it easy to be "labeled a capitalist" and lose the right to vote (Kautsky 1919, 71, 77–8, 81–2, 134–48). Kautsky (1921, 45) held positive views on the Mensheviks in the Georgian Democratic Republic, which he had visited, claiming that their government relied on an overwhelming majority in the Parliament and the population.

Otto Bauer, an influential Austrian Marxist, initially showed understanding of the Bolshevik regime, but he soon grew more critical of it, dismissing it as a model for Central Europe. In 1920, Bauer denounced "War Communism" as "despotic socialism," based on brute force and terror, and therefore doomed to fail. Seeing Russia as unready for socialism, he considered the NEP as proof that the Bolsheviks could not build socialism through dictatorship and terror. Bauer urged the Bolsheviks to return to legality and establish a democratic system in order to strengthen the NEP (Croan 1959, 578–80).

Bertrand Russell, a prominent British philosopher who, at the time, supported socialism, visited Soviet Russia and met Lenin in 1920. Upon his return, he published a critical evaluation of the Soviet system.

> Friends of Russia here think of the dictatorship of the proletariat as merely a new form of representative government, in which only working men and women have votes, and the constituencies are partly occupational, not geographical. They think that "proletariat" means "proletariat," but "dictatorship" does not quite mean "dictatorship." This is the opposite of the truth. When a Russian Communist speaks of dictatorship, he means the word literally, but when he speaks of the proletariat, he means the word in a Pickwickian sense.

> He means the "class-conscious" part of the proletariat, i.e., the Communist Party. He includes people by no means proletarian (such as Lenin and Tchicherin) who have the right opinions, and he excludes such wage-earners as have not the right opinions, whom he classifies as lackeys of the bourgeoisie.
>
> (Russell 1921, 27–8)

Russell anticipated "an interesting experiment in a new form of representative government," seeking to determine if the Soviet system was superior to parliamentarism. However, he concluded that the Soviet system was "moribund," and various methods were used to secure government candidates' victory, including an open ballot to mark dissenters and restricting non-Communist candidates' access to the press and meeting halls. While discussing the Moscow Soviet, he pointed out that the Executive Committee's Presidium held all the power. He observed that the representation system at the Saratov Provincial Congress of Soviets granted urban workers "an enormous preponderance" over peasants (Russell 1921, 72–6). He also criticized the All-Russian Congress of Soviets.

> The All-Russian Soviet [Congress of Soviets], which is constitutionally the supreme body, to which the People's Commissaries are responsible, meets seldom, and has become increasingly formal. Its sole function at present, so far as I could discover, is to ratify, without discussion, previous decisions of the Communist Party on matters (especially concerning foreign policy) upon which the constitution requires its decision.
>
> All real power is in the hands of the Communist Party, who number about 600,000 in a population of about 120 millions. I never came across a Communist by chance: the people whom I met in the streets or in the villages, when I could get into conversation with them, almost invariably said they were of no party.
>
> (Russell 1921, 76)

The discussions about the soviets contributed to debates among Western socialists on reforming parliamentary institutions. Morris Hillquit, a founder and leader of the Socialist Party of America, summarized them. He mentioned the idea of Sidney and Beatrice Webb of establishing "a dual governing body" with "the Social Parliament and the Political Parliament." Analyzing the Soviet government, Hillquit noted that it did not necessarily mean "an exclusively working-class constituency," nor did it imply "a system of occupational representation," as was often asserted. He asserted that the Soviet electoral system was wholly based on geographical units, while voting in factories and trade unions was done for convenience. Hillquit did not see the Soviet system as universally applicable, arguing that the form of the socialist state, whether parliamentary or based on soviets, would depend on country-specific conditions (Hillquit 1921, 77–8, 84–5, 89).

Non-socialist authors were overwhelmingly critical. Frederick Arthur MacKenzie, a Canadian journalist who also visited Soviet Russia, provided a critical account

of Soviet assemblies but noted that despite the party's control, they started to turn into institutions of dissensus.

> Actually, the proceedings of the [All-Russian] Congress [of Soviets] have been rehearsed ahead by the Communist leaders. But it is becoming more and more impossible to keep these gatherings merely passive. The delegates have a way of making their opinions heard, despite all rehearsals, and the Government comes in touch with the people of Outer Russia. […] Up to the spring of 1922 the Executive Committee [VTsIK] was mainly a recording body, registering the wishes of the inner powers. Its proceedings, like those of the All-Russia Congress, had all been rehearsed ahead by the Communists. Now, however, it too begins to show independence, debating issues vigorously, compelling modifications of some matters that had been already decided in secret Committee, and issuing decrees on its own.
>
> (MacKenzie 1923, 75)

MacKenzie shared his impressions from attending the VTsIK session in May 1922, noting the contrast between the Bolshevik leadership and the body of deputies.

> Three hundred delegates were present on the opening night, most of them peasants. There were very few women. Most of them had just arrived from distant homes, and looked shabby and unkempt. […] A day or two later, after they had time to buy in Moscow, their appearance greatly improved. They were intent and orderly, and closely followed every word. On and around the platform were the leaders. The contrast between these and the assembly was remarkable. The leaders looked a group of prosperous professional men, lawyers and statesmen; the delegates in the body of the hall might have been a collection of unskilled and semi-skilled laborers. But before the Committee was over those same delegates did some very good work.
>
> (MacKenzie 1923, 76)

Henry Noel Brailsford, a British journalist, reported on a session of the Vladimir Provincial Congress of Soviets in the fall of 1920. He emphasized that discussing the soviets as representative bodies was pointless since they functioned as organs of the Communist dictatorship. The assembly in Vladimir was predominantly composed of Communists, with a "tiny opposition, very loyal and discreet," labeled as non-party members. He was surprised that the debates in an assembly "virtually nominated" by the party were quite vigorous, with the "hardest hitting" criticism of the administration coming from the Communists. The debates mainly revolved around practical economic matters. Brailsford, however, noted that the "criticism was never pushed to the point of a vote, though it must have given useful indications" to the administration, and the "time allotted to important points of detail was inadequate." Therefore, he argued, the debates had hence little practical importance (Brailsford 1921, 42–5).

Conclusion

The contradiction between the two principles on which Soviet Russia was established in January 1918 contributed to disagreements between the proponents of a federation of soviets, influenced by anarchist ideas, and those advocating a federation of nationalities. Relying on *Realpolitik* and stressing its centralist design, which would make it a sham federation, Stalin and other proponents of the latter prevailed. The RSFSR was indeed established as a highly centralized polity, with uniform government bodies across the entire federation. Although the Constitution allowed local soviets to conduct elections as they were accustomed to, often leading to elections in factories and plants, the overall principle of representation was territorial.

By the time the Constitution was adopted, the RSFSR had turned into a single-party regime. The relative autonomy of regional and local soviets, as well as that of the VTsIK, which was primarily bolstered by the participation of its Chairman Sverdlov in the Bolshevik Central Committee, quickly diminished. The "unwritten" constitution positioned the Central Committee and, once established in 1919, the Politburo at the apex of the Soviet state. In the meantime, the entire system had become highly bureaucratized, with numerous non-constitutional agencies and practices. Despite the VTsIK transforming into a specialized legislative body where disagreements and criticism of other agencies continued to be articulated after the ousting of non-Bolshevik, it did not become a parliament. Dissensus was not reflected in voting, and criticisms of officials were inconsequential.

During the Russian Civil War, particularly in the context of foreign military presence since the spring of 1918, numerous regimes, alternative to the Soviet state, emerged across the former Russian Empire. In many cases, such regimes relied on or included quasi-parliamentary assemblies, predominantly formed through nomination, or their standing bodies. Parliamentarism was commonly the declared principle for organizing the government in the future. In several cases, specifically in Finland, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, republican regimes with parliaments were successfully established and maintained. However, with the consolidation of the White movement, the most influential regimes turned autocratic despite the existence of consultative assemblies.

The establishment, expansion, and consolidation of the Soviet regime, which was openly and practically antiparliamentarian, stimulated conceptual discussions. Bolshevik authors predominantly followed Lenin's stance and line of argumentation, dismissing parliaments as instruments of bourgeois rule and hailing the soviets as superior to them. The Bolshevik discourse on parliaments and Soviet assemblies was, however, self-contradictory. First, "parliament" continued to be used as a metaphor for Soviet assemblies despite Lenin's rejection of this. Second, whereas some Bolsheviks stressed the dynamic character of Soviet legislation, which could be easily changed or adapted, others sought to strengthen the "legality" of the regime.

The Bolsheviks' opponents, many of whom fought them in Russia and later emigrated, predominantly criticized the Soviet regime, dismissing it as a dictatorship of the party or bureaucracy. However, a group of nationalist intellectuals chose to

recognize the Soviet state as a Russian national regime. Among foreign observers, the opinions on Soviet Russia were more diverse. There was a sizable group of radical left authors and politicians who supported the Bolsheviks and sought to emulate their experience. Most of them, however, relied on Bolshevik propaganda and did not discuss the practice of the Soviet regime. In the meantime, many authoritative socialist thinkers dismissed the Bolshevik regime as detrimental to socialism itself. Those commentators who had the opportunity to see the operation of the Soviet system and provided in-depth reports tended to be very critical.

Notes

1 See III Vserossiiskii s"ezd Sovetov (1918, 4). The total number of delegates remains unclear. The number 1,798 was mentioned in Galili, Nenarokov, and Pavlov (1999, 118). Another source mentions a total of 1,647 delegates with a decisive vote and 219 with a consultative vote (Protasov 2014, 439). Sverdlov announced the merger of the two congresses on January 13, 1918, but SR authors specified that the Bolsheviks disbanded the peasant congress, while its "right" SR delegates were instructed not to join the merged assembly. On January 18, the credentials committee mentioned 1,046 registered delegates, including 942 with the right to decisive vote, but this probably pertained to the Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. The same day, Sverdlov spoke of 916 delegates in attendance. It is hence unclear how the delegates of the Congress of Peasants' Deputies participated in the proceedings (III Vserossiiskii s"ezd Sovetov 1918, 48, 82, 87; M. K.-B. 2000, 324–5).
2 RGASPI, f. 19, op. 1, d. 411, l. 1 rev. (Minutes No. 41 of the Sovnarkom, January 6, 1918); (III Vserossiiskii s"ezd Sovetov 1918, 73–81).
3 GARF, f. R-6980, op. 1, d. 4, l. 35, 37, 39–41, 44–7, 49–50 (M. A. Reisner, Report on the Basic Principles of the Constitution of the RFSS Republic, presented in the Commission on Drafting the Constitution of the Soviet Republic on April 12, 1918); RGASPI, f. 558, op. 1, d. 140, l. 7–14 (Verbatim Report No. 1 of the Commission on Drafting the Constitution of the Soviet Republic, April 5, 1918).
4 Russian: Varlaam Aleksandrovich Avanesov (Suren Karpovich Martirosian).
5 GARF, f. R-6980, op. 1, d. 4, l. 10–12, 23–4 (Verbatim Report No. 2 of the Commission on Drafting the Constitution of the Soviet Republic, April 10, 1918); RGASPI, f. 558, op. 1, d. 140, l. 19–25 (Verbatim Report of the Commission on Drafting the Constitution of the Soviet Republic, April 12, 1918).
6 RGASPI, f. 558, op. 1, d. 140, l. 66 (I. V. Stalin, Draft general provisions of the constitution, April 1918).
7 RGASPI, f. 558, op. 1, d. 140, l. 26–34, 36–8, 40–2, 50, 54–5, 57, 62–3 (Verbatim Report of the Commission on Drafting the Constitution of the Soviet Republic, April 19, 1918). There were other drafts as well. GARF, f. R-130, op. 2, d. 86, l. 10 (Outline of the Constitution by Shchepanskii, 1918).
8 GARF, f. R-130, op. 2, d. 89, l. 3 (On the Russian soviets of deputies); (Chistiakov 2019, 27).
9 GARF, f. R-6980, op. 1, d. 12, l. 49 (Verbatim Report of the Commission on Drafting the Constitution of the Soviet Republic, June 19, 1918).
10 Russian: Martyn Ivanovich Latsis, also known as Martin or Martin'sh Ianovich Latsis. His real name was Jānis Sudrabs (Russian: Ian Fridrikhovich Sudrabs).
11 GARF, f. R-6980, op. 1, d. 12, l. 53–4, 55b, 59–62 (Verbatim Report of the Commission on Drafting the Constitution of the Soviet Republic, June 26, 1918).
12 Russian: Petr Ivanovich Stuchka.
13 GARF, f. R-6980, op. 1, d. 12, l. 51 (Verbatim Report of the Commission on Drafting the Constitution of the Soviet Republic, June 26, 1918); (Chistiakov 2019, 28–9).

14 The "right" SRs and the Mensheviks had by then been expelled from the soviet bodies.
15 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 36, l. 3–4 (Politburo Minutes, November 6, 1919).
16 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 118, l. 1 (Politburo Minutes No. 54, October 28, 1920); RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 124, l. 1 (Politburo Minutes No. 65, November 24, 1920); RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 125, l. 2 (Politburo Minutes No. 67, December 4, 1920).
17 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 43, l. 1 (Politburo Minutes, December 4, 1919).
18 RGASPI, f. 94, op. 2, d. 3, l. 9–10, 21 (Verbatim Reports of the Communist Faction of the Seventh Congress of Soviets, December 5–9, 1919).
19 Russian: Illarion Vissarionovich Mgeladze (Vardin).
20 RGASPI, f. 45, op. 1, d. 5, l. 61 (From T. V. Sapronov to V. I. Lenin, December 2, 1921).
21 RGASPI, f. 45, op. 1, d. 5, l. 61 (From T. V. Sapronov to V. I. Lenin, December 2, 1921).
22 RGASPI, f. 45, op. 1, d. 5, l. 61 (From T. V. Sapronov to V. I. Lenin, December 2, 1921).
23 *Gudok* (Moscow), August 26, 1922: 3.
24 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 225, l. 4–5 (Politburo Minutes No. 74, November 3, 1921); RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 244, l. 1 (Politburo Minutes No. 85, December 14, 1921); RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 324, l. 4 (Politburo Minutes No. 38, November 30, 1922).
25 This was done, for instance, after a heated exchange between Larin and Sokol'nikov at the Tenth All-Russian Congress of Soviets. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 327, l. 1 (Politburo Minutes No. 41, December 27, 1922).
26 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 328, l. 4 (Politburo Minutes No. 42, January 4, 1923).
27 Russian: Pavel Petrovich Skoropadskii.
28 Russian: Nikolai Prokof'evich Vasilenko.
29 *Nash vek* (Petrograd), May 9, 1918: 2.
30 Russian: Ovanes Matevosovich Kadzhaznuni (Ter-Ovanesian).
31 GARF, f. R-749, op. 1, d. 46, l. 2 (Provisional military agreement on the organization of Bashkir armed forces between the Komuch and the Plenipotentiary of the Government of Bashkiria, Samara, September 5, 1918).
32 *Zaria* (Samara), March 27, 1918: 1.
33 RGASPI, f. 558, op. 4, d. 602, l. 1–2 (Minutes of the joint emergency meeting of members of the collegium of the Belarusian National Commissariat, representatives of the Central Bureau of the Belarusian Communist Sections, and the Committee of the Moscow Belarusian Section of the RCP(b) on the state structure of Belarus, December 25, 1918); (White 1994, 1350, 1362–3; Minins 2015, 50–1, 53).
34 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 7, l. 1, 3 (Politburo Minutes, May 12, 1919); RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 9, l. 1, 4 (Politburo Minutes, May 28, 1919); RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 10, l. 1–2, 5 (Politburo Minutes, June 1, 1919); RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 35, l. 2 (Politburo Minutes, October 31, 1919); RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 57, l. 2 (Politburo Minutes, January 20, 1920); RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 244, l. 2 (Politburo Minutes No. 85, December 14, 1921).
35 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 237, l. 1–2 (Politburo Minutes No. 80a, November 29, 1921).
36 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 258, l. 4 (Politburo Minutes No. 92a, February 1, 1922).
37 RGASPI, f. 372, op. 1, d. 69, l. 51–2 (Protocol of the Azerbaijan SSR, the SSR of Armenia, the SSR of Belarussia, the Bukharan People's Soviet Republic, the SSR of Georgia, the FER, the Ukrainian SSR, and the Khorezm People's Soviet Republic, February 22, 1922).
38 RGASPI, f. 558, op. 1, d. 4404, l. 1 (I. V. Stalin to S. M. Kirov, October 16, 1922); (Sablin 2018, 235, 257–8).
39 RGASPI, f. 558, op. 1, d. 2466, l. 1 (I. V. Stalin to S. Ordzhonikidze, November 29, 1922).
40 *Izvestiia* (Petrograd), January 11, 1918: 1.
41 RGASPI, f. 2, op. 1, d. 16428, l. 5 (G. E. Zinoviev, Points "On the fight against bureaucratism and on the revival of the methods of worker–peasant democracy in the soviets" for the Eighth All-Russian Congress of Soviets, with notes and remarks by V. I. Lenin, 1920).

42 RGASPI, f. 2, op. 1, d. 16428, l. 5 (G. E. Zinoviev, Points "On the fight against bureaucratism and on the revival of the methods of worker–peasant democracy in the soviets" for the Eighth All-Russian Congress of Soviets, with notes and remarks by V. I. Lenin, 1920).
43 Russian: Eino Abramovich Rakh'ia.
44 *Izvestiia: Organ Tsentral'nogo komiteta Kommunisticheskoi partuu Turkestana i Tsentrl'nogo ispolnitel'nogo komiteta sovetov Turkestanskoi respibliki* (Tashkent), January 11, 1922: 1.
45 *Gudok*, August 26, 1922: 3.
46 *Izvestiia*, October 29, 1922: 2.
47 *Vecherniaia zaria* (Samara), March 27, 1918: 1.
48 *Nash vek*, April 4, 1918: 1.
49 *Poslednie novosti* (Paris), January 17, 1921: 1.
50 This message was written in the context of the visit of the British Labour Delegation to Russia in 1920 (Kropotkin 1920, 90–1).
51 *Novoe vremia* (Belgrade), July 21, 1921: 1.
52 *Novoe vremia* (Belgrade), December 31, 1922: 1.
53 *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), July 5, 1920: 7.
54 *Los Angeles Times*, May 27, 1919: I2; *The New York Times*, January 17, 1919: 3; *The Washington Post*, June 14, 1919: 2.
55 *The Christian Science Monitor* (Boston), July 2, 1919: 7.
56 *The Washington Post*, August 5, 1919: 4.
57 See Li Dazhao (1965, 62). The author is grateful to Egas Moniz Bandeira for his help with tracing the reception of the Bolshevik discourse and Soviet institutions in China.

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5 An alternative to parliament

The USSR Congress of Soviets and the Central Executive Committee, 1923–1934

> The Union TsIK [Central Executive Committee] is undoubtedly a benchmark compared to all the bourgeois-democratic parliaments of the West in terms of representation of individual nationalities, not to mention representation of the broadest masses of the toilers of Russia.[1]

Abel Enukidze,[2] a Georgian Bolshevik and the Secretary of the USSR TsIK, referred in this speech to the new design of the Soviet system during the presentation of the draft constitution of the USSR at the TsIK session on July 6, 1923. The Constitution, approved in its final version on January 31, 1924, retained the non-universally, unequally, and indirectly elected USSR Congress of Soviets, the TsIK (between the Congresses), and the TsIK Presidium (between TsIK sessions) as the supreme bodies of state power. The new Constitution, however, made the TsIK bicameral, with the members of the Union Council (*Soiuznyi sovet*) elected at the Congress of Soviets proportionally from the entire USSR, and the members of the Council of Nationalities (*Sovet natsional'nostei*) nominated by the union and autonomous republics and autonomous regions (Trainin 1940, 43).

Enukidze's speech continued the frequent comparisons to Western institutions, typical of Soviet legal discussions (Burbank 1995, 38–9). Such comparisons became especially relevant in the context of the global crisis of parliamentarism in the 1920s and 1930s, which featured the rise of several authoritarian and dictatorial regimes across the world – in Brazil, China, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Turkey, and elsewhere. Although some of them retained nominal parliamentary institutions, confirming in a way that political modernity required a parliament, they prioritized consensus over dissensus, hampering or quelling public debates and political competition (Gallagher 1990; Ben-Ghiat 2001; Atabaki and Zürcher 2004; Hentschke 2006; Plach 2006; Pinto 2009; Jessen and Richter 2011; Petronis 2015).

The Bolshevik criticism of "bourgeois parliamentarism" and their project of antiparliamentary modernity became part of a broader trend in an intellectual sense as well. The notion of the crisis of parliamentarism, which had been supported by some European authors in the preceding decades, grew popular, with Oswald Spengler endorsing it in his influential *The Decline of the West*. In the second volume, published in 1922, Spengler discussed the end of democracy and

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claimed that parliaments and elections had been devolving into a "play" and a "comedy," respectively. Furthermore, Spengler challenged parliamentary universalism, deeming the application of such ideas as "constitution, parliament, and democracy" outside the West as "ridiculous and meaningless" (Spengler 1920, 1:68, 1922, 2:394, 581–2).

The formation of new union republics and autonomous units, as well as broader political and economic processes, affected the size, composition, and practices of the Congress of Soviets and the TsIK. The assemblies were quite numerous. The Second USSR Congress of Soviets (January 26–February 2, 1924) had 2,124 delegates (including 1,540 with a decisive vote) (II S"ezd sovetov SSSR 1924, 191), while the Sixth USSR Congress of Soviets (March 8–17, 1931) had 2,403 delegates (including 1,570 with a decisive vote).[3] The unicameral First USSR TsIK, elected at the First USSR Congress of Soviets in late 1922, had 371 members (I S"ezd sovetov SSSR 1922, 20), while the Sixth TsIK had 469 members in the Union Council and 137 members in the Council of Nationalities (VI S"ezd sovetov SSSR 1931, 21:17). Constitutional provisions were never strictly followed, which was acknowledged and explained through the prism of the Bolsheviks' dynamic approach to law, based on Leon Petrażycki's "intuitive law" theory (Gerasimov 2018, 178). Enukidze, for instance, stressed that the Bolsheviks did not view laws, "even the fundamental ones," as a "fetish" and changed them in accordance with changing conditions.[4] Furthermore, there was no proper separation between the governments of the USSR and the RSFSR until 1927.[5]

The single-party regime, not legal theory, shaped the Congress of Soviets and the TsIK. The Central Committee and its Politbiuro – the main bodies of the party, known since 1925 as the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) or the VKP(b)[6] – were the *de facto* supreme bodies of state power, and the new Constitution did not change this. The Politburo curated all USSR assemblies, determining their dates and agendas, with Mikhail Ivanovich Kalinin, the Chairman of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee (VTsIK) and one of the USSR TsIK chairmen, and Enukidze being responsible for them in most cases. Political struggle also occurred within the party. With Lenin effectively out of office due to illness in late 1923–1924, most of the Politburo members – Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin, Grigorii Evseevich Zinov'ev, Lev Borisovich Kamenev, Aleksei Ivanovich Rykov, Iosif Vissarionovich Stalin, and Mikhail Pavlovich Tomskii – united against Lev Davidovich Trotskii. Once Trotskii was removed from power, a new Politburo majority emerged in opposition to Zinov'ev and Kamenev, who had briefly joined forces with Trotskii. By the end of 1926, Trotskii, Zinov'ev, and Kamenev – the leaders of the so-called United Opposition – were removed from the Politburo. The new Politburo included Bukharin, Kalinin, Viacheslav Mikhailovich Molotov, Jānis Rudzutaks,[7] Rykov, Stalin, Tomskii, and Kliment Efremovich Voroshilov. Stalin's struggle against the so-called "rightists" (Rykov, Bukharin, and Tomskii), which started in 1928 and ended with his victory in April 1929,[8] consolidated his control of the Politburo (Khlevniuk 2008, 1–7). Kalinin held moderate positions but ultimately ended up on "Stalin's team" rather than with the "rightists" (Khlevniuk 2008, 7; Fitzpatrick 2017, 24, 36, 54, 61, 72).

The grain crisis in 1927–1928, the start of forced collectivization of agriculture and industrialization in 1928–1929, and the mass dekulakization[9] and deportations of peasants in 1930–1933 plunged the USSR into a series of major crises. Mass resistance included rural riots in 1929–1930. There were vocal opponents of Stalin's policies within the party as well. Among them were Sergei Ivanovich Syrtsov, then the Chairman of the RSFSR Sovnarkom and candidate for membership in the Politburo, and Martem'ian Nikitich Riutin, a Central Committee official, but their opposition was suppressed. The removal of Rykov from the Politburo and his position at the helm of the USSR Sovnarkom by the end of 1930 finalized the campaign against the "rightists." During the severe economic crisis of 1931–1933, which included the Great Famine, the Stalinist leadership resorted to large-scale brutal repressions in both urban and rural areas. The opposition to violent industrialization and collectivization intensified within the party. The Union of Marxists–Leninists, inspired and led by Riutin, sharply criticized Stalin's policies in 1932. However, the group was quickly suppressed, marking the end of organized opposition to Stalin within the party. After a brief halt to mass repression in 1934, it resumed in 1935 (Fitzpatrick 1994; Khlevniuk 2008, 8, 21–3, 28, 32, 38, 47–8, 1996, 49; Kuromiya 2008; W. A. Clark 2015, 48–95; Goldman 2022).

In this context of intraparty developments, there was a period of liberalization in the soviet elections in 1924–1927 under the slogan of "reviving the soviets" (Borisov et al. 2010, 148–9). However, due to the multistage system, independent deputies, who were occasionally elected locally, especially in rural areas, had few chances to make it to the USSR Congress of Soviets or the TsIK. Since 1928, the franchise was restricted on several occasions, with only a brief liberalization in 1934. The elections had nevertheless remained an important part of perpetual campaigning by the Bolsheviks (Lih 2020).

Although there was some dissensus and deliberation in the TsIK in the 1920s, especially regarding budget allocation and division of competence, voting in the Soviet assemblies was unanimous most of the time. With the Congresses of Soviets remaining short and becoming rarer, and the TsIK having only a few brief sessions between them, the supreme bodies were incapable of proper deliberation and legislation by design. Divergent opinions were mainly voiced by party functionaries. Furthermore, the Sovnarkom was always accountable to the Politburo. With rank-and-file deputies relegated to the background, demonstrative descriptive representation became an important feature of the Congresses of Soviets and the TsIK. "Non-party members" and women emerged as key categories for the Bolsheviks, while the ethnic diversity of deputies attracted attention abroad. These assemblies served as showcases of the ostensible resolution of social, gender, and ethno-national inequalities of the former empire, providing evidence of the successful "decolonization" on its territory and the ultimate triumph of the imperial revolution (Gerasimov 2017). The Congresses also performed symbolic functions as milestone events, marking economic and political campaigns of the Bolsheviks.

The TsIK and its bodies, however, became an integral part of the Soviet bureaucratic system. As Terry Martin pointed out, the party closely oversaw economic,

security, and military affairs, while the TsIK had some agency in addressing cultural, agricultural, and social welfare matters. In this context, the TsIK and its Council of Nationalities participated in the implementation of the *korenizatsiia* ("indigenization") policy, aimed at integrating non-Russians into the Soviet government (Martin 2001, 22, 87). The TsIK Presidium formally operated as the collective "head of state." In this role, it received complaints and petitions from the population, thereby becoming a vital part of the feedback mechanism for surveying public sentiments.

The Soviet system continued to play an important role in the global parliamentary crisis, both institutionally and discursively, even though the notion of "socialism in one country" upstaged that of the world revolution. From a theoretical standpoint, the USSR Congress of Soviets and the TsIK crowned the novel government system developed by Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, a system that departed from the Western concepts of the separation of powers and the division between state power and local self-government. The principle of combining legislative, executive, and, to a certain extent, judicial functions, and the substitution (*zameshchenie*) of one body by another in terms of competence were features of the Soviet system. Soviet elections abandoned the liberal democratic principle of individual representation in favor of predominately class-based group representation. However, the USSR Congress of Soviets and, especially, the TsIK were occasionally called "workers'," "workers' and peasants'," or "soviet parliament."

The Bolshevik Party remained a major critic of "bourgeois" parliamentarism and became a chronicler of its global crisis in the context of the rise of fascist and other conservative movements, primarily in Europe. The Communist International (Comintern), over which the Bolsheviks had established nearly complete control in the 1920s, served as a major amplifier of their views on parliaments and parliamentarism. Despite the perceived crisis of parliamentarism, the Comintern continued to support the use of parliaments by foreign communist parties as rostrums for reaching and mobilizing broader audiences. Furthermore, until 1928, the Comintern considered the creation of democratic republics with parliaments a viable slogan for the anticolonial struggle. There was, hence, never a complete departure of the Bolsheviks and the Soviet system from parliamentarism in discursive terms.

For the Bolshevik's domestic opponents, including peasant activists, freely elected soviets remained a viable slogan. Some advocated for establishing proper parliamentary institutions. While many commentators outside the USSR, including émigré authors, had no illusions about the dictatorship of, initially, the party and, eventually, Stalin, and hence viewed the USSR Congress of Soviets and the TsIK as ornamental, there was persistent interest and occasional praise for the system of soviets. The soviets, elected according to the principle of group (class) rather than individual representation, were a major reference point for the critics of bourgeois parliamentarism, both those who deemed it not modern enough and those who rejected modernity. The soviets were seen as comparable to the fascist corporatist representative bodies. In particular, the Eurasianists and comparable imperial nationalist authors were inspired by the design, but not the practice,

of the Soviet government. As for the émigrés' own designs, there were still those who supported proper parliamentarism for Russia. Among the new projects, modernist and spiritual takes on authoritarianism predominated.

The Constitution and elections

The USSR Constitution outlined the design and competence of the supreme institutions, the USSR Congress of Soviets and the TsIK, and only included the norm of representation. The elections continued to be regulated by the constitutions of the union republics. The norms were neither clearly formulated nor strictly observed. In practice, the decisions of the Politburo and the Central Committee guided each individual "electoral campaign," while the TsIK instructions served as the legal basis for the elections.

The USSR Constitution was worked out by two commissions, one of the TsIK Presidium and one of the Bolshevik Central Committee, with Kalinin, Stalin, Timofei Vladimirovich Sapronov, and others working on the text.[10] There were debates on the introduction of a new body that would represent all nationalities of the union on the principle of equality. In February 1923, Stalin, then the RSFSR People's Commissar of Nationalities, rejected the proposal to create such a body above the Union TsIK and proposed making the TsIK bicameral instead. In addition to the representatives of union republics and autonomous units, he proposed that the Russians also sent their representatives from central provinces. He also proposed that the two chambers have equal rights in legislation but discuss matters separately, and that a joint Presidium have supreme authority between sessions. If this plan was accepted, the RSFSR People's Commissariat of Nationalities (one had not been established on the USSR level) was to be abolished.[11]

In March 1923, after the Central Committee Plenum supported the bicameral design of the USSR TsIK, Sapronov criticized this decision in a letter to all of its members. He argued that the introduction of the second chamber with direct representation from the autonomous units of the RSFSR threatened the latter's existence, rendering it unnecessary, while the equal representation gave preponderance to the peasants over the proletariat. Sapronov anticipated that the eventual demands for autonomous rights would destroy party discipline. If the second chamber were to be created anyway, he proposed that the majority of deputies should come from the industrial districts, including the RSFSR's non-autonomous regions. He also proposed making the existing USSR TsIK a legislative and executive body (the supreme body), and the second chamber only a legislative one. The Sovnarkom was to be elected by the former.[12]

The Twelfth Congress of the Communist Party (April 17–25, 1923), however, approved the establishment of "a special body for the representation of nationalities" on an equal basis. As argued by Stalin, it would reflect not only the class interests of all proletarian groups but also the peculiar interests of nationalities, which was of significance due to the large non-Russian population in the USSR. "Without this barometer in hand and without people capable of articulating these special needs of individual nationalities, one cannot govern." Stalin argued that

the nationalities question was particularly important considering the international situation, and its correct resolution in Russia would serve as "an example to the East, which represents the heavy reserves of our revolution," thereby strengthening "their confidence, their craving" for the Soviet federation. Domestically, this was to help against Russian chauvinism. The essence of the nationalities question in the USSR, according to Stalin, was "to determine the proper relationship between the proletariat of the former state nation and the peasantry of the former non-state nations." The resolution of the congress stressed the internationalist considerations, reaffirming that the USSR was the first step toward the future "world Soviet republic of labor" (Rossiiskaia kommunisticheskaia partiia 1968, 492–4, 695).

In June 1923, Politburo approved the points on the nationalities policy, as presented by Stalin, but deemed them non-binding for the party's constitutional commission. In the non-Russian peripheries, the Bolsheviks were to cooperate with the broader public, particularly the native intelligentsia, and make concessions to potentially loyal native national elements. As part of this policy, the Politburo approved the creation of the second chamber in the USSR TsIK. The chambers would be called the Union Council and the Council of Nationalities,[13] with the latter nominated by union and autonomous republics (on an equal basis) and autonomous regions and approved by the USSR Congress of Soviets. The two chambers would have equal rights, including legislative initiative. In the case of conflict, a conciliatory commission would be created. If it remained unresolved, then the two chambers would discuss it at a joint session but vote separately. If this also failed, then the matter would be passed to the Congress of Soviets. The single Presidium of the TsIK would be elected by both chambers and include representatives of non-Russian nationalities, at least the largest of them. The TsIK Presidium would be the standing supreme body of the USSR. The chambers were expected to have their own presidiums without legislative functions. The broader nationalities policy included the organization of conferences and clubs for "non-party members."[14] The system had some resemblance to that established by the 1874 Constitution of Switzerland, where the Federal Assembly consisted of the National Council and the Council of States.[15]

This bicameral design of the USSR TsIK made its way into the final draft of the constitution, which was unanimously adopted at the USSR TsIK session on July 6, 1923. The Constitution was enacted immediately but was still to be approved by the Second USSR Congress of Soviets. The formation of the bicameral TsIK was postponed until the Congress. The TsIK nevertheless formed the USSR Sovnarkom under Lenin.[16] On January 31, 1924, the Congress of Soviets considered the Constitution with minor amendments proposed before the Congress, and it was approved unanimously without any debate (II S"ezd sovetov SSSR 1924, 136).

The Constitution consisted of the amended Declaration of the Creation of the USSR and the Union Treaty, which were adopted at the First USSR Congress of Soviets in December 1922. The USSR Congress of Soviets was the "supreme body of power." Between the Congresses, this role belonged to the USSR TsIK, and to TsIK Presidium between TsIK sessions. The Congress of Soviets consisted of

deputies elected at provincial or republican congresses of soviets. The norm of representation was 1 deputy per 25,000 voters for municipal soviets and 1 deputy per 125,000 inhabitants for provincial congresses (where municipal soviets were also represented). The unequal elections favoring the urban population were hence retained. The TsIK convened the Congresses once a year but could postpone them "under extraordinary circumstances" (Trainin 1940, 41–4).

The TsIK, accountable to the Congress of Soviets, consisted of the Union Council and the Council of Nationalities,[17] which had equal rights.[18] The former was elected proportionally to the population and consisted of 414 members. The latter was nominated by the union and autonomous republics (five representatives from each) and autonomous regions (one representative from each). The Autonomous Republics of Ajaria and Abkhazia (in the SSR of Georgia) sent one delegate each. Legislation was the TsIK's primary function, and it was to have three regular sessions a year. The right to legislative initiative belonged to the TsIK, its Presidium, the USSR Sovnarkom, individual people's commissars, and the TsIKs of the union republics. The USSR TsIK formed the USSR Sovnarkom, the "executive and administrative body" of the TsIK. The Sovnarkom could issue decrees and resolutions within the competence granted to it by the TsIK and was accountable to the TsIK and its Presidium. The Supreme Court was also established under the USSR TsIK (Trainin 1940, 43–6).

There was hence no separation of powers. Furthermore, as resolved by the Politburo in November 1923, each law to be issued by the TsIK had to go through the USSR Sovnarkom. The Politburo refused to limit the Sovnarkom to only developing the decrees of the TsIK and to allow representatives of union republics to protest the decisions of the Sovnarkom and the TsIK, as proposed by Mykola Oleksiiovych Skrypnyk,[19] the People's Commissar of Justice and the Prosecutor General of the Ukrainian SSR. The Politburo also resolved that unofficially all people's commissars of the USSR Sovnarkom and their deputies were to be approved by the Organizational Bureau of the Central Committee.[20]

The TsIK Presidium, accountable to the TsIK, was the "supreme legislative, executive, and administrative body" between TsIK sessions. It had 21 members, including the presidiums of the two chambers. The TsIK Presidium could issue decrees and other acts. The TsIK and its Presidium could suspend or repeal the acts of other union and republican bodies (Trainin 1940, 44–5). According to the Statute of the USSR TsIK, adopted on November 12, 1923, the USSR TsIK Presidium also had the authority to grant amnesties and pardons for selected types of crimes. The members of the TsIK had the right of legislative initiative and interpellation. They were paid and had immunity. The chairmen of the TsIK (one from each union republic) were to perform their duties in rotation, as determined by the Presidium itself (Trainin 1940, 28–31).

When presenting the Constitution at the Second USSR Congress of Soviets, Enukidze stressed the uniqueness of the TsIK as a bicameral legislative body in "world history," as its chambers based on class and national representation, respectively, had equal rights. He reaffirmed that it was a model for the

"more developed peoples of Western Europe and America" as well as for the "hundreds of millions of oppressed nationalities in the colonies." The TsIK chambers were also to educate the union and autonomous republics and "all peoples" of the USSR in legislation. Enukidze further explained that the size of the Union Council was supposed to ensure the availability of representatives from specific localities for the sessions, even if some of them were unable to attend (II S"ezd sovetov SSSR 1924, 130–4).

The multistage Soviet elections were costly and lengthy, with some places voting six months ahead of a USSR Congress.[21] The new constitutions of the union republics, adopted in the 1920s, retained unequal and indirect elections with an open ballot while keeping voting rights restricted. The 1925 RSFSR Constitution, for instance, listed the same categories of those disenfranchised by the 1918 Constitution, with only minor amendments to the formulations: those who relied on hired labor for making profits; those who lived off "non-labor" income; private traders; the clergy of all denominations for whom it was an occupation; those connected to the former police and security agencies; members of the Romanov dynasty; those were officially declared mentally ill or insane; and those convicted for "selfish or dishonorable offenses" (Borisov et al. 2010, 103).

Enukidze lamented the lack of clear criteria for electoral qualification in the constitutions of the union republics, citing, for instance, the difference between profit and economic benefit. He argued that disenfranchising all those who hired labor would exclude a large mass of the "toiling peasantry" from the soviets. The rights of the former landowners and "bourgeoisie" as well as the participants of anti-Bolshevik armies and governments, were also unclear. Due to the ambiguous constitutional norms, voting rights were determined by the instructions of the presidiums of the TsIKs of the USSR and the union republics.[22] The interpretation of electoral law, however, remained arbitrary.

In October 1924, as part of the broader campaign of "turning" to the countryside, as formulated by Zinov'ev in July 1924 (McDonald 2011, 3–4), the Central Committee Plenum proclaimed the goal of "reviving the soviets," particularly the rural ones. This was to be achieved by involving non-party peasants in their operation. This, in turn, was intended to create "a broad cadre of active non-party peasants" around the party, allowing it to establish its leadership over the broader peasant masses (Borisov et al. 2010, 148–9). According to the instructions approved by the Politburo in January 1925, regional party organizations were directed to increase the nomination of non-party members, including women, and discuss candidates at meetings of non-party workers and peasants. Imposing votes was discouraged, appeals were to be taken seriously, and "business-like" criticism of soviets' policies by candidates and voters was allowed. Only peasants and Cossacks who had fought the Bolsheviks in the Civil War could be barred from elections. The instructions also aimed to mobilize the "unorganized" urban population, such as craftsmen, artisans, housewives, and the unemployed, who were barely represented in the soviets.[23] Enukidze stressed the importance of attracting national minorities[24] as well as nomadic and seminomadic populations in the "Eastern" national republics and



Figure 5.1 N. A. Valerianov. "Worker and peasant women, everyone to the elections." "Under the red banner, to the ranks with the man! – We bring fear to the bourgeoisie!" Poster. Moscow: Moscow Committee of the Russian Communist Party, 1925. RSL, IZO P2-7/12.

regions to the elections.[25] The campaign was accompanied by visual propaganda, such as a poster (Figure 5.1) targeting women while emphasizing their class belonging.

Speaking at the Third USSR Congress of Soviets (May 13–20, 1925), Kalinin reaffirmed the role of elections in mobilizing the broader population, which had been detached from state due to their work, remoteness from the center, and poor material conditions.

> And the election period is the moment when we are faced with the task of opening the shell of domestic life, pulling the peasant, the peasant woman, the railway worker abandoned at a remote station, out of this shell, and attaching them to the common statehood.

> In the Soviet state that we are building, in the Soviet state that is subject to all sorts of dangers, we cannot allow ourselves the liberty that the worker and peasant should become isolated and not interested in statehood. […] That is why I say: undoubtedly, the election period is the moment when we must attract attention, this moment is the same as Christ's Day [Easter] is for a Christian: he forgets all household chores and communicates with religion. So we should have a holiday too when workers and peasants forget all household chores and devote themselves entirely to the public.
>
> But in order to devote himself entirely to the public, the peasant must feel that this is a day of celebration, that he is creating something, that he is participating in the election process, that he is influencing this or that side of the matter.
>
> (III S"ezd sovetov SSSR 1925, 263)

Kalinin used the terms "proletarian democracy" and "proletarian dictatorship," emphasizing that the latter needed the support of broader toiling masses beyond the proletariat. He referred to the elections as a campaign "for convergence of the working class and the peasantry" and for bringing "gifted" individuals in the work of the soviets. Each electoral campaign aimed to involve new segments of the population into Soviet state-building. Kalinin emphasized, however, that criticism during the elections could only relate to individuals and not the Bolsheviks' program and objectives (III S"ezd sovetov SSSR 1925, 263–6).

Despite the continued restrictive interpretations of electoral law by local bodies (Borisov et al. 2010, 91), the 1925 policy of extending participation in the soviets brought independent activists into them. However, the Politburo also saw some adverse results. In October 1925, it informed all party organizations that increased political activity applied to all social strata, including the *kulaks* (prosperous peasants). The reelections of soviets led to heightened *kulak* influence in certain areas, while party organizations struggled to consolidate the rural poor. The Politburo directed them to recruit new cadre from the masses and use them to increase the party's influence over mass organizations of workers and peasants, such as soviets, cooperatives, and trade unions.[26]

The inclusive policies in the countryside contributed to a new split within the party. The members of the New Opposition, led by Zinov'ev, warned about the *kulak* danger starting in the middle of 1925 (Halfin 2007, 191, 378). In July 1926, the leaders of the United Opposition, including Trotskii, Kamenev, Zinov'ev, and Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaia, denounced the permissive approach to elections, as it increased the representation of the "petty bourgeoisie" in the soviets, weakening that of the proletariat, and as it violated the Soviet Constitution in favor of the "petty bourgeoisie" (Borisov et al. 2010, 232). Viacheslav Alekseevich Karpinskii, a member of *Pravda*'s editorial office, opposed the "liberalism" of local bodies in the elections and rejected the policy of increasing the percentage of non-party members in municipal soviets without considering the "social-class composition of the population" in each locality (Karpinskii 1926, 25).

In January 1927, the Politburo nevertheless reaffirmed the goal of increasing the participation of non-party workers and peasants in the soviets.[27] In February 1927, the VTsIK extended the franchise to lower technical personnel from former police and prison agencies on the condition that they had engaged in productive labor for no less than five years and demonstrated loyalty to the Soviet government (Borisov et al. 2010, 128). Kalinin was a key advocate of broader election participation in both rural and urban areas. Zinov'ev denounced Kalinin's stance on the peasant question as "wrong" and going against Lenin's ideas, while Trotskii warned of dangers to the proletarian dictatorship. Most of the Bolshevik leadership supported Kalinin's position. Consequently, the Central Committee Plenum resolved that the ongoing campaign would be the second "broad and open" one, featuring genuine elections, although the political isolation of *kulaks* was deemed necessary.[28]

At the 1927 elections, the turnout was 50.7 percent of approximately 67.3 million voters.[29] Enukidze stressed that they occurred in the context of a rigid and open class struggle in the countryside. He celebrated the increased turnout and activity of the population, the strength of the middle peasants, and the leadership of the working class. Although he referred to the electoral campaign as "the second broad" one, he praised the implementation of the instructions to increase the number of those disqualified from voting (Tsentral'naia izbiratel'naia komissiia Prezidiuma TsIK SSSR 1928, 3–4). The "nationalization" of soviets across the USSR, that is, the increased participation of non-Russians in them, was considered a success. A Central Committee department reported in September 1927 that the percentage of "nationals" (non-Russians) in elected soviet bodies "in general" corresponded to their shares in the total populations of specific territories. The apparatuses, however, remained predominantly non-native (Gatagova, Kosheleva, and Rogovaia 2005, 1:508).

A significant shift occurred with the poor harvest of 1927 and the new majority supporting Stalin's decision for industrialization and collectivization in 1928. Amidst the grain crisis of 1927–1928 and growing rural dissatisfaction with extraordinary policies, elections were postponed until 1929.[30] In December 1928, the "cleansing" of soviets from "enemy elements" was discussed during the TsIK session (Tsentral'nyi ispolnitel'nyi komitet SSSR 1928b, 1:3). Later that month, the party leadership issued new instructions to all regional and republican party organizations for the upcoming electoral campaign. Stressing its importance given the increased external pressure on the USSR and intensified class struggle due to industrialization and socialist reconstruction of agriculture, including mass collectivization, the Politburo ordered the mobilization of "proletarian and peasant masses" around the party's and government's main tasks. This included expelling "*kulak* agents" from soviets and combatting bureaucratism. The Politburo cautioned against urban and rural "capitalist elements" – NEP-men (businessmen) and *kulaks*, respectively – and organized "counterrevolutionary" groups, including religious ones. While voting limitations were to be observed by party organizations, Kalinin added that they could not be applied to the middle peasant stratum (*seredniaki*).[31]

In January 1929, the TsIK Presidium defined the "alien element" in the soviets as those who were formerly clerics, nobles, landowners, policemen, businessmen, members of the "court-prosecutor" group, highest military officers, highest officials, homeowners, municipal and *zemstvo* heads, members of the "enemy" parties, and all those who were in the past the "enemy" of the working class and its party in class terms, as well as the "decaying or decomposed elements from the ranks of the workers, peasants, and employees."[32] The number of those deprived of voting rights (*lishentsy*) increased from around 3 million people in 1927 to around 3.7 million people in 1929. The turnout, however, increased to 63.2 percent of 72.5 million voters (Tsentral'naia izbiratel'naia komissiia 1929, 14, 36).

The 1929 elections did not produce the intended results. In January and December 1930, the USSR TsIK Presidium adopted two resolutions on new elections, asserting that many soviets had once again been "contaminated with alien elements" and therefore did not emerge as leaders in collectivization. By December 1930, Kalinin had abandoned his conciliatory stance. He emphasized the connections between class enemies at home and foreign imperialists, suggesting the use of the foreign intervention threat during the elections. Rejecting the idea of replacing soviets with collective farm boards, Kalinin argued that the soviets should function as "combat organs" for mobilizing the broad toiling masses around the party's "general line." He also stressed the integrative function of the elections, that is, their role in emphasizing and strengthening the ties between the peoples of the USSR and their common interests and goals. Kalinin asserted that the soviets had to be "Communized," transformed into implementors of the party's "general line." They also needed to be purged of "opportunistic elements," similar to the party, which he expected to involve violations of the Constitution. To better connect the party and the masses, Kalinin suggested that the share of non-party members – "shock workers" (*udarnik*) in the cities and collective farmers in the countryside – in the soviets had to be no less than one-third. Collective farmers had to become the central figures in village soviets. The electoral campaign overall was intended as an auxiliary to the economic campaigns.[33] Indeed, the elections of 1931, which had a turnout of 70.4 percent of voters, resulted in an increased presence of collective farmers and larger shares of party and the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League (Komsomol) members in the soviets (Tsentral'naia izbiratel'naia komissiia 1931, 5, 21; Danilov, Manning, and Viola 2001, 3:891).

In the context of the deep economic crisis, regular soviet elections were delayed.[34] There were no elections in 1932 and 1933, no USSR Congress of Soviets in 1932–1934, and no TsIK sessions in 1932. The TsIK electoral instruction, adopted in 1934, provided a list of the disenfranchised. The constitutions of the union republics barred several categories of rural population engaged in various economic activities, former officers and bureaucrats of the White Armies, and those who had been administratively exiled from elections. (Danilov, Manning, and Viola 2002, 4:931). There was, however, a small extension of the franchise, which aligned with the brief period of liberalization in 1934 (Khlevniuk 1996, 32). On March 17, 1933, the USSR TsIK Presidium resolved that the children of the exiled *kulaks* could be enfranchised if they engaged in "socially useful labor" and worked "honestly." On

May 27, 1934, the USSR TsIK allowed the reinstatement of voting rights for some of the exiled *kulaks* (Borisov et al. 2010, 138–9). The turnout for the 1934 elections was 85 percent of approximately 91 million voters (Tsentral'naia izbiratel'naia komissiia 1935, 8).

Dissensus and deliberation

There was no dissensus at the USSR Congresses at Soviets. In the TsIK, some disagreements initially concerned the relations between the USSR and the union republics, but they were rare and did not result in any major changes in the party's policy. The "criticism and self-criticism" of the officials, which was also voiced in the TsIK, did not affect their careers. The TsIK Presidium and Kalinin personally had the opportunity to make minor decisions independently, but major matters, including all legal acts, had to be approved by the party leadership.

Even after the adoption of the 1924 Constitution, there were issues with the establishment of the USSR TsIK. Kalinin, Vlas Iakovych Chubar,[35] the Chairman of the Sovnarkom of the Ukrainian SSR, and Enukidze claimed in the summer of 1924 that the USSR needed strengthening as one union state. This involved protecting national republics and regions from possible manifestations of "great power chauvinism" and "centralist perversions," as well as safeguarding the interests of the whole union state. In particular, this meant strict adherence to the Constitution, with the most important legislation passing through the Union Council and the Council of Nationalities, as well as the bodies of the union republics participating in the preliminary development of the union's legislation.[36] In June 1925, Kalinin informed Stalin that it was necessary for the Presidium of the Council of Nationalities to start operating. There was a need to address the nationality questions, which were on the agenda of the Presidium of the USSR TsIK, and it was politically important for it to gain popularity, manifesting itself "before the nationals."[37]

In practice, however, little had changed. The sessions of the USSR Congresses of Soviets and the TsIK remained short. Most matters were resolved within the TsIK Presidium and in permanent and *ad hoc* commissions (Kul'besherov 1928). There was no strict schedule for the USSR Congress of Soviets, and when its postponement was discussed at the Central Committee Plenum in the fall of 1924, the participants laughed, which could be interpreted as a sign of the institution's little importance for the Bolshevik leadership.[38] In 1925, there were suggestions to organize the USSR Congresses of Soviets once every two years, which Kamenev opposed, as it would hinder the policy of reviving the soviets.[39] However, no Congress was convened in 1926, and the Politburo ultimately resolved to host the USSR Congresses of Soviets once every two years.[40]

There was little dissensus and practically no deliberation at the USSR Congresses of Soviets. Most decisions were adopted unanimously. The TsIK was approved *en masse* without any debates (III S"ezd sovetov SSSR 1925, 551, 555). The USSR Congresses of Soviets, held in the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow, were considered ornamental events. When defending a proposal for a lower number of



Figure 5.2 N. I. Bukharin (second row, fifth from right), I. V. Stalin (fourth from right), and K. E. Voroshilov (third from right) in a group of delegates of the Fourth All-Union Congress of Soviets. Moscow, April 18–26, 1927. RGAKFD, V-53.

delegates at the upcoming Thirteenth Party Congress in the spring of 1924, Anastas Mikoyan,[41] a regional party official at the time, cautioned against turning it into another congress of soviets: "and who does not know that the Congress of Soviets is nothing but an all-union rally."[42] The hierarchy between party leaders and rank-and-file deputies was very strong, and a common genre of photographs depicted a group of delegates with the leaders in the center (Figure 5.2).

There were, nevertheless, some substantial disagreements in the debates at the TsIK plenary sessions in the 1920s. The debates on the introduction of an all-union court system in October 1924 serve as an illustrative example. Initially, there was a disagreement about whether to discuss the USSR Sovnarkom's project in the two chambers jointly or separately. The vote on the matter in the Council of Nationalities split almost equally. The matter was debated both jointly and within the Council of Nationalities. Nikolai Vasil'evich Krylenko, the RSFSR Deputy People's Commissar of Justice and candidate for membership in the USSR TsIK, advocated for a strict interpretation of the Constitution regarding the division of competence between the Union and the republics, which the draft law violated. Vladimir Pavlovich Antonov-Saratovskii, a member of the USSR Supreme Court and the head of the Sovnarkom commission of legal proposals, opposed such a dogmatic approach to the Constitution. He argued that Soviet legal documents should be interpreted without straying "from the spirit and objectives" for which

they were created (Tsentral'nyi ispolnitel'nyi komitet SSSR 1924, 216, 406, 414–15). Antonov-Saratovskii and other critics of Krylenko's position underscored the flexibility of the Soviet legal system, implying the Bolshevik approach to "intuitive law" (Gerasimov 2018, 178).

When the matter was discussed in the Chamber of Nationalities, Samad aga Agamalioglu,[43] who chaired the TsIK of the Azerbaijan SSR, opposed the idea of a single court system for the USSR due to cultural differences between the republics. The resolution of the issue was delegated to the commission of constitutional matters and a conciliatory commission, which prepared an amended draft law on the foundations of a Union court system. In particular, the draft reaffirmed the continued existence of the people's court systems in the union republics. There was no further discussion, and the law was passed unanimously by both chambers (Tsentral'nyi ispolnitel'nyi komitet SSSR 1924, 466–7, 489, 589, 591, 597).

Occasionally, deputies criticized individual people's commissariats, especially in the context of discussing the state budget. Such debates became part of the "criticism and self-criticism" campaign that Stalin declared after the defeat of the United Opposition in late 1927, allowing criticism from the "masses" and expecting self-criticism from various agencies. Some of the criticism involved the violation of the interests of national republics in the budget sphere. At the same time, shortcomings were often explained by the peculiar conditions and recent history of the Soviet system, with expectations for future improvements (Tsentral'nyi ispolnitel'nyi komitet SSSR 1926, 172–3, 175, 347; 1927, 619, 1928b, 3:36–7, 7:3–4; Kharkhordin 1999, 147–8; Griesse 2008, 615–16).

There were passing mentions of oppositional views, such as concerns that lowering prices would benefit the NEP-men and *kulaks*, but these views were presented as incorrect (Tsentral'nyi ispolnitel'nyi komitet SSSR 1927, 895, 928). Rapid industrialization was a subject of minor disagreements in 1928 (Tsentral'nyi ispolnitel'nyi komitet SSSR 1928b, 6:3, 6). Direct references to challengers of the "general line" were rare. In 1928, Enukidze merely reported that in December 1927, the TsIK Presidium "had to" expel eight members, including Zinov'ev, Kamenev, and Trotskii, from the TsIK, describing it as a "very important, very difficult" step (Tsentral'nyi ispolnitel'nyi komitet SSSR 1928a, 706). In 1929, a deputy from Siberia praised the government for managing to work despite "*Kolchakism*, and the opposition, and Trotskyism, and all kinds of devilry" (V S"ezd sovetov SSSR 1929, 7). Criticism of the party leaders in power – even when factions still existed in the Politburo – was extremely rare but, nevertheless, present until late 1928, despite Stalin receiving standing ovations at least since 1927 (Seibert 1932, 85). For instance, the Ukrainian Panas Ivanovych Butsenko[44] claimed that Stalin demonstrated a "deviation" in his liberal treatment of rural artisans and craftsmen who hired labor (Tsentral'nyi ispolnitel'nyi komitet SSSR 1928a, 521–2). On another occasion, a deputy from the RSFSR criticized Stalin's stance on agriculture and his optimism about collective farms (Tsentral'nyi ispolnitel'nyi komitet SSSR 1928b, 5:13).

The discussions rarely pertained to the core disagreements among the Bolsheviks and never questioned the program of building socialism. Some deputies cautioned against saying "too much in such a high body, a revolutionary parliament,"



Figure 5.3 Participants of the fourth session of the Fourth USSR TsIK. Moscow, December 3–15, 1928. Second row, right to left: S. M. Budennyi, K. E. Voroshilov, M. I. Kalinin, ? , N. K. Krupskaia. RGAKFD, 2-113777.

due to "polemical enthusiasm," and stressed that it was "not an academy, not a discussion club but a business apparatus, a workshop" (Tsentral'nyi ispolnitel'nyi komitet SSSR 1928b, 9:33–4). Furthermore, the discussions usually involved only party and government functionaries, with rank-and-file deputies playing the role of an audience or extras. The gap between the leaders and other TsIK deputies is also reflected in photographs (Figure 5.3).

In the early 1930s, when the economic crisis became especially acute, the reports by officials to the TsIK took the shape of celebratory speeches. Aliaksandr Rygoravich Charviakou,[45] the USSR TsIK chairman from the Belarusian SSR, for instance, celebrated the implementation of the First Five-Year Plan within four years in January 1933,[46] amidst the Great Famine. During the "debates" (*preniia*), speakers usually affirmed whatever was said by party and government functionaries, while criticism pertained to local authorities and conditions.[47] More concentrated attacks on former members of the opposition started in 1931 (Tsentral'nyi ispolnitel'nyi komitet SSSR 1931, 6:24). In his report to the Sixth Congress of Soviets in March 1931, summing up the preceding decade, Molotov celebrated the victory of the "Leninist policy," that is, "the policy of irreconcilable struggle against Trotskyism and the right deviation," which embodied "bourgeois influence" on some parts of the "vanguard of the proletariat" (VI S"ezd sovetov SSSR 1931, 2:23).

Regarding Stalin's personal status, a major change occurred in 1931. Whereas he was barely mentioned at the Fifth Congress of Soviets in May 1929 (V S"ezd sovetov SSSR 1929), at the TsIK session in January 1931, he was celebrated as the leader of the party, occasionally quoted, and presented as a teacher (Tsentral'nyi ispolnitel'nyi komitet SSSR 1931, 3:7, 11, 8:15, 12:21, 13:12). At the Sixth Congress of Soviets in March 1931, he was not only frequently quoted but also presented as the main authority formulating tasks in different spheres (VI S"ezd sovetov SSSR 1931, 1:3). At the TsIK session in January 1933, Stalin's leadership over the party and the working class was already being described as "genial."[48]

The occasional dissensus and even criticism of the people's commissars did not impact the mechanism of decision-making, which remained confined to the party. The Politburo and the Central Committee made all major decisions. In the 1920s, substantial debates and deliberation on the budget and other matters took place at the Central Committee Plenums. It was also "customary" to hold a Party Conference preceding of a USSR Congress of Soviets.[49]

The Congresses of Soviets and TsIK sessions were directed by party commissions, and the lists of speakers were pre-approved. Kalinin and Enukidze, along with the TsIK Presidium as an institution, were responsible for the central Soviet assemblies in most cases, while the commissions for directing the USSR Congresses also included other top-tier leaders.[50] The party commissions prepared resolutions and organized their preliminary publication. They had some autonomy and discussed not only the matters raised by the Central Committee but also those emerging within them. Three further institutions for directing the Congresses were the Council of Elders, which included representatives from republics and regions, the Communist Faction (with a bureau and a "narrow group" within the bureau), and the meeting of non-party delegates. These institutions were also managed by the party commissions, and in most cases, Kalinin was part of their leadership. The TsIK also had a Communist Faction.[51]

The subordination of the TsIK to the party was openly acknowledged. Opening the TsIK session in December 1928, Charviakou stressed that the TsIK worked under the leadership of the party and on the basis of its decisions.

> The basis, the outline for the decisions of the Central Executive Committee is already in the decisions of the All-Union Communist Party. Each party member is obliged to take all measures to prove that the decisions and directives of the November Plenum of the C[entral] C[ommittee] of the VKP(b) are the only correct basis for legislation and the activities of the Soviet government. Every non-party worker and peasant, and, in the first place, the members of the TsIK, are obliged to carefully study the decisions of the Communist Party and accept them as the basis for their work.
>
> (Tsentral'nyi ispolnitel'nyi komitet SSSR 1928b, 1:5)

There were suggestions to make better use of the USSR TsIK. The Central Committee Plenum in January 1925 supported the proposals of Chubar and Rykov, resolving that a "comprehensive discussion" of the budget in both the TsIK budget

commission and the TsIK session was necessary to ensure "closer participation of representatives of the union republics and regions" in its preparation and approval. At the same Plenum, Kalinin proposed making it customary to pass "approximately one law" at each session after a "more solid and comprehensive" discussion.[52] In February 1927, the Central Committee Plenum resolved that the union and union republic assemblies needed further strengthening through the formation of commissions and sections that would include non-party members to facilitate broad discussions.[53]

The TsIK did not become a deliberative legislature. However, as part of the USSR's bureaucratic system, it had some agency in cultural, social, and select economic matters. The Council of Nationalities acted as a lobbyist for non-Russian interests, with its first Chairman Skrypnyk being especially influential. There were conceptual and policy discussions in the Presidium of the Council of Nationalities, focusing, for instance, on the concept of national minority and the introduction of the Ukrainian system of territorial national soviets in the rest of the USSR (Martin 2001, 46–50, 87, 113, 129).

Descriptive representation, integration, and other functions

Among the key functions of the USSR Congress of Soviets and the TsIK was descriptive representation aimed at demonstrating progress pertaining to gender, social, and national relations through the mere presence of a certain number of deputies and members belonging to a particular population group. The assemblies also performed the integrative function of brining diverse populations together in their loyalty to the party and the state. The Congresses of Soviets became milestone events, celebrating the party's policies. However, the TsIK Presidium had practical functions as well. It operated as a "complaints board," being the addressee of numerous petitions.

In the context of the liberalization of Soviet elections, descriptive representation became central to the assemblies. Reporting on the work of the credentials commission of the Third USSR Congress of Soviets, Syrtsov provided statistical information on the 1,580 deputies with a decisive vote and 696 delegates with a consultative vote, noting the political significance of the figures. He highlighted the increase in the number of women deputies (162 total, 95 with a decisive vote) compared to the previous Congress, as well as the ratio between Communists and non-party deputies (1,822 and 454 deputies, respectively), noting the increase in the number of the latter from 5 percent at the First USSR Congress to 20 percent at the Third Congress. Syrtsov also mentioned the distribution of delegates among classes (29 percent were peasants, whose numbers increased, and 40.5 percent were workers) and nationalities (51.5 percent were Russian, 11.2 percent were Ukrainian, 2.5 percent were Belarusian, 6 percent represented the peoples of the Caucasus, 7.5 percent represented Turkic peoples,[54] and 14 percent represented other peoples). He also noted that 60 percent of the deputies were new to the USSR Congress of Soviets (III S"ezd sovetov SSSR 1925, 531–3).

Although the reports of the credentials commissions of the 1927–1931 Congresses did not provide much commentary, they paid close attention to the increasing percentage of women among the deputies, which rose from 2.9 percent at the First Congress to 15.4 percent at the Fifth Congress and 20.6 percent at the Sixth Congress. The share of non-party deputies also increased, peaking at the Fifth Congress at 27.4 percent of delegates with a decisive vote, although the share of Communists slightly increased at the Sixth Congress due to more restrictive election (IV S"ezd sovetov SSSR 1927, 587–90; V S"ezd sovetov SSSR 1929, 20:1–3; VI S"ezd sovetov SSSR 1931, 21:1–3).

The large number of absent delegates at the Sixth Congress in 1931 was explained with the fact that "some southern republics," such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, had proclaimed themselves as shock workers (VI S"ezd sovetov SSSR 1931, 21:1). In fact, given the ongoing crisis, the collectivization, and the sowing campaign, the Politburo resolved to limit the participation of deputies from Central Asia, the Caucasus, Crimea, and southern Ukraine in the Sixth Congress.[55]

Descriptive representation also became important for union and republican TsIKs. In February 1927, Kalinin praised the increased number of non-party members in the VTsIK, claiming that Communists even consulted them on legislation. Molotov supported a further increase in non-party members in executive committees (including the USSR TsIK) and emphasized their importance beyond mere statistics. Their involvement was supposed to improve the Soviet government and apparatus, inform the party of the masses' most pressing demands, and help it through criticism.[56] In the Soviet press, the participation of women "from Eastern nationalities" in the TsIKs of union and autonomous republics was celebrated as a major step in their emancipation (Liubimova 1923).

The diversity of deputies TsIK members was performed through the occasional use of languages other than Russian and the "national" costumes that some of them wore (Tsentral'nyi ispolnitel'nyi komitet SSSR 1924, 448; VI S"ezd sovetov SSSR 1931, 7:6). In photographs, rank-and-file deputies were often presented as members of specific groups, such as women or representatives of specific territories, rather than as individual members of the supreme government bodies. One such photograph (Figure 5.4) depicted a group of ordinarily dressed women members of the USSR TsIK reading a newspaper, thus celebrating gender and social equality and probably implying the success of the literacy campaign (C. E. Clark 1995).

Another photograph showed members of the TsIK from the Uzbek SSR, including the Tajik Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic (ASSR), posing in the Kremlin.[57] Central Asia played a key role in the supposed "liberation" of the former Russian Empire and its dependencies. The formally independent Khorezm People's Soviet Republic and the Bukharan People's Soviet Republic were eliminated during the national delimitation in 1924. Unlike the Uzbek and Turkmen SSRs, which joined the USSR as union republics, the Tajik ASSR was created as an autonomous republic in the Uzbek SSR (Sabol 1995; Karasar 2008).



Figure 5.4 Women deputies of the fourth session of the Fourth USSR TsIK. Moscow, December 3–15, 1928. GTsMSIR, 4989/26k.

In the Soviet assemblies, the "liberation" of Central Asia was often linked to the expected global decolonization that would follow the Soviet example, as emphasized by Agamalioglu during the formal inclusion of the Uzbek and Turkmen SSRs into the USSR at the Third Congress of Soviets in 1925.

> […] on the former territory of a vast empire, great things are now happening: not only are the formerly oppressed peoples being liberated, not only are the foundations being laid for their happiness, but the foundations are being laid for world liberation (*applause*).
>
> (III S"ezd sovetov SSSR 1925, 22)

The debates at the fourth session of the Fourth TsIK in December 1928, however, highlighted tensions between the supposed resolution of the nationalities question and practical politics. Fayzulla Xo'jayev[58] (Figure 5.5), the chairman of the USSR TsIK from the Uzbek SSR and the Chairman of the Sovnarkom of



Figure 5.5 A group of members of the Fourth USSR TsIK at its fourth session. Moscow, December 3–15, 1928. GTsMSIR, 4989/31-12. Front row, left to right: Yo‘ldosh Oxunboboyev, Fayzulla Xo‘jayev, Qəzənfər Mahmud oğlu Musabəyov, Shalva Eliava.

the Uzbek SSR, reaffirmed the ostensible decolonization but also highlighted its socialist aspects.

> The October Revolution liberated the peoples of Turkestan from the Tsarist government and from capitalist exploitation, but Bukhara and Khorezm remained under the rule of their emirs and khans even after the October Revolution. They only changed their masters: instead of the Russian capitalists, English and other foreign capitalists began to dominate in these countries. And only three years later, the working masses of Bukhara and Khorezm were freed from the power of their emirs and khans. They were able to do this as a result of the revolutionary movement, which turned into a popular uprising twice. Of course, the success of the struggle was greatly aided by the fraternal help of the revolutionary Russian workers.
>
> […] A number of nationalities, whose names were not even mentioned before the revolution and whose national interests had never been taken into account, received the right to exist independently [with the national delimitation].
>
> Among these nationalities we should mention, first of all, the Tajiks, who formed an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic within the Uzbek Republic.
>
> (Tsentral’nyi ispolnitel’nyi komitet SSSR 1928b, 14:2–3, 5)

During the debates in the Union Council, Kurman-Ali Alievich Kurdzhiev of the Karachay Autonomous Region criticized Fayzulla Xo'jayev's report, stating that he only mentioned that there were national minorities in the Uzbek SSR but only briefly touched upon the work among them. He argued that this work had to be increased so that the treatment of national minorities in the union republics became the "best agitation" for other "peoples of the East" (Tsentral'nyi ispolnitel'nyi komitet SSSR 1928b, 21:11). In the Council of Nationalities, the Tajik Mū'min Xoçaev[59] claimed that Fayzulla Xo'jayev did not sufficiently address the Tajik ASSR, providing a separate report on the republic. Mū'min Xoçaev lamented that not only the Union bodies but also the Uzbek ones had "a very vague idea" about Tajikistan despite its significant political importance due to linguistic connections with Afghanistan, Iran, and India. He even openly accused Fayzulla Xo'jayev and the Uzbek government of inadequate attention to the Tajik ASSR (Tsentral'nyi ispolnitel'nyi komitet SSSR 1928b, 22:1–5).

> You probably noticed from his report how much attention the Uzbek government pays to Tajikistan. Com[rade] Fayzulla Xo'jayev was making a report at the TsIK session for four hours, and the issues related to Tajikistan he covered within two–three minutes. This proves once again that one still does not pay proper attention to Tajikistan.
>
> (Tsentral'nyi ispolnitel'nyi komitet SSSR 1928b, 5)

Fayzulla Xo'jayev, however, did not consider this criticism "especially strong," claiming that the other speakers "generally agreed" with the conclusions of the written and oral reports (Tsentral'nyi ispolnitel'nyi komitet SSSR 1928b, 23:1).

These debates reflected the general situation of the Tajik ASSR within the Uzbek SSR. There had been numerous complaints about discrimination and forced linguistic assimilation of the Tajiks, and in the late 1920s, Tajik officials organized a campaign for the creation of a union republic. It was in December 1928 when the campaign became especially intense, and in early 1929, the Soviet government agreed to consider the proposal. After a complicated border delimitation, the Tajik SSR was created in late 1929 (Hirsch 2000, 219–24).

Although the USSR Congresses of Soviets and the TsIK remained exclusionary and differentiated in terms of class, the two bodies also had an integrative function, bringing together the nationally defined parts of the USSR and performing political unity between the government and the population groups included into the toiling masses (Nelson 1982, 9). Bringing together delegates from "all corners of the Union," the Congresses of Soviets received extensive coverage in the press and were broadcast on the radio.[60] Special themes were assigned to individual Congresses. The first day of the Second Congress revolved around Lenin's death (on January 21, 1924). Despite the adoption of the Constitution, the commemoration of Lenin proved to be a much more significant issue. The Third Congress, as suggested by Kalinin, was supposed to be the Congress of the proletariat turning to the countryside, and all matters

were to be discussed in this context.[61] The Fourth Congress formally adopted the First Five-Year Plan, thus becoming associated with the Great Break in economic policy (Harris 2016, 85). The Seventh Congress, scheduled for January 1935, was dubbed the "Congress of the victorious builders of socialism" before its convocation.[62]

The monumental Palace of Soviets, which was planned to be built according to the design of Boris Ivanovich Iofan, chosen in 1933, was a towering skyscraper with a statue of Lenin on top. It was intended to symbolize Soviet power, and its projected image was frequently used, although it was never built (Hoisington 2003, 42–3).

TsIK sessions were supposed to be held in different union republics,[63] but this remained unrealized, with most assemblies taking place in Moscow. However, a TsIK session ultimately took place in Tiflis (Tbilisi) in March 1925. Newspapers reported on the travel of the TsIK members to Tiflis through various cities of the USSR, where they were received in a solemn atmosphere. Anticipating the session in Tiflis, Enukidze noted that it would "undoubtedly be a decisive step towards closer convergence between the peoples of the USSR" and that it would demonstrate to "all the peoples inhabiting the Soviet Union that Tiflis" was "one of the equally important capitals of the USSR."[64] According to a *Gudok* journalist, a demonstration in honor of the arrival of the members of the USSR Sovnarkom and the TsIK was organized in Tiflis under the slogan "All hail the USSR, the greatest model of national peace!" Its participants carried "a comical effigy" of Noe Zhordania,[65] the Prime Minister of the Georgian Democratic Republic in exile.[66]

The TsIK session, devoted to the tenth anniversary of the Soviet government, was held on October 15–20, 1927, in the Uritskii (former Tauride) Palace Leningrad (Figure 5.6). Although the *Manifesto to All Workers, Toilers, Peasants, Red Army Soldiers of the USSR; to the Proletarians of All Countries and the Oppressed Peoples of the World*, which was pre-circulated at the session and adopted on October 15, 1927, underscored the importance of the working class, it also stressed the need to strengthen the Soviet state.[67] According to Enukidze, the session demonstrated that "with such unity, with such cohesion between the working masses and their government, international complications and provocations are nothing to be afraid of."[68]

The discourse of unity became particularly strong in the 1930s. Reporting on the TsIK session in January 1933, *Izvestiia* claimed that the speeches by "the representatives of all peoples of our multinational state testified to complete unity, complete cohesion between the party, the government, and the working masses."[69]

The USSR TsIK Presidium, as the main legislative body, had a complex internal structure with multiple commissions. It not only issued legislation between TsIK sessions but also acted as the "collective" head of state, granting pardons and presenting state awards. These awards were a significant aspect of its presence in the press,[70] particularly when they became an important instrument for rewarding activism in support of the regime and loyalty to it in the 1930s (Fitzpatrick 2000, 38). The Presidium also received numerous letters from Soviet citizens, predominantly



Figure 5.6 The Anniversary Session of the USSR TsIK in the Uritskii (former Tauride) Palace. Leningrad, October 15–20, 1927. RGAKFD, E-629.

comprising complaints about disenfranchisement, economic hardships, and the arbitrariness of local authorities, but also including denunciations. Alongside other state and party bodies, it was an important part of the communication mechanism between the government and the populace (Fitzpatrick 1996, 834; Alexopoulos 2003; Nérard 2004). The letters to various bodies, including the TsIK, served as a source for investigating public sentiments. They were analyzed *en masse* and utilized in making policy decisions (Sokolov 1998, 6–7).

The image of the "head of state" was personified in the figure of Kalinin. Despite being only one of the TsIK chairmen, he was treated as the head of the USSR TsIK and its Presidium, and thus the highest official of the USSR.[71] As such, Kalinin performed representative functions, including the reception of credentials from foreign diplomats.[72] Kalinin was also used as the personification of the USSR TsIK in caricatures.[73] He was portrayed as a man of the people (Figure 5.7), thanks to his peasant and worker background, and called the "All-Russian" or "All-Union Elder" (*vsesoiuznyi starosta*). His nomination to the highest state positions was, in fact, seen as a gesture toward the peasants by some party leaders.[74] The city of Tver was renamed after Kalinin in 1931 (Fitzpatrick 2017, 94). With the rise of Stalin's personality cult, Kalinin came to be referred as the "comrade-in-arms" of "great Stalin."[75]

Many letters were addressed to Kalinin personally, as he was often seen as the approachable "face" of the government and the "peasant's friend" (Fitzpatrick 2017, 84). Some of the letters were given to Kalinin during his extensive

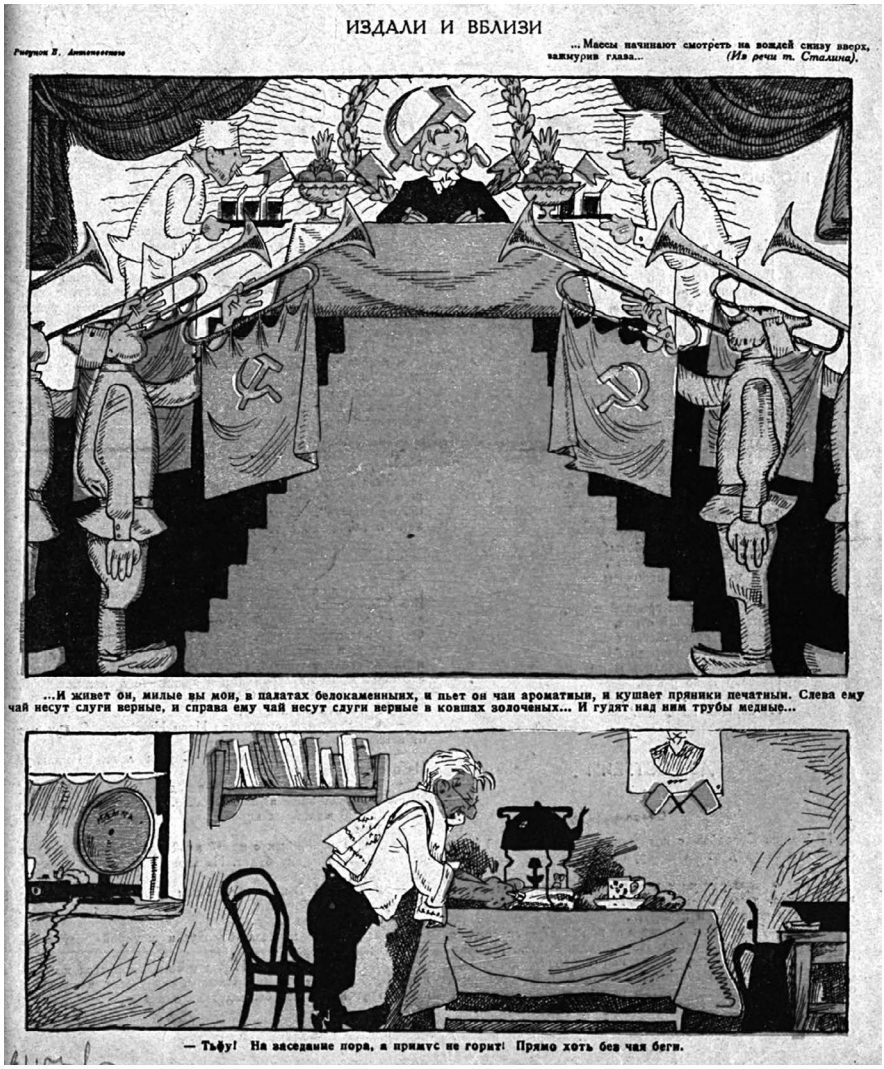


Figure 5.7 "From far away and up close." Caricature by B. I. Antonovskii. Text in the upper right section: "… The masses start to look at the leaders in a bottom-up manner, shutting their eyes… (From a speech by C[omrade] Stalin)." Text between the pictures: "… And he lives, my dears, in white-stone chambers, and he drinks fragrant teas and eats printed gingerbread. From the left, faithful servants bring him tea, and from the right, faithful servants bring him tea in gilded ladles… And copper trumpets hum over him…" Text in the bottom section: "– Ugh! It's time for a meeting, but the Primus stove won't start! I might have to run without my tea." *Begemot*, no. 20, 1928: cover.

travels across the USSR, during which he spoke at various assemblies, including the congresses of soviets of the union republics, and to different groups of Soviet population. Many of them were complaints and petitions, to which Kalinin occasionally responded. Some of the letters were anonymous. Numerous letters were sent by children, including those of the exiles. Children, who called Kalinin "Uncle," "Grandpa," or the "All-Union Elder," complained about hardships, including malnutrition, and asked for help (Sokolov 1998, 80–1, 95–7, 302, 314–15, 336). Children from Volkhovstroy, the settlement of the builders of the Volkhov Hydroelectric Station in the Leningrad Region, for instance, wrote, "We go to the common canteen for lunch and get soup with pickled cabbage there […]. With such food, it became unbearable for us to study. They feed [us] like piglets. Note our nutritional situation, give us some fat …" (Sokolov 1998, 303). Some letters praised the Soviet Union or Kalinin personally. In one such letter, which Kalinin received in 1933, Liza Zarubina and Zhenia Smirnova from a village in the Ivanovo Industrial Region asked him if they could visit Moscow or at least get a letter from him.

> We send you our heartfelt greetings and all the best in your great deeds. Uncle Misha, we have long heard about you that you are a good man [*muzhichek*], everyone praises you, and we wanted to write you a letter. You probably will not be angry with us that we have written to you, but we want to see you very much, to see Moscow. We have never been anywhere but our village and have not seen anything good. We also want to see good Uncle Volodia's [Lenin's] grave, and there are a lot of good uncles like you there.
>
> (Sokolov 1998, 314)

Kalinin was not necessarily benevolent. For instance, speaking at the Territorial Congress of Shock Collective Farmers (*kolkhozniki-udarniki*) of the North Caucasus in February 1933, he reprimanded its participants for failing to fulfill the "vows and promises" made at the previous congress, placing the blame for poor yields on the collective farmers. He also asserted that class enemies, the *kulaks*, had purposefully attempted to undermine collective farms in the region.[76] When Kalinin visited a collective farm in the Tatar ASSR later that year, a peasant woman, who was not a collective farm member, complained to him that everything had been taken from her family, that her husband had been wrongfully imprisoned, and that he could not get papers to work in Kazan. Although Kalinin promised that inadequate demands would be lifted from the family and that the papers would be provided, he also blamed her: "It's your own fault. You probably didn't let your husband join the collective farm."[77]

Parliaments and parliamentarism in Bolshevik discourse

The words "parliament" and "parliamentarism" retained negative connotations in Bolshevik discourse, and Soviet institutions were constantly juxtaposed with

Western ones. Nonetheless, the Soviet assemblies were occasionally called "parliaments." Furthermore, the Comintern's strategy still included the use of parliaments abroad.

The Bolsheviks discussed the crisis of parliamentarism in the context of the rise of fascism since 1923. Speaking at the Twelfth Party Congress in April 1923, Bukharin referred to fascism, manifestations of which he observed not only in Italy but also in Germany, France, Belgium, the USA, Sweden, Greece, Japan, and elsewhere, as a "kind of amendment" or "corrective to the so-called normal methods of bourgeois government," a symptom of the instability of the bourgeois regime, and a form of "legalizing the civil war" (Rossiiskaia kommunisticheskaia partiia 1968, 272–3).

The same year, the first book-length overviews of fascism were published in the USSR. Gershen Berkovich (German Borisovich) Sandomirskii, a political commentator, wrote about fascism in Italy. He interpreted Benito Mussolini's declaration to the Italian Parliament upon his appointment as Prime Minister in the fall of 1922 as "nothing but a frank statement by the propertied classes that from now on they see no need to cover up their dictatorship over the working masses with fig leaves like parliamentarism, constitutionalism, and such" (Sandomirskii 1923, 2:15). Writing on fascism in a broader context, Nikolai Ivanovich Iordanskii, a journalist and diplomat, saw the roots of fascism in parliamentarism' inability to adapt to the new tasks set by the contemporary age and the interest of the "petty bourgeoisie" in "strong and decisive" authority. International fascism, aiming for dictatorship, therefore sought to reorganize the state by "strengthening executive power, narrowing the rights of parliament, creating national economic councils alongside it, and even changing the electoral system itself in the sense of transforming it into a 'representation of interests' of economic and labor groups" (Iordanskii 1923, 87, 89–90). Maria Koszutska (Wera Kostrzewa), a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Poland, argued that the bourgeoisie no longer found parliamentarism acceptable due to the intensified class struggle (V. Kostrzheva 1923, 153).

In the *Encyclopedia of State and Law,* published in 1925–1927, Georgii Semenovich Gurvich defined parliamentarism as "a developed political system in the bourgeois state, where the system of class representation, called popular representation by the bourgeoisie, was fully realized," and described it as a type of hegemony of the capital. He pointed out that it was facing a crisis, as the bourgeoise was incapable of utilizing it, while the proletariat no longer desired to do it. Gurvich argued that bourgeois democracy was degenerating within the context of recent economic development (G. S. Gurvich 1925–1927, 212, 231). Nikolai Ivanovich Cheliapov, another legal scholar, argued in the same encyclopedia that the ruling bourgeoise resorted to extraparliamentary action, listing fascism in Italy, Aleksander Tsankov's regime in Bulgaria, the May 1926 Coup by Józef Piłsudski in Poland, and the 1926 Lithuanian coup as examples. He concluded that bourgeois politicians viewed the parliamentary way of solving problems as superfluous (Cheliapov 1925–1927, 236).

These ideas were reflected in the Comintern's Program adopted at its Sixth Congress on September 1, 1928.

> The era of imperialism, the intensification of the class struggle, and the growth, especially after the world imperialist war [First World War], of elements of civil war led to the bankruptcy of parliamentarism. Hence, the "new" methods and forms of government (for example, the system of small cabinets, the creation of behind-the-scenes oligarchic groups, the fall and falsification of the role of "the representation of the people," the shortening and destruction of "democratic freedoms," and so on). This process of the offensive of bourgeois imperialist reaction acquires, under special historical conditions, the form of fascism.
>
> (Kommunisticheskii internatsional 1933, 11)

The Bolsheviks and the Comintern continued to support the participation of communist parties in parliaments, in line with the decisions of the Second Comintern Congress in 1920. Given that the Comintern's main bodies had been under Bolshevik control since the 1920s, it was the Bolshevik Politburo that developed instructions for the parliamentary and extraparliamentary activities of foreign communist parties.[78] The precise extent of participation by Western communist parties in parliaments, however, led to disagreements. At the Seventh Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) in late 1926, Bukharin accused the French Communist Party of devoting too much attention to parliamentary combinations and not enough to mobilizing the working-class and petty bourgeois masses. Pierre Semard, the leader of the French Communists, had to defend his party's attention to parliamentary issues, asserting that Parliament played a significant role in the life of France (Ispolnitel'nyi komitet Kommunisticheskogo internatsionala 1927, 107, 220).

The Comintern's 1928 Program reaffirmed the strategy for proletarian parties during the "revolutionary upsurge." Their primary task was leading the masses against the bourgeois state by propagating the slogans of a soviet government, workers' control over production, seizure of private lands by peasants, and disarming the bourgeoise and arming the proletariat, as well as by organizing mass actions, such as strikes, demonstrations, and armed uprisings. All propaganda was to serve these purposes. The "rostrum of the bourgeois parliament" could also be utilized for this. The Comintern parties were expected to use all opportunities to defend "the current and urgent needs of the working masses and the masses of toilers in general" (Kommunisticheskii internatsional 1933, 43–4). Bolshevik authors, however, reaffirmed that when Western communist parties used parliamentarism in preparation for armed uprisings, it did not mean treating it as the main form of public life, as was the case with social democrats (Brudnyi 1928, 28).

The Bolsheviks did not hold a unified opinion on the matter of cooperating with social democratic parties. In 1923, Bukharin supported limited cooperation as part of the united front tactics, which he found particularly relevant in the context of

fighting fascism (Rossiiskaia kommunisticheskaia partiia 1968, 286). However, a more radical stance against social democratic parties prevailed. Since late 1928, the Comintern denounced social democracy as "social-fascism," opposing any form of cooperation, and cautioned against the "right" danger, which coincided with the struggle against the "rightists" within the USSR (Editorial 1928, 7). The Tenth ECCI Plenum in July 1929 excluded Bukharin from the ECCI Presidium, calling him and his group a "center of attraction for all right-wing elements" (Kommunisticheskii internatsional 1933, 911–13).

Speaking at the Sixteenth Congress of the VKP(b) in the summer of 1930, Dmytro Zakharovych Manuil's'kyi,[79] a member of the Central Committee and the head of the Bolshevik delegation in the ECCI, asserted that each political campaign, including parliamentary elections, should be utilized for recruiting new members. He also advocated for revised united front tactics, which involved creating satellite organizations around the communist parties. Molotov reaffirmed that social democratic forces were explicitly excluded from any possible blocs (Vsesoiuznaia kommunisticheskaia partiia 1930, 433, 471–2). In 1931, Manuil's'kyi confirmed the rejection of "social-fascism," maintaining that it did not matter which form of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, parliamentary or extraparliamentary, was in place. Supporting the former as a "lesser evil" was incorrect, as it perpetuated the "parliamentary illusions of the masses." Manuil's'kyi opposed a "parliamentary" interpretation of fascism, arguing that it was not its urge to destroy parliamentarism, but the open attack on the working class, the civil war against toilers, that mattered. He asserted that the case of Poland demonstrated that abolishing parliament was unnecessary (Ispolnitel'nyi komitet Kommunisticheskogo internatsionala 1932, 37, 610).

In 1930, *Kommunisticheskii internatsional*, the Comintern's journal, reminded its readers about the need to use parliaments as rostrums for revolutionary speeches, praising, *inter alia*, Kliment Gottwald in the Czechoslovak Parliament for a "Bolshevik utilization" of it. The journal celebrated the exposure of "the colonial regime of imperialism," the promotion of the "grandiose socialist construction in the USSR," the unmasking of the "counterrevolutionary, lackey role of social-fascism," and the statements that "communist parties would defend the USSR by all means" by communist deputies. It also anticipated an increase in "revolutionary parliamentarism's" significance with the deepening crisis of capitalism and the revolutionary upsurge, arguing that the extinction of bourgeois democracy made the work of communist parliamentarians more important. The journal cited the experience of the Russian Empire and contemporary Poland. It quoted Lenin's article on the State Duma, discussing the Social Democrats who were arrested and exiled, as an example of connecting to the masses and working as illegal propagandists (Editorial 1930, 12–14).

Some Bolsheviks viewed parliaments as a marker of progress in Asia. Georgii Vasil'evich Chicherin, the USSR People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs, for instance, praised the gradual development of the "bourgeois parliamentary system and the modernization of state and cultural apparatus" in the struggle against the "remnants of feudal groups, supported by imperialism" in Iran (Tsentral'nyi ispolnitel'nyi komitet SSSR 1924, 74). This was not a unified opinion. In his article

about Chinese politics, Pavel Ivanovich Smolentsev, a Soviet advisor to Sun Yat-sen's Guangzhou Government, cited the mass bribing of Chinese members of parliaments as "a new concrete example of the utter failure of parliamentarism" (Smolentsev 1924, 26).

The cooperation between the Comintern and the Guomindang in China led the Bolsheviks to prioritize broad national democratic movements. In January 1925, the ECCI instructed the Communist Party of Turkey to support the national revolutionary movement, even though it was led by the bourgeoisie, and declared: "Retaining its independent political identity, the party is ready, both in parliament and outside it, to support the national Kemalist group in all its progressive steps, in the field of both domestic and foreign policy." The Communist Party of Turkey, nevertheless, had to work out a clear position on the nationalities question and oppose national oppression and xenophobia sponsored by Turkey's ruling class. It was also tasked with penetrating the industry and leading the economic struggle of the working class. Its objective was, however, not to alienate the progressive bourgeois group but to assist it and shift it to the left.[80]

The establishment of a Guomindang-like party and a parliamentary regime was also a viable objective for Korean Communists. In 1925, the Eastern Department of the ECCI advised the Korean Communist Party, which had been established in Seoul earlier that year, to avoid slogans mentioning Soviet rule and instead campaign for a democratic republic. The slogan of Soviet rule was deemed premature due to the predominance of peasantry and little political importance of the proletariat. In 1926, under the auspices of the ECCI, the Korean Communist Party adopted the slogan of a people's democratic republic, in which a universally elected legislative assembly was to have all "supreme and state power" (Vada et al. 2007, 344–5, 386–8).

After the fallout with the Guomindang following the Shanghai Massacre of 1927, the Comintern abandoned parliamentary designs for Asia. In 1928, its Sixth Congress deemed a "non-capitalist path of development" in "backward colonies," and the development of the bourgeois-democratic revolution into a proletarian socialist revolution in "advanced colonies" possible, instructing all communists to fight for this. In practical terms, this meant that a revolutionary government in colonies could be established on the basis of soviets (Kommunisticheskii internatsional 1933, 836–7). In 1931–1934, a network of soviets existed in parts of China. Some attempts to establish them occurred elsewhere in Asia (Bernal 1981; Butler 1983).

In the USSR's own dependencies in Asia, namely Mongolia and Tuva, a non-parliamentary system was established from the onset. The 1924 Constitution of the Mongolian People's Republic created a system very similar to that in the USSR. The State Great Khural ("assembly"), elected non-universally and indirectly, corresponded to the USSR Congress of Soviets, and the Small Khural to the USSR TsIK. Similar to the TsIK, the Small Khural was also not permanently active, and between its sessions, supreme authority was exercised by its Presidium (albeit jointly with the Cabinet) (Mongol'skaia Narodnaia Respublika 1925, 46–8). In Tuva, where multiple constitutions were adopted in the 1920s and 1930s, a similar

system was established. The 1930 Constitution declared adherence to a non-capitalist path to socialism and "the dictatorship of the toiling arat [herder] masses," departing thereby from the more inclusive concept of "people's power" in the 1926 Constitution (Dubrovskii and Serdobov 1958, 281–2, 286–7).

In his report to the Thirteenth ECCI Plenum, Otto Wille Kuusinen,[81] a member of the ECCI Presidium, reiterated the Comintern's "parliamentary" interpretation of fascism, stating that its rise indicated that "the capitalists" were incapable of maintaining "their dictatorship using the old means of parliamentarism and bourgeois democracy in general." He also noted that "fascist demagogy" could, in fact, make it easier for the Bolsheviks "to liberate the toiling masses from the illusions of parliamentary democracy and peaceful evolution" (Kuusinen 1934, 52–3). The ECCI's points, based on his report, reaffirmed the exclusion of social democratic parties from a united front and supported the call for a Soviet government as the main slogan, citing the establishment of soviets in China (Ispolnitel'nyi komitet Kommunisticheskogo internatsionala 1934, 20, 589, 593–5).

At the Seventeenth Congress of the VKP(b) (January 26–February 10, 1934), Bukharin attempted to revise the party's stance on cooperation with social democratic parties in the West, claiming that the USSR had to fear only Adolf Hitler's regime. Although this contradicted Stalin's position, voiced at the same Congress (Khlevniuk 1992, 34), later that year, the ECCI changed its official position, deeming conditional cooperation with social democratic forces possible (Ispolnitel'nyi komitet Kommunisticheskogo internatsionala 1935, 43–5, 48).

Following Lenin, Bolsheviks cited Karl Marx, who contrasted parliaments and the Paris Commune – a businesslike collegial body that united executive and legislative authority (G. S. Gurvich 1925–1927, 224). Interpreting the soviets as the successors to the Paris Commune, they constantly drew comparisons between bourgeois democratic and Soviet institutions. The Comintern's 1928 Program asserted the radical difference between the Soviet proletarian dictatorship, emphasizing "broad democracy" among the toilers, and the "bourgeois-parliamentary republic." In the former, the right to reelect and recall deputies, the convergence of executive and legislative power, and elections based on the "production" rather than territorial basis (from factories, workshops, and so on) ensured active and systematic participation of the working class and the broader toiling masses under its hegemony in all public affairs (Kommunisticheskii internatsional 1933, 19).

The same ideas predominated in Soviet publications and within the central assemblies. Pēteris Stučka, for instance, argued that Soviet elections were based on class and were "predominantly collective elections," thereby presupposing a collective mandate. He maintained that with the secret ballot, a voter could not fully exercise the right of control and recall since the voter's identity remained unknown, although he acknowledged that the issue of the secret ballot was not predetermined in the Soviet context (Stuchka 1929, 174–5, 176). Cheliapov explained that since the French Revolution of 1789, members of parliaments were considered representatives of the will of the entire nation, leading to a lack of voter control and the use of territorial representation. He then listed the peculiar features of Soviet elections (Cheliapov 1931, 39–40).

Kalinin drew comparisons between the role of elections in different systems at the Third USSR Congress of Soviets in 1925.

> In capitalist countries, the purpose of the election campaign is to cheat the broad popular masses, to get one's proteges into parliament. With the end of the elections, the advertised promises of the party also end until the new elections. Elections in bourgeois countries are one of the ways to deceive peoples, one of the ways to move the people further away from power. The Soviet government is itself a product of the activity of the popular masses; its strength and future lie in the might of the workers and peasants, in their political maturity. It is quite natural that it seeks to consolidate the electoral campaign by fishing out the most gifted peasants, workers, and rural intelligentsia [for placing them] into the bodies of the soviets.
>
> (III S"ezd sovetov SSSR 1925, 265)

Addressing the single-party regime, Stalin explained to the American Trade Union Delegation visiting Soviet Russia in September 1927 that, despite the existence of only one legal political party, it faced a test of strength among the toiling masses through elections. He reasserted that the bourgeoisie had no political rights but pointed to the struggle of opinions among the workers and peasants. This struggle revolved not around dismantling the Soviet system but rather focused on improving Soviet institutions (Borisov et al. 2010, 164–6, 168–71).

Stučka dismissed the separation of powers as fictitious, maintaining that state power remained undivided when interpreted as class dominance. In a parliamentary regime, the cabinet was appointed and dismissed by parties or coalitions representing the ruling class. Speaking about the relations between different bodies of the Soviet government, Stučka mentioned that the USSR TsIK Presidium was a "substitute" body of the USSR TsIK. He also stressed that the Sovnarkom was not exclusively an executive body since the TsIK endowed it with legislative authority (Stuchka 1929, 184, 187, 200–4). Soviet authors who wrote about the Council of Nationalities stressed that it only had superficial similarities to a chamber of parliament while highlighting the distinctive class essence that set apart the USSR TsIK from the bourgeois parliament (Ignat'ev 1926, 80; Kul'besherov 1929, 15–17; Stuchka 1929, 200).

Despite this, the word "parliament" was occasionally used for describing the Soviet assemblies. They were referred to as the "workers' parliament," the "workers' and peasants' parliament," and the "Soviet parliament."[82] Stučka defined the VTsIK as a "working parliament" (*rabochii parlament*) in theoretical terms, drawing upon Max Weber's distinction between "working" and "talking" parliaments (Stuchka 1929, 209, 211; Palonen 2014).

Descriptive representation was a further point of comparison between the Soviet assemblies and foreign parliaments. While reporting on the credentials of the delegates to the Third USSR Congress of Soviets, Syrtsov argued as follows: "if we compare the number of women in our Soviet parliament with the number of women in bourgeois parliaments, we will see that we have made a major step forward:

there are only four women in the English Parliament" (III S"ezd sovetov SSSR 1925, 533). The comparisons between the TsIK and parliaments in "bourgeois" countries also concerned the ostensibly open discussions of matters pertaining to nationalities (Tsentral'nyi ispolnitel'nyi komitet SSSR 1927, 5–6). Enukidze compared the relatively large USSR TsIK, which increased from 735 members in its second convocation to 833 members in the third, to Western European parliaments. He argued that considering the size and population of the USSR, the number of TsIK members was not particularly large (III S"ezd sovetov SSSR 1925, 545).

The Soviet assemblies were also compared to parliaments in order to elucidate their flexible procedures. Skrypnyk, for instance, explained that the last-minute removal of the report on defense from the agenda of the Sixth Congress of Soviets did not imply a lack of interest in the matter. He argued that in the USSR, which was not a country of "bourgeois parliamentarism," formal agenda inclusion was not essential for addressing matters, asserting that the evaluation of defense issues had already occurred "on the ground" (VI S"ezd sovetov SSSR 1931, 5). Sometimes, however, such comparisons were made to criticize Soviet practices. Thag'ak'adikh"ala Ghialibeila Ghialibei,[83] a member of the Sovnarkom of the Dagestan ASSR and member of the TsIK, criticized the poor practices of budget discussions.

> Although we bear the title of deputies and, as they say, of high chambers, it seems that the People's Commissariat of Finance considered us to be extremely modest people, for only before the meeting it distributed to us, bad financiers, its large material and forced us to work through it here, between meetings and business. If this had taken place somewhere in a bourgeois parliament, a major conflict and nearly a government crisis could have arisen out of it. We, Soviet deputies, as more modest people, will not create a conflict in the Soviet country on this occasion, but we believe that it is necessary to point out the abnormality of such an order. We do not have to approve the budget, as it has already been approved by time. For seven months out of twelve, we have already been living on the current budget. We only have to talk about what needs to be kept in mind when budgeting for the new fiscal year.
>
> (Tsentral'nyi ispolnitel'nyi komitet SSSR 1926, 172–3)

Molotov consistently rejected the use of the term "parliament" for the Soviet assemblies.

> In fact, it is the influence of old prejudices and, at best, old, irrelevant terminology. This comparison does not at all emphasize the special significance of the soviets, but rather, on the contrary, it sugarcoats the idea of parliamentarism, which is now moribund. This comparison does not embellish our workers' soviets at all. Indeed, parliament and parliamentarism are the embodiment and an illustrative symbol of bourgeois democracy; soviets and the Soviet government are the living realization and the universal form of proletarian democracy. Parliamentarism, as has been proved for centuries, is a tried and tested instrument of the power of the bourgeoisie,

> where workers and peasants have, at all times and in all states, proved powerless to improve the material and cultural conditions of their life on the basis of parliamentarism in any appreciable way. The soviets are the road to socialism.[84]

There were some structural similarities between the Soviet assemblies and foreign parliaments, such as the Council of Elders at the USSR Congress of Soviets, the the Communist Factions of the Congress and the TsIK, and commissions.[85] Some of these similarities normalized the TsIK as a parliament. Valerian Vladimirovich Kuibyshev, who was then the USSR People's Commissar of Workers' and Peasants' Inspection, claimed that budget commissions played an important role in all parliaments of Western Europe and America, and the differences in the social systems did not make the TsIK budget commission less important (Tsentral'nyi ispolnitel'nyi komitet SSSR 1925, 202–3).

The choice of the former Tauride Palace as the venue for the Anniversary Session of the USSR TsIK in October 1927 symbolized a certain degree of continuity with the State Duma and revolutionary assemblies. As pointed out by a journalist covering the session, an individual familiar with "the old Duma" remarked that Aron Aleksandrovich Sol'ts, a member of the USSR Supreme Court, had occupied the same chair in which "Markov II" (Nikolai Evgen'evich Markov) had once sat. This observation elicited laughter and jokes,[86] given the former's Jewish background and the latter's anti-Semitism.

Some parliamentary practices could be observed in the struggle within the Bolshevik Party, similar to the earlier period (Rakov 2022). As noted by Alexander V. Reznik, these elements were particularly strong in 1923–1924 when members of the Left Opposition campaigned for elected positions within the party and engaged in debates. However, the rejection of parliamentarism at the discursive level by both the majority of and the Left Opposition limited the scope of political action for the latter. Furthermore, after Lenin's death, the discourse of "unity" within the party became ever more prominent, with local party organizations denouncing debates in the leadership (Reznik 2017, 143–60). In this context, the supporters of the "general line" often used "parliament" and "parliamentarism" as derogatory metaphors. In the struggle against the Left Opposition, Zinov'ev discussed Trotskii's speech as "parliamentary" at the Thirteenth Party Congress in May 1924.

> The most apt thing that has been said here is that Com[rade] Trotskii's speech was parliamentary. This definition was polite, politically loyal, and at the same time, it seems to me, the deadliest for our opponents. What is called a "parliamentary" speech, a "parliamentary" oration? A parliamentary speech can be characterized by two features. The first is when a person says not quite what he thinks, or even not at all what he thinks. (*Applause*). The second feature is when a person, speaking in "parliament," speaks "through a window" to some other environment, to other voters, using legal opportunities. (*Applause*). I think Com[rade] Trotskii's speech had both of these

> features. His parliamentary speech used this legal opportunity, the congress, to appeal to someone else, to those to whom you, they say, will not give all democracy, and so on. At the same time, it was also a parliamentary speech in the first sense.
>
> (Rossiiskaia kommunisticheskaia partiia 1963, 251)

When denouncing the New Opposition at a party meeting in Moscow in July 1926, Rykov cautioned against turning the party into a parliament. He argued that the presence of diverse "shades of political opinions" within the party influenced the struggle concerning the class interests of non-proletarian groups outside of it.

> […] a free struggle of factions within the party would essentially be a surrogate for the struggle of political parties in the country. Moreover, the struggle of factions within the party is only the first step toward the organization of various parties in the country and bourgeois parliamentarism.[87]

At the Sixteenth Party Congress (June 26–July 13, 1930), Pavel Petrovich Postyshev labeled members of the left and right oppositions as "petty-bourgeois democrats of the parliamentary type," who needed discussions and groupings in response to their concerns that the party's congresses and conferences displayed bureaucratism and a lack of dissensus (Vsesoiuznaia kommunisticheskaia partiia 1930, 108).

Reception and alternatives

Despite having limited opportunities to express their opinions, many Soviet people, particularly those in rural areas, actively resisted the single-party dictatorship and criticized the practices of the Soviet government. While some foreign observers found similarities between the Soviet assemblies and parliamentary institutions, most of them remained critical of the party's rule. Émigré authors overwhelmingly opposed the Bolsheviks, yet the design of soviets and the principles on which they operated appeared attractive to both the radical left and some on the right.

Opposition to Soviet rural policies manifested itself during soviet elections across the entire country. During the 1928–1929 campaign, there were reports that in rural areas, "*kulaks* and anti-Soviet elements" called for the overthrow of the Soviet government and the reestablishment of the State Duma. Others advocated for a Soviet government without Communists, essentially demanding the party's non-interference in the elections and operation of soviets. Some demanded a secret ballot and freedom for all political parties, while others insisted on proportional representation of workers and peasants in the soviets. There were demands to permit the formation of peasant unions and protests against class-based policies in the countryside. Many people sought to reinstate their voting rights. There were reports of violence against local officials and activists, as well as violations by officials (Danilov, Manning, and Viola 1999, 1:130–2, 484–6, 542, 546–8, 574–7, 768).

As reported on December 12, 1928, in a village in the Mariupol District of the Ukrainian SSR, those who were disenfranchised argued:

> The Soviet election technique is wrong. Despite the fact that they talk about Soviet democracy at every corner, in reality, under the Tsarist government, there was more freedom of elections and democracy than under the Soviet government, [to] which all the greenhorns who are not able to [either] live independently or manage the village and the country are given access, who are elected on the recommendation of the Communists at an open meeting. Another thing would be the old days, the elections with a secret ballot, where everyone could cast their vote for any candidate without fear of anyone, but now anyone who openly tries to oppose is put on record and so on. In fact, now it is not an election but an appointment – let them try using a secret ballot, and you will see that not a single Communist or candidate [for membership in the party] will be elected.
>
> (Danilov, Manning, and Viola 1999, 1:576–7)

The Joint State Political Directorate (OGPU) reported that some of the leaflets seized across the USSR in 1930 called for genuine voting rights, the defense of the Constituent Assembly, the establishment of a democratic republic, and the introduction of presidency. Some leaflets supported the "right deviation," opposed the "Stalinist dictatorship" in favor of "genuine workers' and peasants' dictatorship," and hailed Bukharin, Rykov, and Tomskii. One slogan read, "All hail a parliamentary government headed by C[omrade] Bukharin" (Danilov, Manning, and Viola 2000, 2:791). As reported from the North Caucasus in March 1932, soldiers and officers received letters from the countryside and discussed a new revolution, the "dictatorship of a handful of Communists," and the need to change soviet elections by introducing a secret ballot (Danilov, Manning, and Viola 2001, 3:289).

There were cased of organized opposition in urban areas. The Democratic Union, which was created by graduates of a school in Chernihiv in the Ukrainian SSR, printed materials that then circulated in Moscow, Leningrad, Kharkiv, Kyiv, Odessa, and other cities. The organization also campaigned among the peasants. The pamphlet *How and Why We Should Fight the Bolsheviks*, printed by the organization in 1928, denounced the Soviet regime as anti-democratic due to the absence of free elections and an open struggle among parties. It called for the establishment of an all-popular constituent assembly. A leaflet produced around the same time discouraged participation in soviet elections so that the party could not shift responsibility for its disastrous policies onto the voters (Mazus 2010, 5, 142, 430, 452, 457).

Communists, including party members, also expressed criticism of the Soviet system. In the 1932 proclamation of the Union of Marxists–Leninists addressed to all VKP(b) members, written by Riutin, it was contended that Stalin had established a personal dictatorship by sidelining the Central Committee and assuming control of the Politburo and other party bodies. "The soviets have lately been reduced to the role of miserable appendages of the party apparatus, turned from bodies close and dear to the masses into a soulless bureaucratic machine" (Riutin 1992, 255–6).

A group of military topographers, who called themselves the Militant Communist Union and were arrested in Leningrad in December 1934, advocated a return to the "genuinely Leninist path of socialist construction" through an organized uprising of the toilers. According to their program, to overcome the "concentration of power in the hands of a small group," all state and economic apparatus had to be elective. Candidate lists were not to be prepared in advance, and voters were to nominate candidates during their meetings. Participation in the elections was reserved for the toilers who had not "stained themselves with a social crime" (Iakovlev et al. 2003, 579–81).

There are records of private assessments of the Soviet institutions. Sergei Mikhailovich Golitsyn, a student of noble descent at the time, recalled that the lists of those who were disenfranchised were publicly displayed next to the house in which he lived in Moscow in 1929. He described the public humiliation that those deprived of voting rights faced.

> At first, the law on the deprivation of [voting] rights was met without fear, but rather with resentment, especially in the countryside. Everyone votes for the deputy who was picked [and] set up by the authorities, but they do not let you vote and hung out [your name] in the lists for show and shame. But in fact, disenfranchisement has become a terrible tool that punished people who have not committed any crimes from the point of view of simple common sense, that furthermore punished their children, including minors.
>
> (Golitsyn 2010, 557)

Golitsyn nevertheless noted that some appeals for the restoration of voting rights were granted, as many people were disenfranchised illegally due to the arbitrariness of local authorities (Golitsyn 2010, 558, 568).

G. S. Onishchenko, a village soviet chairman from the Volga region, who exchanged letters with Kalinin in late 1933–early 1934, claimed that it was impossible to work due to the excessive demands from the party. One faced the choice of either failing the tasks of the district or breaking the law. Kalinin responded with encouragement but in an evasive manner, stating that understanding the party's policy and its implementation was of utmost importance (Sokolov 1998, 95–7).

The Soviet supreme bodies and their initiatives received less public attention compared to soviet elections locally. As reported by the OGPU, the Manifesto of the USSR TsIK's Anniversary Session in 1927 was poorly received among Russian peasants and Cossacks in the Kazakh ASSR. They considered it to solely serve the interests of the workers while violating the interests of the peasants (Danilov, Manning, and Viola 1999, 1:131). Another point of criticism revolved around the status of deputies. In April 1927, Kalinin noted that participation in Soviet assemblies became a source of income for some peasants. As a result, some of them even became rich, causing envy and anger.[88]

Kalinin was a target of criticism himself. The following joke, which circulated since at least 1928, is illustrative in this respect. "A performer sings, 'Show me an abode where the Russian man [*muzhik*] would not suffer?'[89] – '[It is in] Kalinin's

apartment in the Kremlin!'" (Mel'nichenko 2014, 327). Another joke that circulated since at least 1929 pertained to the perceived discrepancy between the official discourse, including Kalinin's frequent references to the peasants' interests, and the repressive policies.

> A little girl had been to the circus, and she liked the magician immensely. The next day, she picked up the phone and said, "Lady, connect me to the circus." The little girl burred. The lady on the switchboard connected her to the TsIK [which sounds similar to *tsirk*, the Russian word for circus] of the USSR. "Give the phone to the magician who so deftly deceives everybody." Kalinin was called up.
>
> (Mel'nichenko 2014, 327)

In the early 1930s, as the crisis in the countryside turned into famine, and the situation in the towns and cities deteriorated as well, Kalinin firmly became the "peasants' friend" who had let them down (Fitzpatrick 2017, 85).

The foreign press reported on Soviet institutions. American newspapers occasionally called Soviet assemblies, the USSR TsIK and the VTsIK, "parliaments" (sometimes enclosing the word in quotation marks). Kalinin was referred to as "President."[90] *The Boston Daily Globe* found some similarities between the USSR Constitution and that of the USA, with the bicameral TsIK resembling the US Congress, and the members of the Council of Nationalities being elected by "provincial legislatures, as American Senators formerly were." The USSR Congress of Soviets was considered to roughly correspond to "a huge electoral college."[91] However, US newspapers stressed that there were no direct elections provided and no civil liberties included.[92]

Descriptive representation and diversity attracted significant attention. *The New York Times* acknowledged the historical significance of convening the USSR TsIK session, "the highest legislative body of the country," in Tiflis.[93] *The Daily Boston Globe* noted the diversity but hinted at the ceremonial nature of the institution. "Approximately 300 delegates, many in native costume of distant provinces, sat stolidly in straight rows of wooden desks, while speaker droned out voluminous reports on claimed accomplishments and their intentions for the future."[94] *The Wall Street Journal* highlighted the exoticism of the Soviet assemblies.

> The 400 men and women delegates from all corners of the Union of Soviets constitute a picturesque gathering, probably the world's most unusual "parliament." They included esquimaux from the north, Siberian clans and Caucasian hill tribes, as well as delegates of the more advanced nationalities in European and Asiatic Russia.[95]

The German press was less enthusiastic about the Soviet assemblies. *Badischer Beobachter* ("Baden Observer"), for instance, underscored the predominance of the RSFSR representatives in the Council of Nationalities, achieved through the representation of autonomous republics and regions.[96]

In-depth descriptions of the Soviet government by international scholars and journalists tended to be critical toward the Soviet institutions. Robert F. Kelley, a US State Department official, advised against treating the Soviet government as "a government in the usual sense of the word – a sovereign political body," as it was "merely an instrumentality" through which the party governed. He pointed out that the party had "at no time ceased to direct its activities," with the Politburo being the supreme authority in the USSR (Kelley 1924, 68–9). Edgar S. Furniss, an American economist, also recognized that Soviet elections ensured the party's complete control. However, he argued the biennial elections enabled "public opinion to make itself felt." He also observed the regime's liberalization in 1934, during which the franchise was reinstated for many "former outcast groups" (Furniss 1934, 375).

Henry Noel Brailsford, a British left-wing journalist, offered a description of the third session of the Third USSR TsIK, which he attended on February 14, 1927.

> Through the guarded doors of the Kremlin, deputies and the curious public are drifting to hear a debate of the C.I.K. [TsIK], the Central Soviet which represents the whole population of the union. One guesses at their many nationalities, as they tramp over the snow, while the dazzling sunlight sets the gay colors of St. Basil's Church dancing. The hall in which the four hundred assemble makes a dull background […]. The curious public seems to consist chiefly of earnest young men and women who have come to study the system under which they live. An ample and well-frequented stall, at which the literature of the party is sold, testifies to their serious tastes. The speaking is rendered unattractive by the use of megaphones.
>
> (Brailsford 1927, 79)

Despite this sympathetic perspective, Brailsford had no illusions about the Soviet system. He maintained that the Soviet elections were "a device for registering unanimity" and ratifying the candidates nominated by the Communist Party. He also compared the soviet election in Moscow to an English municipal election rather than a Parliamentary one (Brailsford 1927, 30–1, 33). A Soviet review of Brailsford's book acknowledged that the elections indeed did not alter the party's position and emphasized their focus on economic and local issues, rendering them comparable to municipal elections. The review, however, reminded that in the USSR, there was no distinction between state power and local self-government, nor between politics and the economy (Il'inskii 1929, 320–1).

One of the most comprehensive accounts of the Soviet government was provided by the German journalist Theodor Seibert, who traveled through the Soviet Union in the second half of the 1920s. He noted the gradual extension of the franchise. While acknowledging that the elections were again restricted in 1928, Seibert argued that "the number of persons entitled to vote in Soviet Russia is still large enough to give the Soviet system a strong outward resemblance to the parliamentary democratic method of popular representation in western Europe." However, he was critical of the elections themselves, pointing out that only village soviets featured representatives of the "well-to-do stratum of the peasantry," as the multistage

process enabled the party to "filter the votes of the electors five or six times before the supreme authority is reached." Seibert also criticized the brief and infrequent sessions of the All-Russian Congress of Soviets, suggesting that under these conditions, it was unable to engage in any "practical work" (Seibert 1932, 80–3).

Describing his personal experience at the Thirteenth All-Russian Congress of Soviets (April 10–15, 1927), Seibert pointed out unanimous voting and the absence of debates. "What an ideal parliament! I think the chairman of our own Reichstag would turn green with envy at the sight." He also observed that during Rykov's report, many deputies left, leaving the chamber half empty by the time he concluded. Seibert stressed that despite the Soviet propaganda's claim about the enthusiasm of workers, peasants, and their elected representatives for public matters, he had never witnessed "so much obvious boredom in public assemblies" anywhere else in the world. He also noted that during the reading of the Manifesto of the TsIK Anniversary Session by Rykov in 1927, "a majority of deputies were in the smoking-room or in the restaurant, while of the representatives of the people who remained in the assembly room a considerable proportion were sleeping soundly" (Seibert 1932, 85–6).

Seibert also strongly criticized the USSR TsIK, emphasizing its short and rare sessions. He highlighted the small size of the Council of Nationalities, which made it unable to "give any serious trouble" within the TsIK. Having attended TsIK meetings, Seibert asserted that while there were "very lively debates," they lacked decisive influence on the government, as the laws were hardly ever initiated by the TsIK and were forwarded to this "substitute parliament" for approval. Seibert described the TsIK Presidium, holding the "actual powers" of the state, as disconnected from the "the popular will" due to the multistage filtration process. Despite the Bolshevik efforts to "conceal from the foreign world that Red Russia is actually government by a clique," it was evident to him that the Soviet system was ornamental (Seibert 1932, 86–9).

The Russian émigré press regularly reported on the union and other congresses of soviets. An article allegedly based on an eyewitness's account noted the atmosphere of indifference surrounding the 1929 congresses.

> Such boredom emanates from the current sessions of the red parliaments. The Congress of Soviets of the RSFSR has just been in session, and now the meetings of the All-Union Congress of Soviets are beginning. And there is such boredom reigning around these major political events that it is hard to imagine. The public and the participants of these ornamental parliaments themselves do not positively feel any interest in what is happening in the magnificent halls of the Kremlin palaces.
>
> What a truly pitiful picture is presented by the thousands of deputies who have come together from all over the great country to for the "sovereign" resolution of the most important questions of politics and the economy.
>
> According to the constitutions, the Congress of Soviets is the supreme unrestricted master of the country, the embodiment of the will of the toilers. In reality, the participants themselves feel like powerless extras, summoned

> for a few days to dutifully approve everything that has been decided and done before and without the parliament by a handful of party leaders or, rather, one leader.
>
> Of course, the "ornamental" role of the Congresses of Soviets, their complete dependence on the decisions of the Politburo and the Central Committee of the Communist Party are nothing new. It is the basis of the Soviet system. But it is precisely now that the inner lie of this edifice stands out particularly prominently.
>
> […]
>
> The parliamentarians themselves feel very well that they are assembled only for parades, that they play the pitiful role of scenery, which is considered necessary for some reason. It seems, however, that even this conditional lie is beginning to evaporate. A draft has been introduced – and it will become a law – so that the Congresses will no longer assemble every year, but every two years. And if they assemble even every three–four years, then the matter will not change at all.[97]

The article then specified that the congresses did not discuss the pressing issues faced by the Soviet state. Instead, they summarily approved the government's actions. While their members were allowed to make minor remarks and submit notes on individual matters, the core problem, that is, the lack of grain, was never at the center of attention.[98]

Émigré commentators from the entire political spectrum were highly critical of the Soviet system. In 1923, Mark Veniaminovich Vishniak, who edited the Paris-based journal *Sovremennye zapiski* ("Contemporary Papers") at the time, pointed out the chaos within the Soviet legislative system. Multiple bodies issued decrees, laws, resolutions, and other legal acts. Vishniak also observed that the Bolsheviks contradicted their own antiparliamentary stance already in the 1918 Constitution of the RSFSR, by introducing the Sovnarkom's accountability to the supreme authority, a distinctive feature of parliamentarism. He argued that in practice, however, they turned parliamentarism upside down, as the All-Russian Congress of Soviets and the VTsIK became effectively accountable to the Sovnarkom (Vishniak 1923, 371–2, 386).

The Menshevik journalist Semen Osipovich (Solomon Iosifovich) Portugeis, similar to many other commentators, stressed that the Bolshevik Party was the government, the true "sovereign" of the state (St. Ivanovich 1928, 5). In his 1929 New York lecture, Victor Mikhailovich Chernov asserted that the Communist Party's position above the law made it a successor to Russian autocracy. Comparing Bolshevism to fascism, he noted that they both despised "formal democracy" and considered themselves "superdemocracies." In both the USSR and Italy, dictatorial parties controlled elections to representative bodies.[99] Vishniak similarly drew parallels between corporations in fascist regimes and the soviets in his 1934 article. He argued that both institutions could only exist in dictatorial regimes, regardless of whether the monopolistic party was called "international and communist" or

"national and fascist." For Vishniak, it was inconsequential which bodies – corporations or soviets – were used to drape the "antidemocratic and antiparliamentary" essence of such regimes. It was because of this, he argued, that Russian monarchists so easily combined fascist and Soviet ideas (Vishniak 1934, 359).

Indeed, right-wing émigré authors seemed to share the Bolshevik rejection of parliamentarism and displayed some affinity for the soviets, despite their rejection of the Communist Party. The philosopher Nikolai Aleksandrovich Berdiaev, who remained in Soviet Russia until his expulsion from the country in 1920, denounced the belief in "the ideal of liberalism" in his *Philosophy of Inequality*, written in 1918 and first published in 1923. Pointing to the irrationality of human nature, he dismissed rational political ideologies altogether (Berdiaev 1923, 130).

> We no longer have much faith in the constitution; we can no longer believe in parliamentarism as a panacea for all evils. One can recognize the inevitability and occasional relative usefulness of constitutionalism and parliamentarism, but it is no longer possible to believe that these means can create a perfect society, can cure evil and suffering. No one has such faith. And the latest doctrinaires of liberal constitutionalism and parliamentarism make a pitiful impression. Parliamentarism in the West is going through a serious crisis. One can sense the exhaustion of all political forms. And since liberalism believes too much in the political form, it does not reach the height of contemporary consciousness. Socialism also does not reach the height of contemporary consciousness because it believes too much in economic organization. All these beliefs are remnants of the old rationalism.
>
> (Berdiaev 1923, 130–1)

Berdiaev asserted that the "will of the people" was "dead," while democracy was a futile attempt to find and represent this disintegrated will. Within a democratic representative institution, the will of the people remained disintegrated, with its parts in conflict with each other. Berdiaev dismissed parliamentarism and universal elections altogether (Berdiaev 1923, 139).

> A democratic parliament is an arena of struggle for interests and power. It is difficult to hear the voice of the unified people in it. It is heard only in exceptional moments and through exceptional people. The counting of votes, which depends on a million random instances, says nothing about the quality of the people's will. […] Universal suffrage is a completely mechanical, quantitative, and abstract principle. Universal suffrage knows nothing about specific people, with their different qualities, with their different importance; it deals exclusively with abstract individuals, with atoms and mathematical points. It does not know organic social groups either. […] But this deification of equality is the original sin; it leads to the substitution of the concrete, qualitative, individual human nature with an abstract, quantitative, and impersonal nature. Based on false equality, universal suffrage is the negation of the human being.
>
> (Berdiaev 1923, 139)

Echoing the prerevolutionary etatist ideas of Vasilii Vasil'evich Rozanov and others, Berdiaev defended the state in the state–society dichotomy, asserting that democracy aimed to dissolve the state in the society since it did not recognize the state as a separate reality. Furthermore, according to Berdiaev, democracy reduced the society to interpersonal relations, resulting in the disappearance of all the ontological foundations of both the state and society, which he referred to as "higher and mysterious forces" (Berdiaev 1923, 142).

In his *New Middle Ages*, Berdiaev argued that the "individualistic civilization of the nineteenth century, with its democracy, with its materialism, with its technics, with its public opinion, press, stock exchange, and parliament," was in a deep crisis. He asserted that the new age was a collectivist age and anticipated that people would form groups based on economic and occupational principles while old social estates and classes would disappear. In this context, the "political parliaments," which had "degenerated into talking shops," would be replaced by "businesslike professional parliaments," representing "real corporations." These corporatist assemblies would address "vital issues," such as those pertaining to agriculture or public education. Berdiaev anticipated that peasants and workers would seek occupational and corporatist representation, striving for self-government, for the "soviet" principle in its true sense, rather than the fictitious one used to veil the Communist Party dictatorship in "Soviet" Russia (Berdiaev 2002, 232–3, 250–1). Corporatism gained prominence among several groups of émigré authors. While their positions on the soviets as an institution and on corporatism varied, for most of them, the crisis of Western democracy and parliamentarism was the starting point (Fedotov 1934, 11–12, 19–25).

The Eurasianists, members of a right-wing intellectual movement (Glebov 2017) aiming to liberate "national Russian culture" from "Romano-Germanic forms of life" (Trubetskoi 2010a, 234), found another aspect in fascism and Bolshevism appealing: their fixation on ideology. As argued by the linguist and philosopher Nikolai Sergeevich Trubetskoi, the democratic system was crumbling, and a new system – ideocracy, in which the ruling stratum was united by their worldview – was to take its place. He regarded both Bolshevik and Italian Fascist regimes as ideocratic, yet in both cases, ideocracy remained incomplete and imperfect. Trubetskoi argued that a genuine ideocratic system, which was still to come, would be founded not on democracy but on "state maximalism" (Trubetskoi, 2010b, 444–7).

The legal scholar Nikolai Nikolaevich Alekseev asserted that the Eurasianists aimed to replace the representation of individuals and parties – hallmarks of Western democracy – with an "organic" representation of "needs, knowledge, and ideas." Alekseev claimed that the issue of organic representation was, in fact, already resolved within the Soviet system (albeit "not in Soviet practice") (Alekseev 1998a, 180).

> In the Soviet system, the starting point is not an individual or an artificial combination of people, but an organic territorial part of the whole – a soviet, a district, a region, a city, and so on, or professional associations of people within these territorial units, [and,] finally, the national parts of the state. These principles are subject to further strengthening, development, and improvement in the Eurasian state.
>
> (Alekseev 1998a, 180)

Alekseev also praised another aspect of the Soviet system (once again not the practice), specifically its ability to blend a "stabilized public opinion with its dynamics." The Soviet system comprised a single-party dictatorship and representative institutions. The former manifested the "constant," while the latter embodied "the mobile." Alekseev argued that achieving the right combination of the two was a primary objective of Eurasianist policy. According to his perspective, soviet elections contradicted party politics, which the Eurasianists rejected. In soviet elections, the "business principle" mattered at all stages, as people chose individuals based on merit rather than party affiliation (Alekseev 1998a, 182, 184–5).

Elsewhere, Alekseev provided a more detailed analysis of the Soviet system, as it was supposed to serve as the starting point for the eventual Eurasianist state. He focused on the principle of "substitution" of competence among various Soviet bodies. This principle made TsIK presidiums and sovnarkoms the most powerful institutions, as they were the only permanent bodies, while congresses of soviets and TsIKs had a more ornamental function. Alekseev, however, underscored the extraconstitutional aspects of the Soviet system, namely, the party and its own main bodies, which were the unofficial government. He concluded that the dictatorial principle prevailed over the soviet democratic one, rendering the Soviet state a Communist oligarchy. He set the task for the future to liberate the soviet democratic principle from the Communist oppression. He anticipated that Russians would gradually learn self-organization and self-government through the soviets and regarded them as important institutions for recruiting elites for future Russia. Alekseev also stressed that the existing disproportions between rural and urban soviets had to be eliminated (Alekseev 1998b, 290, 332–7, 340–2, 356, 358–9).

Some émigré intellectuals and activists, primarily monarchists and conservatives, explicitly supported fascism. During the 1920s and early 1930s, new organizations, mainly those involving the youth, were established by émigrés. In 1923, an association called Young Russia (the Union of Young Russians since 1925) was formed in Munich. It was led by Aleksandr L'vovich Kazem-Bek, who had been a boy scout in the late Russian Empire and participated in the Russian Civil War during his teenage years. The organization endorsed Kirill Vladimirovich Romanov as the new Tsar. In the late 1920s, the organization became influenced by fascist ideas. In 1931, the Russian Fascist Party emerged in Harbin. Its leader was Konstantin Vladimirovich Rodzaevskii, a former member of the Komsomol from Blagoveshchensk, who had fled to Manchuria in 1925. In 1933, representatives of various fascist organizations, including Kazem-Bek, convened for a conference in Berlin. Although no broader unification followed, the All-Russian Fascist Organization, based in the USA, merged with the Russian Fascist Party in 1934 to form the All-Russian Fascist Party under Rodzaevskii (Laqueur 1993, 2, 73; Emel'ianov 2003, 136–7; Klimovich 2008, 145–7). Another pro-fascist organization, originally known as the National-Labor Union of the New Generation, was established in 1932. It primarily included émigrés residing in Yugoslavia and Bulgaria (Stephan 1978, 29–30).

The Harbin fascists' program adapted Italian fascism to Russia, aiming to establish a "national-labor state" on corporatist principles. The population would

organize into national unions based on occupation as well as national corporations based on branches of the economy. Elected deputies from the unions and corporations, and members of the Fascist Party would form the hierarchical local, regional, and national councils, with the All-Russian Zemskii Sobor at the apex. The party dictatorship was deemed temporary. The Russian fascists also underscored the role of Orthodox Christianity in Russia. They intended to reinstate certain civil liberties, such as freedom of religion and limited freedoms of speech and press. All non-Russian groups, except for Jews, were to be granted civil rights (Stephan 1978, 55–7; Shenfield 2001, 33–4).

The Young Russians, who put forward the slogan of the "Tsar and the soviets" (Vishniak 1957, 314), had a more eclectic program. They advocated for free universal elections with a secret ballot to the soviets and a clear delineation of competence between different bodies. The Young Russians also aimed to eliminate the principle of "substitution" of competence, following Alekseev's analysis of the Soviet system. At the same time, they argued that the state needed strong central authority and sought to reestablish monarchy. Similar to many other émigré authors, they rejected individualism and called for a regime based on social groups (Arsen'ev 1930, 12).

Fascist ideas garnered support from anti-Bolshevik thinkers who were unaffiliated with their organizations. Ivan Aleksandrovich Il'in, a right-wing philosopher, claimed that political power must be robust and based on will. In his view, republican and parliamentary states were based on the "organized lack of will" and therefore doomed. In this regard, fascism served as a solution for those seeking a strong-willed and state-centered way out of the "organized deadlock of the lack of will" (Il'in 1928, 21). Pavel Aleksandrovich Florenskii, a priest and philosopher who was then in custody in the USSR, outlined his vision for a future state in 1933. He also dismissed representative government, asserting that politics was a profession inaccessible to the masses, "like mathematics or medicine." Hence, representation as a democratic principle was "harmful" and weakened "the whole." While Florenskii endorsed consultation, his ideal was one-man rule, with a "prophetic"-type personality at the helm. He regarded Mussolini and Hitler as surrogates of such a personality, as their emergence steered the masses away from "the democratic way of thinking," along with "party, parliamentary, and similar prejudices," and alluded to the potential of the "will." Although Florenskii deemed linguistic, religious, and other diversity to have immense value for state life, he advocated for a "complete unification of fundamental political aspirations" (Kozhurin, Sinitsyn, and Bogatyrev 2016, 594, 596–8, 600).

On the far left, Trotskii, who himself became an émigré after being expelled from the USSR in 1929, was constrained in his criticism of the party system that he had contributed to establishing. Nonetheless, in April 1929, he argued in the Viennese newspaper *Neue Freie Presse* ("New Free Press") that the Soviet state had grown bureaucratic, with the bureaucrats rising above the masses and becoming similar to bourgeoise circles, intermixing with them. Another issue was the rise of the petty bourgeoisie during the NEP.[100] In 1933, Trotskii maintained that both

the soviets and the party had practically disappeared ([Trotskii] 1933, 3). His stance on parliamentarism, however, remained unchanged. He asserted that it was impossible for the Soviet system to turn into a parliamentary democracy, called the October Revolution the "greatest democratic revolution in the history of humankind," and emphasized that the Soviet regime had "deep historical and social roots in the Russian people."[101] On the international level, he deemed the use of parliaments by communists acceptable, similar to the Comintern (Trotskii 1931, 3–4).

While the right and radical left in the emigration denounced parliamentarism, some émigré authors continued to support it, although many of them also acknowledged its crisis. Vishniak concluded his memoirs, originally published in 1932, with the assertion that Russia could achieve freedom and prosperity only through a constituent assembly (Vishniak 2010, 355). Chernov maintained that formal democracy needed to transform into genuine social democracy through a just resolution of the social issue.[102]

Georgii Davidovich Gurvich, a legal scholar who was teaching in Paris at the time, mentioned the Communists', Eurasianists', and fascists' attacks on parliamentarism in his 1927 article. Gurvich perceived the crisis of parliamentarism in complex party alignments and the need for cabinets to address technical issues. His solution was a new separation of powers between the state and society as well as between political and economic democracy. Recognizing the merits of corporatism, Gurvich suggested building economic democracy upon "group, industrial, and professional representation" while maintaining citizen representation as the basis for political democracy. He asserted that an upper chamber, based on professional representation, would serve as an intermediary between political and economic democracy. Gurvich argued that such a chamber required a developed industrial democracy and, consequently, could only be established in developed countries, that is, not in Russia, where the Soviet system had nothing in common with economic democracy. In his opinion, the Soviet system of representation was based on affiliating voters with fixed groups (village, county, or factory), reminiscent of the social-estate curial system that once existed in Prussia and in the late Russian Empire. Gurvich maintained that following the overthrow of the Communist dictatorship, Russia needed to return to the "normal type of political democracy" based upon the representation of all citizens. In his view, due to the absence of stable European-type corporations and the prevalence of a homogenous peasant (*muzhik*) population, the establishment of political professional representation in Russia in the ensuing decades was unnecessary and unfeasible (G. D. Gurvich 1927, 326, 345–8).

Sergei Vladislavovich Zavadskii, who was a professor at the Russian Law Faculty in Prague at the time, proposed an alternative approach to resolving the crisis of parliamentarism in 1931. Among the issues with contemporary parliamentarism, he identified the transfer of legislative activity to cabinets, while the parliaments themselves merely serviced the tasks of the cabinets that did not necessarily align with state-wide objectives. Zavadskii's solution was to create two separate parliaments, a cabinet without a minister of justice, and a completely independent court system with broad participation of elected jurors. The first of the two unicameral

parliaments would be legislative and formed through proportional elections, and the second one would be administrative and formed through majoritarian elections. The ministers would be accountable to the latter parliament, which would also be responsible for decisions regarding the declaration of war and the state budget, that is, the matters that were not strictly defined as lawmaking in the conventional sense (Zavadskii 1931, 352, 356–8).

In 1928, Fedor Avgustovich Stepun, a philosopher, historian, and sociologist who was then a professor of sociology in Dresden, criticized the Western European model of parliamentary democracy for its "indifference to questions of worldview" and argued for a "religious-metaphysical deepening of politics." However, he rejected any "ideocracy of communist, fascist, racist, or Eurasianist kind," asserting that Western European parliamentarism, despite its shortcomings, was still much better than "ideocratism," which represented the emergence of violence and leaned "toward Bolshevik Satanism" (Stepun 1928, 367, 370). Stepun based his 1934 article on Russia's future on the premise that the people were not autonomized but constituted a collective whole, a collective personality, which had a religious meaning. He argued that the best political system for Russia needed a combination of a strong presidency and freely elected soviets (Stepun 1934, 16, 22–3). The same year, the editors of the journal *Novyi grad* ("New City"), which Stepun co-founded, labeled Stalinism a Russian form of fascism (Editorial 1934, 9–10).

Many of the non-Russian émigré activists from the territory of the former empire supported the independence of the respective national states. In most cases, this implied the establishment of republics with potent parliaments, as many among them had participated in non-Bolshevik governments during the Civil War. Certain activists remained involved with governments-in-exile, including those of the Democratic Republic of Georgia and the Belarusian People's Republic. In 1926, Chernov, Mykyta Iukhymovych Shapoval, and several other Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Armenian socialists formed the Socialist League of the New East in Prague. Its program was based on the principle of national self-determination, recognizing the right to full independence for all the peoples of the former Russian Empire. The League envisioned the potential emergence of a unified state in the future, one that would be referred to as "New East," "Eastern Europe," or the "Free Union of the National Republics of the East," rather than "Russia" (White 2010, 81–3; Rudling 2015, 166, 179–80, 198; Shkandrij 2015, 21). Broader political trends in Europe also affected non-Russian activists, leading to the development of anti-parliamentary programs among them. In 1928, Volodymyr Ievhenovych Martynets', one of the founders of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists in 1929, argued for the need to end the chaos and anarchy of political parties (Shkandrij 2015, 44).

Conclusion

Although there was some competition during Soviet elections locally, the multi-tire nomination of the supreme government bodies filtered out all possible opposition. At the top level of the Soviet government, the party was in full control, and even the splits within the Bolshevik leadership did not seem to have any significant

effect on the debates at the USSR Congresses of Soviets and in the TsIK. By the start of the 1930s, there was hardly any dissensus in the TsIK at all, whereas at the USSR Congresses, there had never been any. In this context, the major functions of the Congress of Soviets and the TsIK were symbolic, with descriptive representation showcasing the Soviet advances in social, gender, and national equality. In this respect, the Soviet assemblies did not become an alternative to Western parliaments as functioning deliberative legislatures.

As for parliamentarism in general, its crisis was a major topic for the Bolsheviks and their opponents in the emigration. The Bolsheviks considered the parliament a moribund institution that the bourgeoise ostensibly did not need anymore, with fascism offering an easier means of exercising their class dictatorship. Nonetheless, the Bolshevik leaders did not exclude parliamentary tactics from the Comintern's instructions to Western communist parties. In discussions of domestic affairs, many Bolsheviks continued to refer to the Soviet assemblies as parliaments despite the attempts of legal scholars and some party leaders to prove that they were completely different institutions.

The ornamental character of Soviet institutions was not a secret either for domestic or foreign audiences, including émigré authors. However, the design of the soviets itself proved to be an alternative to Western parliamentarism for many among the latter. Some émigré authors saw in the soviets corporatist institutions that could fit their antiparliamentary designs. Others saw in them democratic institutions that could be liberated from the Communist Party and used in a future Russian government. In the meantime, with no USSR Congresses of Soviets taking place in 1932–1934, the future of this institution remained uncertain.

Notes

1 *Izvestiia* (Moscow), July 7, 1923: 1.
2 Russian: Avel' Safronovich Enukidze.
3 The total number of mandates with decisive vote was 1,781, but over 200 delegates did not travel to the Congress (VI S"ezd sovetov SSSR 1931, 21:1).
4 *Izvestiia*, July 7, 1923: 1, 3.
5 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 2, d. 276, l. 3 (Verbatim Report of the Plenum of the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission, February 7–12, 1927, printed).
6 Although there were national communist parties in the union republics, they were completely subordinate to the VKP(b). Therefore, the text uses "the party" for the VKP(b) and the national communist parties within the USSR.
7 Russian: Ian Ernestovich Rudzutak.
8 Bukharin was removed from the Politburo in November 1929; Tomskii and Rykov were removed from the Politburo in 1930.
9 The policy of repression against prosperous peasants (*kulaks*).
10 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 356, l. 2, 8 (Politburo Minutes No. 8, May 24, 1923); *Izvestiia*, July 7, 1923: 3.
11 RGASPI, f. 558, op. 1, d. 3414, l. 7–11 (I. V. Stalin to all members of the Politbiuro, February 4, 1923).
12 RGASPI, f. 78, op. 7, d. 3, l. 2–3 (Report by T. V. Sapronov on his proposals on the issue of two chambers, March 6, 1923).
13 The name was taken from that of a consultative body under the RSFSR People's Commissariat of Nationalities (Ignat'ev 1926, 81).

14 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 358, l. 2, 4–6 (Politburo Minutes No. 10, June 4, 1923).
15 Constitution of Switzerland, 1974, accessed March 1, 2023, https://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/sz01000_.html.
16 *Izvestiia*, July 7, 1923: 1.
17 They were not called chambers in the Constitution.
18 Disagreements were to be resolved the way the Politburo suggested.
19 Russian: Nikolai Alekseevich Skrypnik (Skripnik).
20 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 392, l. 2–3 (Politburo Minutes No. 44, November 12, 1923).
21 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 2, d. 148, l. 85 (Verbatim Report of the Central Committee Plenum, October 26, 1924, with visible edits by the speakers); RGASPI, f. 17, op. 2, d. 276, l. 4 (Verbatim Report of the Plenum of the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission, February 7–12, 1927, printed).
22 RGASPI, f. 78, op. 7, d. 74, l. 5–16 (Report to M. I. Kalinin from A. Enukidze on the issue of deviation of the instructions on the reelection of soviets, issued by the USSR TsIK and the TsIKs of the union republics, from the Constitution and party directives, April 30, 1926).
23 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 486, l. 14–16 (Politbiuro Minutes No. 46, January 27, 1925).
24 That is, non-titular groups in the respective units of the Soviet state.
25 RGASPI, f. 78, op. 7, d. 40, l. 39 (A. Enukidze, Draft Circular Letter of the Central Committee of the RCP(b) to all bureaus of the Central Committee, central committees of national parties, regional committees, and provincial committees of the RCP(b) on the regular reelection of soviets, 1925).
26 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 526, l. 12–13, 16–17 (Politbiuro Minutes No. 86, October 29, 1925).
27 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 615, l. 2 (Politbiuro Minutes No. 82, January 31, 1927).
28 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 2, d. 276, l. 4–39, 55 (Verbatim Report of the Plenum of the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission, February 7–12, 1927, printed).
29 See Tsentral'naia izbiratel'naia komissiia Prezidiuma TsIK SSSR (1929, 36). These numbers differ across different official sources, see, for instance, Tsentral'naia izbiratel'naia komissiia Prezidiuma TsIK SSSR (1931). Turnout data for earlier elections in the entire USSR are incomplete.
30 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 664, l. 4 (Politbiuro Minutes No. 1, December 22, 1927); RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 667, l. 2 (Politbiuro Minutes No. 4, January 5, 1928); (Danilov, Manning, and Viola 2002, 4:29; Goldman 2022).
31 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 717, l. 17–22 (Politbiuro Minutes No. 55, December 20, 1928); RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 718, l. 3 (Politbiuro Minutes No. 56 Politbiuro, December 27, 1928).
32 RGASPI, f. 78, op. 7, d. 142, l. 1 (From the Secretariat of the Presidium of the USSR TsIK to the Head of the Secretariat of the Chairman of the USSR TsIK, January 1929).
33 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 2, d. 460, l. 157–63 (Verbatim Report of the Plenum of the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission, December 17–21, 1930, printed).
34 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 854, l. 5 (Politbiuro Minutes No. 69, October 15, 1931).
35 Russian: Vlas Iakovlevich Chubar'.
36 RGASPI, f. 78, op. 7, d. 22, l. 3–5 (M. I. Kalinin, V. Ia. Chubar, and A. Enukidze, Draft Instructions of the Central Committee RCP(b) to the Communist factions of the TsIK, Sovnarkom, Council of Labor and Defense, members of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection, people's commissars of the USSR on strengthening the Union of Republics as a single Union State on the basis of the Constitution of the Union, 1924).
37 RGASPI, f. 78, op. 7, d. 45, l. 3 (Letter from M. I. Kalinin to I. V. Stalin on strengthening the work of the Presidium of the Council of Nationalities, June 1925).
38 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 2, d. 148, l. 82–3 (Verbatim Report of the Central Committee Plenum, October 26, 1924, with visible edits by the speakers).
39 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 2, d. 172, l. 8–9 (Verbatim Report of the Central Committee Plenum, April 25, 1925, with edits by the speakers).

40 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 2, d. 276, l. 3 (Verbatim Report of the Central Committee Plenum and the Central Control Commission, February 7–12, 1927, printed).
41 Russian: Anastas Ivanovich Mikoian.
42 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 2, d. 128, l. 14 (Verbatim Report of the Central Committee Plenum, March 31–April 2, 1924, printed).
43 Russian: Samed Aga Agamalyogly.
44 Russian: Afanasii Ivanovich Butsenko.
45 Russian: Aleksandr Grigor'evich Cherviakov.
46 *Izvestiia*, January 31, 1933: 1.
47 *Izvestiia*, February 4, 1933: 3.
48 *Izvestiia*, January 31, 1933: 1.
49 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 2, d. 148, l. 87–93 (Verbatim Report of the Central Committee Plenum, October 26, 1924, with visible edits by the speakers); RGASPI, f. 17, op. 2, d. 165, l. 15, 30 (Verbatim Report of the Central Committee Plenum, January 17–20, 1925, printed).
50 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 395, l. 3 (Politbiuro Minutes No. 47, November 22, 1923); RGASPI, f. 17, op. 2, d. 111, l. 2 (Minutes No. 10 of the Central Committee Plenum, January 29, 1924); RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 494, l. 3–6 (Politbiuro Minutes No. 54, March 26, 1925); RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 569, l. 4 (Politbiuro Minutes No. 35, June 24, 1926); RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 605, l. 3–4 (Politbiuro Minutes No. 72, December 2, 1926); RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 615, l. 2 (Politbiuro Minutes No. 82, January 31, 1927); RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 622, l. 5–6 (Minutes No. 89 of Politbiuro, March 3, 1927); RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 679, l. 2 (Minutes No. 17 of Politbiuro, March 29, 1928); RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 706, l. 1 (Minutes No. 44 of Politbiuro, September 27, 1928); RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 723, l. 4 (Politbiuro Minutes No. 61, January 24, 1929); RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 729, l. 5 (Politbiuro Minutes No. 67, March 7, 1929); RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 741, l. 6 (Minutes No. 81 of Politbiuro, May 23, 1929); RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 793, l. 6 (Minutes No. 5 of Politbiuro, August 25, 1930); RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 906, l. 3–4 (Politbiuro Minutes No. 122, November 13, 1932); RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 935, l. 7 (Minutes No. 150 of Politbiuro, December 5, 1933); RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 954, l. 30 (Minutes No. 16 of the Politbiuro, November 13, 1934).
51 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 2, d. 278, l. 13–15 (Verbatim Report of the Central Committee Plenum, April 13–16, 1927, with speaker's edits); RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 622, l. 6 (Politbiuro Minutes No. 89, March 3, 1927); RGASPI, f. 78, op. 7, d. 60, l. 20–22 (Minutes No. 1 of the Commission for directing the Second Congress of Soviets of the USSR, January 28, 1924); RGASPI, f. 78, op. 7, d. 60, l. 56–7 (Minutes of the Commission for directing the Third Congress of Soviets of the USSR, May 12, 1925); RGASPI, f. 78, op. 7, d. 60, l. 61–62 (Minutes of the Commission for directing the Fourth Congress of Soviets of the USSR, March 12, 1927); RGASPI, f. 78, op. 7, d. 63, l. 11 (Draft Resolution of the Session of the USSR TsIK on the report of the Worker–Peasant Government of Ukraine, 1926).
52 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 2, d. 165, l. 45–7 (Verbatim Report of the Plenum of the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission, January 17–20, 1925, printed).
53 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 2, d. 276, l. 56 (Verbatim Report of the Plenum of the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission, February 7–12, 1927, printed).
54 He did not list individual groups and did not specify to which category the Azerbaijani delegates, who were from the Caucasus and also Turkic speakers, were ascribed.
55 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 814, l. 18 (Politbiuro Minutes No. 27, February 25, 1931).
56 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 2, d. 276, l. 10, 19–22 (Verbatim Report of the Plenum of the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission, February 7–12, 1927, printed).
57 GTsMSIR, 4989/26e (Members of the Fourth USSR TsIK at the fourth session, December 3–15, 1928).
58 Russian: Faizulla Gubaidullaevich Khodzhaev.
59 Russian: Mumin Suleimanovich Khodzhaev.

60 *Ogonek*, no. 23, 1925: [8–10].
61 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 2, d. 165, l. 47 (Verbatim Report of the Plenum of the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission, January 17–20, 1925, printed).
62 *Ogonek*, no. 22, 1934: [1]
63 RGASPI, f. 78, op. 7, d. 60, l. 5 (Minutes No. 1 of the Commission, appointed by the Politbiuro on the issue of preparing to the sessions of the VTsIK and the TsIK SSR, October 18, 1923).
64 *Gudok* (Moscow), February 28, 1925: 2.
65 Russian: Noi Nikolaevich Zhordaniia.
66 *Gudok*, March 4, 1925: 2.
67 *Pravda* (Moscow), October 16, 1927: 1.
68 *Izvestiia*, October 21, 1927: 2.
69 *Izvestiia*, January 31, 1933: 1.
70 See, for instance, *Izvestiia*, November 16, 1933: 1.
71 *Izvestiia* published an annex on the tenth anniversary of the newspaper in March 1917, which featured multiple USSR TsIK chairmen, but Kalinin was still portrayed as the first among them. *Izvestiia*, March 13, 1927: annex. 4.
72 *Ogonek*, no. 37, 1924: [1].
73 *Krokodil*, no. 2, 1923: cover.
74 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 2, d. 165, l. 38 (Verbatim Report of the Plenum of the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission, January 17–20, 1925, printed); *Krokodil*, no. 46, 1923: cover; *Smekhach*, no. 22, 1925: cover; *Zvezda* (Minsk), March 12, 1924: 1; March 15, 1924: 3; (Petrovskii 1925).
75 *Pravda poligrafista* (Moscow), December 16, 1934: 1.
76 RGASPI, f. 78, op. 1, d. 435, l. 3, 6 (Speech by M. I. Kalinin at the Territorial Congress of Shock Collective Farmers of the North Caucasus, February 26, 1933).
77 RGASPI, f. 78, op. 1, d. 436, l. 97–98 (Conversation between Comrade Kalinin and collective farmers at the collective farm "Zavet Il'icha," village of Churlino, Arsky District, Tatar ASSR, May 17, 1933).
78 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 563, l. 3 (Politburo Minutes No. 29, May 31, 1926); RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 583, l. 4 (Politburo Minutes No. 49, August 26, 1926).
79 Russian: Dmitrii Zakharovich Manuil'skii.
80 RGASPI, f. 495, op. 1, d. 89, l. 4–6 (ECCI Directive to the Communist Party of Turkey, January 25, 1925).
81 Russian: Otto Vil'gel'movich Kuusinen.
82 *Izvestiia*, October 19, 1924: 4; *Ogonek*, no. 9, 1927: cover; no. 51, 1928: cover; *Pravda*, February 22, 1927: 3 (II S"ezd sovetov SSSR 1924, 5; IV S"ezd sovetov SSSR 1927, 54; Tsentral'nyi ispolnitel'nyi komitet SSSR 1928a, 150, 795).
83 Russian: Alibek Alibekovich Takho-Godi.
84 *Pravda*, February 4, 1927: 3.
85 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 2, d. 278, l. 13 (Verbatim Report of the Central Committee Plenum, April 13–16, 1927, with speaker's edits).
86 *Izvestiia*, October 16, 1927: 2.
87 *Pravda*, August 1, 1926: 4.
88 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 2, d. 278, l. 18 (Verbatim Report of the Central Committee Plenum, April 13–16, 1927, with speaker's edits).
89 This is a paraphrase from Nikolai Alekseevich Nekrasov's poem *Reflections at the Front Door* (1858), which was popular among revolutionary-minded intelligentsia in the form of a song.
90 *Los Angeles Times*, November 7, 1923: I3; *The Christian Science Monitor* (Boston), January 12, 1924: 1; *The New York Times*, June 30, 1923: 13; *The New York Times*, March 4, 1925: 4; *The Wall Street Journal* (New York), December 29, 1933: 4.
91 *The Boston Daily Globe*, July 6, 1923: 9.

92 *The Washington Post*, July 6, 1923: 1.
93 *The New York Times*, February 17, 1925: 25.
94 *Daily Boston Globe*, January 14, 1933: 9.
95 *The Wall Street Journal*, December 29, 1933: 4.
96 *Badischer Beobachter* (Karlsruhe), June 13, 1928: 1.
97 *Novoe Russkoe Slovo* (New York), June 11, 1929: 2.
98 *Novoe Russkoe Slovo*, June 11, 1929: 2.
99 *Novoe Russkoe Slovo*, February 19, 1929: 3.
100 RGASPI, f. 74, op. 2, d. 50, l. 114–14 rev. (L. D. Trotskii, "Where does the Russian Revolution lead? An important question for Russia and the whole world," April 1929, Information summary No. 52, April 29, 1929).
101 RGASPI, f. 74, op. 2, d. 50, l. 116–17 rev.
102 *Novoe Russkoe Slovo*, February 19, 1929: 3.

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6 A socialist parliament

The making of the Supreme Soviet and its functions, 1935–1954

> […] what was best in parliamentarism, namely, direct and equal elections by a secret ballot of representatives to the bodies of state administration with the universal participation of all toilers in them, as required by the Soviet Constitution, must now be fully carried out in the Soviet Union.
>
> We thus achieve a further development of the Soviet system in the form of a combination of directly elected local soviets with direct elections of a kind of Soviet parliaments in the republics and an all-union Soviet parliament (*prolonged applause*).
>
> (VII s"ezd Sovetov SSSR 1935, 17:28)

Viacheslav Mikhailovich Molotov, the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom), who had so vigorously opposed using the word "parliament" for Soviet assemblies before, used it when presenting the plans to reform the electoral system at the Eight USSR Congress of Soviets (January 28–February 6, 1935). Ultimately, the Soviet leadership drafted a new constitution. After eighteen years of denouncing parliamentarism, the 1936 Constitution introduced a universally elected assembly, the USSR Supreme Soviet, which was often called "parliament" in propaganda. The Constitution made it "the supreme body of state power" and the only legislative authority, introducing thereby some separation of powers, which the Bolsheviks also opposed before. Many features of the USSR Central Executive Committee (TsIK), which was the supreme body between the Congresses of Soviets, were transferred to the Supreme Soviet. The Supreme Soviet also met only for short sessions. Its Presidium (the "collegial president")[1] had broad legislative and executive authority between the sessions.

The adoption of the 1936 Constitution was connected to domestic and international developments. The Soviet leadership sought social stability and reconciliation with at least some of the groups that had been persecuted in the previous years. In July 1935, Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin, who participated in drafting the new constitution, published an article celebrating the emergence of a unified Soviet people through the cohesion of classes and nationalities. A "democratic" Soviet Union was also supposed to facilitate the shift of politics in foreign states to the left and help the struggle against fascism (Khlevniuk 1996, 156–7; Whittington 2019, 147).

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By the time the 1936 Constitution was adopted, the initial collective leadership of the Bolshevik Politburo had given way to one-man rule. Iosif Vissarionovich Stalin's dictatorship achieved its apex with the onset of the Great Terror (1937–1938). According to J. Arch Getty, Stalin anticipated contested elections to the Supreme Soviet, but the flow of reports on reenergized oppositional activity had convinced him that there was a security threat. These reports contributed to Stalin's decision to unleash a mass terror against ordinary citizens, in addition to the purge of the party leadership, and to make the elections uncontested (Getty 1991, 18, 2013, 211–12, 219–23, 234–6). Indeed, the materials of the Bolshevik Central Committee show that contested elections were implied. However, the Stalinist ideology and practice of the party called into question their very possibility. The notion of the emerging classless society meant that there could be no different parties or political interests; the notion of the party's effectiveness implied that any candidate not backed by the party was a failure. As a result, the elections to the Soviet "parliament" were uncontested until perestroika. All candidates were pre-appointed by the party, and the so-called "bloc of Communists and non-party members" always won all of the seats.

The Supreme Soviet became neither a legislature nor an institution of dissensus. The apparatuses of the Bolshevik Central Committee and the Sovnarkom, which Stalin chaired since 1941, drafted resolutions to be approved by Stalin as the *de facto* supreme authority (Khlevniuk 2008, xiv–xvi, xix–xxi). The Supreme Soviet and its Presidium unanimously ratified whatever was submitted to them. The establishment of a nominal parliament hence did not mean a departure from the transnational antiparliamentary developments. In the latter half of the 1930s, authoritarian and totalitarian regimes consolidated across the world – in Italy, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Yugoslavia, Japan, China, Thailand, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Brazil, and elsewhere (Hentschke 2006; Pinto 2009, 2019; Jessen and Richter 2011).

Apart from token legitimation of the regime, the main functions of the elections and the Supreme Soviet were ritualized representation of total loyalty to the party and Stalin and the amplification of the official discourse. Through descriptive representation, the Supreme Soviet was supposed to demonstrate the victory of the imperial revolution (Gerasimov 2017) in the USSR by representing previously marginalized groups and demonstrating the harmony of their interests. The presence of non-Russian women in the Supreme Soviet was also supposed to demonstrate intersectional (Valentine 2007) advances in the USSR. Apart from this, individual deputies, the Supreme Soviet Presidium, and the Presidium's Chairman received countless petitions from Soviet citizens and acted upon them. This feedback mechanism informed the government about the population's economic and social hardships and allowed to provide their targeted alleviation.

The Soviet version of "parliament" also became a key instrument in empire-building. Parts of Poland (Western Ukraine and Western Belarus), Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were annexed to the USSR in 1939–1940 through universally elected assemblies, convened after Soviet military occupation of the respective territories. After the Second World War (1939–1945), the Soviet Union refrained from direct

annexations and established formally sovereign dependencies instead, continuing the policy of new imperialism that began with Mongolia as the first satellite state. Parliamentary and quasi-parliamentary bodies were among the structural adjustments used in building the informal Soviet empire (Lattimore 1956; Wolf 1985; Duara 2007). By the end of 1954, all Soviet dependencies in Europe and Asia adopted new constitutions or introduced substantial amendments to the existing ones. Although they had some differences in the texts, most of them declared parliaments the supreme bodies of state power, similar to the 1936 Soviet Constitution. With the exception of East Germany, standing bodies with legislative authority between parliamentary sessions had been established in all Soviet dependencies.

As argued by Ilya Gerasimov, the Soviet ideology was "a quasi-discourse: it had a single authoritative author known to everyone and it allowed no modifications or even creative additions by those willing to partake in it" (Gerasimov 2018, 181–2, 190). In this context, the public interpretations of parliaments and parliamentarism conformed to Stalin's views. Outside of the official discourse, however, there were spaces for dissent. As demonstrated by B. M. Firsov, even at the height of Stalinism, the loyalty to the regime was not absolute (Firsov 2008, 11). This was reflected in occasional criticism of Soviet institutions within the country.

The new Soviet institutions attracted much attention abroad. The participants of the Soviet-led communist movement were uncritical and, in most cases, repeated Soviet propaganda. In English-speaking academia, however, well-founded critical interpretations of the Supreme Soviet and the state system as a whole prevailed thanks in part to the involvement of émigré intellectuals. Most émigré authors denounced the Supreme Soviet, but their takes on parliamentarism varied. Whereas before the Second World War, many continued to speak of the crisis of parliamentarism and democracy, after the war support for the conventional liberal understanding of democracy predominated. The formal establishment of parliaments in most states across the world marked a new global fascination with parliamentarism.

The introduction of the Supreme Soviet

The 1936 Soviet Constitution departed from Vladimir Il'ich Lenin's ideas about the state. Universal elections, a parliament, and some separation of powers meant that the Communist leadership abandoned the project of inventing entirely new government institutions and accepted some of the liberal elements of the modern state. The launch of the Great Terror, the uncontested elections, and the *de facto* appointment of all members of the Supreme Soviet, however, meant that the innovations were nominal.

Stalin initiated the revision of the electoral system sometime in late 1934–early 1935. Abel Enukidze, the Secretary of the TsIK Presidium, prepared a note on the matter upon Stalin's request. The note argued that due to the "tremendous growth of the socialist economy and culture," the increase in the worker population, the spread of industrial enterprises in rural areas, the "cultural upsurge in the national republics," and the influence and authority of the Communist Party, there was no need to retain the complex elections. It suggested making the elections to local soviets and

the executive committees of all levels direct and equal; congresses of soviets were to be abolished, although the TsIK was to retain the right to convene the USSR Congress of Soviets in extraordinary cases. The note proposed retaining uncontested candidate lists to be compiled by the party organs, the Komsomol, and trade unions.[2]

On January 30, 1935, the Politburo resolved to amend the 1924 Constitution and create a constitutional commission under the TsIK.[3] In the note, which Stalin submitted with the draft of the Politburo resolution, he anticipated that the reform would bring domestic political benefits and help fight "international fascism" (Khlevniuk 1996, 157). On February 1, 1935, the Central Committee approved Stalin's proposal to "further" democratize the electoral system by introducing equal and direct elections by a secret ballot so that it reflected the new class structure of the USSR in the context of industrialization and collectivization.[4]

The TsIK's constitutional commission began its meetings on July 7, 1935. Among its members were Stalin (Chairman), Bukharin, Karl Radek,[5] Aliaksandr Rygoravich Charviakou, Fayzulla Xo'jayev, and others.[6] Its work was connected to global developments: Radek was to organize the translation and publication of the existing constitutions and fundamental legal acts of the "main bourgeois countries," both "bourgeois-democratic" and "fascist," and circulate them among the members of the commission.[7]

Reading the 1874 Constitution of Switzerland, Stalin marked the provisions on the Federal Assembly, which was the "supreme authority of the union" and consisted of two chambers, the National Council and the Council of States.[8] He also read German legal acts, including the 1933 Enabling Act that established Adolf Hitler's dictatorship, and marked the provisions on uncontested elections and the formal single-party regime.[9]

Instead of making amendments, the commission drafted a new constitution.[10] The final draft was approved by the Central Committee Plenum on June 1, 1936. The Plenum resolved to convene the Congress of Soviets for considering the draft. The leaders of the union republics were instructed to develop new constitutions of the union and autonomous republics to follow the new draft constitution of the USSR.[11]

The dualism of the existing Soviet system was retained. According to the draft, the USSR was "a socialist state of workers and peasants," with the power of urban and rural toilers being represented by the soviets. At the same time, the USSR was defined as a union state based on "the voluntary unification" of soviet socialist republics. The draft included a chapter on the fundamental rights and obligations of citizens, including the freedom of speech, press, assembly, and association. According to the article on the right of association, the most active members "of the working class and other segments of toilers" united into the Communist Party of the USSR, "the leading core of all organizations of the toilers, both civic and state."[12]

Unlike the 1924 Constitution, the draft introduced some separation of powers, with the USSR Supreme Soviet being the "supreme" and sole legislative body. It had a five-year term and was to have two regular sessions per year. Its deputies had immunity for the whole term. Like the TsIK, the Supreme Soviet had two chambers. The Council of the Union (instead of the Union Council of the TsIK) was to be universally elected; the Council of Nationalities was to include delegates

of the supreme soviets of union republics, autonomous republics, and autonomous regions. The two chambers were equal and there was a mechanism of conciliation. The USSR Supreme Soviet formed the Sovnarkom, "the supreme executive and administrative body." The Sovnarkom was accountable to the Supreme Soviet and could issue resolutions and orders. The Supreme Soviet also elected the Supreme Court, "the supreme judicial body," and appointed the Procurator of the USSR, who had the function of "supreme" legal oversight. The Supreme Soviet could form commissions.[13] Making the Supreme Soviet the "supreme body" and retaining the two chambers, the draft made the Soviet "parliament" even closer to the Swiss Federal Assembly than the TsIK was.[14]

The duration of the USSR Supreme Soviet's sessions was not specified. It formed a Presidium of 35 members and a secretary. The Presidium was accountable to the Supreme Soviet but had broad competence between the sessions. It ratified international treaties, declared war in case the USSR was attacked; it could annul the resolutions of the union and republican sovnarkoms and appoint and dismiss ministers. It also performed as the collective head of state, accrediting foreign diplomatic representatives, presenting awards, and issuing pardons. The Presidium could organize referenda. It was not, however, granted full legislative competence, having only the right to interpret the existing laws "by issuing corresponding decrees."[15]

The same system of government was established in the union and autonomous republics, which had their own supreme soviets, sovnarkoms, and supreme courts. Below the republican level, the universally elected soviets of toilers' deputies were "bodies of state power" rather than those of self-government. The soviets formed executive committees as their executive and administrative bodies.[16]

The chapter on the electoral system stated that the elections to all soviets, including the USSR Supreme Soviet, were universal, equal, and direct by a secret ballot. All citizens over the age of 18 had active and passive voting rights. Only "insane persons" and those who were disenfranchised by court could not vote. The right to nominate candidates was granted to social organizations and "societies of toilers," namely the Communist Party, trade unions, cooperatives, organizations of the youth, and cultural societies. No right to form other political organizations or parties was granted. The draft reaffirmed the imperative mandate: deputies had to report to their voters and could be recalled by their majority.[17]

When presenting the draft at the Plenum, Stalin argued that the liquidation of the exploiter classes changed the class structure of the Soviet society. There was a new working class, a new peasantry, and a new toiling intelligentsia in the USSR; the boundaries between the Soviet toiling classes and the intelligentsia were disappearing; the old class exclusiveness was vanishing. All this meant that a unified Soviet society was emerging. Stalin hence presented an inclusionary vision of the Soviet nation in class terms. Presenting the Supreme Soviet, he argued that having four bodies with legislative authority, the Congress of Soviets, the TsIK, the TsIK Presidium, and the Sovnarkom, undermined the stability of legislation and confused the population.[18]

Stalin anticipated that the new constitution would become a mobilizing force for the Soviet population. He also suggested that in those countries where the workers

were not in power the Soviet constitution could serve as a political program. It could also be used by the "fraternal," that is, communist parties in the propaganda against fascism.[19] The international importance of the draft was reaffirmed before its adoption when the Politburo resolved to translate it into German, English, and French.[20]

The Plenum approved the draft without any discussion. Stalin then proposed to convene the Congress of Soviets for adopting the constitution in November, which would leave four months for a popular discussion.[21] This discussion provided an outlook into the Soviet public opinion (Lomb 2017; Velikanova 2018). Soviet citizens submitted many proposals on the voting system and some on the Supreme Soviet. In the Mordovian ASSR, for instance, many suggested excluding the "alien elements, such as, priests, *kulaks*," "scalpers," or generally those who had no voting rights according to the current Constitution. There were suggestions to extend the term of the Supreme Soviet to five years, to have it meet three times a year, and to extend the representation in the Council of Nationalities to the nationalities that lived together but had no territorial autonomy.[22] During the discussion, regional and central authorities became concerned about "anti-Soviet activity" (Lomb 2017, 123).

Stalin mentioned some of the amendments that had been proposed during the popular discussion at the Eighth USSR Congress of Soviets (Figure 6.1) on



Figure 6.1 The Eighth Extraordinary USSR Congress of Soviets. Moscow, November 25–December 5, 1936. Left to right, front row: N. I. Ezhov, N. S. Khrushchev, A. A. Zhdanov, L. M. Kaganovich, K. E. Voroshilov, I. V. Stalin, V. M. Molotov, M. I. Kalinin; second row, seated: V. Ia. Chubar (second), G. M. Malenkov (third), N. A. Bulganin (sixth); standing, left to right: Ia. B. Gamarnik (second). GTsMSIR, 15234/24.

November 25, 1936. He rejected all suggestions to change the source of sovereignty from the "workers and peasants," claiming that "Marxists" could not exclude class from the constitution. Stalin also rejected the amendments that would limit the voting rights, arguing that the limitations were irrelevant since the exploiter classes had been destroyed (VIII chrezvychainyi s"ezd Sovetov SSSR 1936, 1:25–6, 31–2).

Discussing the suggestions on the Supreme Soviet, Stalin opposed the abolition of the Council of Nationalities, as the USSR was not a nation-state but a multinational state and since nationalities had their own particularistic interests. Addressing the claim that upper chambers in Europe and America hampered progress, he asserted that this could be avoided if the two chambers were equal and formed democratically. Stalin supported the suggestions to make the two chambers equal in size and to introduce universal elections to the Council of Nationalities. He then opposed granting the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet the right to provisional legislation. "It is necessary to, finally, put an end to the situation when there is not just one body that legislates, but a number of bodies. This situation contradicts the principle of stability of laws." Stalin also rejected a popular election of the Chairman of the Presidium, claiming that "the president in the USSR" was "collegial" (VIII chrezvychainyi s"ezd Sovetov SSSR 1936, 1:29–31).

No one else discussed the amendments and they were simply passed to the Congress's editorial commission chaired by Stalin. All the amendments supported by Stalin were accepted. Although he rejected making the Presidium a legislative body, the provision on its legal competence was reformulated: "The Presidium […] interprets current laws of the USSR, issues decrees." Issuing decrees was hence not explicitly tied to the interpretation of laws. The Presidium's right to declare war was extended to the situations when this was part of mutual defense agreements. On December 5, 1936, the Congress of Soviets unanimously adopted the Constitution without any debate.[23]

Initially, the elections were supposed to be contested. The American newspaperman Roy W. Howard asked Stalin in an interview on March 1, 1936, how the new system could change the situation if only one party would participate in the elections. Stalin responded that the lists of candidates would be proposed not only by the Communist Party but also by the "civic organizations" of which there were hundreds (Borisov et al. 2010, 590). At the Eighth Congress of Soviets, however, Stalin interpreted parties as vanguards of classes and concluded that several parties could exist only in a society that had antagonistic classes. Since there was no class antagonism in the USSR, there was no foundation for multiple parties and hence for the freedom of these parties. Besides, Stalin implied that the victory of a "hostile" candidate would be treated as a failure of the Communist Party. This would only be possible if the "agitation" was bad (VIII chrezvychainyi s"ezd Sovetov SSSR 1936, 1:23, 32).

The overall political context had changed dramatically between the middle of 1936 and early 1937. The numerous reports about the increase in "anti-Soviet" activity amplified the anxieties of the leadership (Lomb 2017, 123). Although the "threats" were discussed at the Central Committee Plenum on February 26, 1937,

its participants still anticipated contested elections. In the unedited version of the transcript, Andrei Aleksandrovich Zhdanov argued: "We must be ready to meet, to face hostile organizations and hostile candidates." After Zhdanov edited the transcript, the notion of contestation remained there: "In the elections we will have to deal with hostile campaigning and hostile candidates."[24] Aleksei Ivanovich Stetskii argued that it would be difficult for "hostile organizations to present their candidates for the Supreme Soviet," but for the local soviets, village soviets in particular, the electoral struggle would be "extremely serious." To this, Stalin remarked that some soviets could fall into the hostile hands. Stetskii then spoke of the religious activists and the exposed Socialist Revolutionaries (SR) who ostensibly prepared for the elections. While Stetskii downplayed the danger, claiming that the Communist Party had "unlimited trust" of the masses, Stalin noted that the trust had some limits.[25]

Contested elections were still implied when the Central Committee Plenum discussed the draft electoral law in June 1937 (Borisov et al. 2010, 681, 685, 691). The law, adopted in July 1937, introduced the majoritarian system. The right to nominate candidates was extended to "general meetings" at enterprises, in military units, and in collective and Soviet (state) farms (Borisov et al. 2010, 716, 721). Although the Great Terror started in July 1937, there was no formal decision on making the elections uncontested. A party and government commission on preparing for the Supreme Soviet election was established in August 1937. Its tasks included the preliminary nomination of candidates. Among the commission's materials, there was a document with the anticipated or prescribed composition of the Supreme Soviet: central party and government officials (50 persons); republican and regional officials (120); district officials (55); creative professionals, scholars, engineers, and agronomists (100); teachers and doctors (50), managers in industry, transport, and agriculture (30); Stakhanovite (exceptionally productive or shock) workers (300); Stakhanovite collective farmers, chairmen of collective farms, foremen, tractor drivers, combiners, and so on (500); and Red Army servicemen (30) (Borisov et al. 2010, 733, 735).

The Party Propaganda and Agitation Department of the Central Committee informed the commission in September 1937 that "hostile elements," especially the clergy, were active and that in Leningrad religious activists sought to get at least one deputy elected. It also accused "many leaders of party organizations" of insufficient effort of preparing for the elections. On September 23, 1937, the Central Committee instructed all regional, territorial, and national party organizations to engage in "agitation-propaganda" work in the electoral districts. In particular, the propagandists were supposed to discuss the electoral law and the Constitution as well as the party policy and the international situation. The propagandists had to campaign for the party candidates (Borisov et al. 2010, 741–5).

In October 1937, the Politburo clarified that the main task of the party was no to isolate itself from the "non-party mass" of workers and peasants. In this context, the Politburo resolved that around 20 percent of the Supreme Soviet should be non-party members. Such candidates were to be nominated at voter meetings at collective farms and factories. Molotov stressed at the Central Committee Plenum

the same month that party organizations were to control the nomination of candidates. Those to be nominated jointly with the meetings of voters were to be vetted by party organizations and then approved by the Central Committee (Borisov et al. 2010, 751–3).

Stalin expressed his vision of the Supreme Soviet's composition at the Central Committee Plenum on October 12, 1937. He rejected the opinion that the more workers there were in the Supreme Soviet the better and argued that it also needed "proven politicians of regional and central scale." Stalin also claimed that the share of the non-party members did not have to be too large. Finally, he cautioned against rushing with campaigning for concrete candidates, claiming that the Central Committee needed more time to vet them.[26]

According to the Plenum's resolution, the candidates from the non-party organizations were to be nominated jointly with the party so that they would not nominate alternative candidates and thereby disperse the votes and help "the enemies of the toilers." The party's district committees were made responsible for the campaign on their territory (Borisov et al. 2010, 813–14). On December 6, 1937, the Central Committee appealed to all voters, claiming that the party participated in the elections in a bloc with the non-party members. Each Communist candidate was hence a non-party candidate and vice versa. "The Bolshevik party urges all Communists and sympathizers to vote both for party and non-party candidates unanimously, as one." Furthermore, the appeal stressed that there should not be a single voter who did not vote (Borisov et al. 2010, 825, 830).

The slogans of patriotism and defense against external and domestic (in the context of the Great Purge) enemies were central for the campaign. Famous cultural figures, who were appointed candidates, also had to campaign. The writer Aleksei Nikolaevich Tolstoi, for instance, traveled to Staraya Russa and neighboring villages in late November 1937 (Figure 6.2). *Literaturnaia gazeta* published a report on his visit.

> Not only the entire Collective Farm "Atheist" gathered at the collective farm's square, but also collective farmers from neighboring collective farms of the Penkovo Village Soviet. […]
>
> Returning to Staraya Russa in the evening [of November 29, 1937], A. N. Tolstoi spoke at a pre-election meeting of commanders, political workers, and Red Army soldiers. He spoke on the subject of love for the motherland and hatred for its enemies.[27]

The Central Committee received information on inadequate campaigning locally and demanded improvements. Local soviets and executive committees were accused of poor organization of the elections. There were issues with the publication of propaganda materials and with the supply of paper for the election (Borisov et al. 2010, 818, 820–3).

The elections took place on December 12, 1937, and became a major public event. The propaganda materials featured numerous photographs of voters, both celebrities and those who were supposed to represent specific groups of population.



Figure 6.2 Collective farmers of the "Atheist" Collective Farm of the Penkovo Village Soviet at a meeting with A. N. Tolstoi (on the podium, second from left in the front row), the candidate for the USSR Supreme Soviet in the Staraya Russa Electoral District, next to the House of Culture named after S. M. Kirov. November 29, 1937. TsGAKFFD SPb, Vr79090.

The photograph of Wayland Rudd[28] (Figure 6.3), an American and then Soviet actor, was used in propaganda materials such as the illustrated album devoted to the Supreme Soviet. The album was built on juxtaposing the Soviet institutions with their capitalist counterparts. Rudd's photograph, captioned "negro voter Rodd Veiland," was included in the section that boasted the universal character of Soviet elections, in contrast to "capitalist countries," and specified that in the southern states of the USA, "2,225,000 negroes" were disenfranchised as illiterate (Gorfunkel' and Podgornova 1938, 30–2).

The officially reported turnout was 91,113,153 people or 96.8 percent of voters. That is, around 3,000,000 people did not participate in the election. The candidates of the bloc of Communists and non-party members received 98.6 percent of votes in the Council of the Union and 97.8 percent in the Council of Nationalities. Out of the total of 1,143 deputies elected to the Council of the Union (569 members) and the Council of Nationalities (574), there were 870 party members and 273 non-party members (23.9 percent). There were 189 women (16.5 percent), 480 workers, 337 peasants, and 326 representatives of the intelligentsia (Borisov et al. 2010, 838–9). The Politburo's 20 percent quota for non-party members was hence more or less followed.

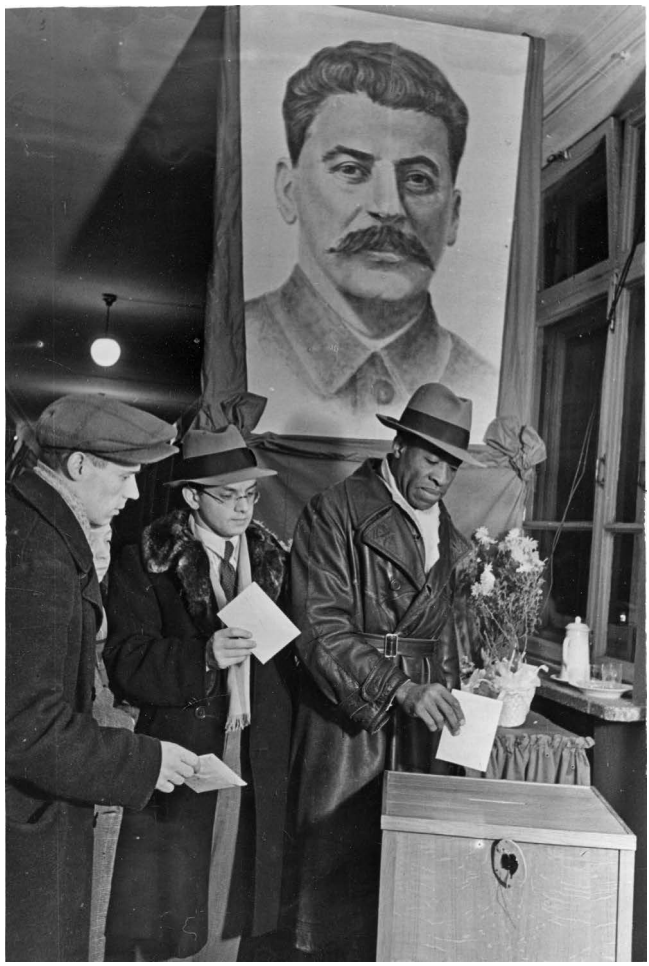


Figure 6.3 Voter of the Forty-Eight Electoral District Wayland Rudd, an actor of the Theater of V. E. Meerkhol'd, voting in the election to the USSR Supreme Soviet. Moscow, December 12, 1937. GTsMSIR, 22718/1081.

Due to the Second World War, regular elections were delayed. After the war, some changes were introduced to the state system. The Sovnarkom was renamed the Council of Ministers, while the Procurator became the Procurator General in 1946. The passive voting age was raised to 23 in 1945.[29] The number of seats in the Supreme Soviet fluctuated for the elections in 1946 (a total of 1,339 seats), 1950 (1,316 seats), and 1954 (1,347 seats). Soviet servicemen abroad elected deputies in the special districts since 1946 (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1946, 438, 444, 1950, 414, 420, 1954, 566, 572).

The end of the violent antireligious struggle during the war was reflected in the public image of the Soviet elections in 1946, when the Russian Orthodox religious

figures were also used in propaganda images, being thereby included into the Soviet people.[30] The elections themselves barely changed. Even though a departure from Stalin's personality cult began after his death in 1953, the 1954 Supreme Soviet election still prominently featured his portraits, albeit often together with those of Lenin.[31] All candidates were approved by the Central Committee.[32] The elections of 1946, 1950, and 1954 also featured a near total voter turnout and a near total victory of the "bloc of Communists and non-party members." The elections to the Supreme Soviet were staged as festive events with flags, banners, and music. Elaborate and costly campaigns predated them. Until the middle of the 1950s, even suggesting to vote against the only candidate could be classified as an anti-Soviet crime. The electoral commissions were required to ensure a 100 percent turnout (Edelman 2011, 168, 172).

Serhy Yekelchyk argued that apart from being rituals of demonstrating loyalty or campaigns of political education, Soviet elections also strengthened the Soviet community by making political participation a communal duty. The Election Day itself was far less important than the campaign that contributed to the diffusion of state ideology through daily interactions. The campaign also helped identify the potential sources of discontent (Yekelchyk 2010, 94–6). During the campaign, the party leadership also highlighted specific issues. Stalin, for instance, reaffirmed that the world remained divided into "two camps" in a speech to voters on February 9, 1946, which symbolically recognized the start of the Cold War after the joint victory in the Second World War (Sakwa 1999, 279).

Domestic functions

The main functions of the Supreme Soviet pertained to domestic and foreign propaganda and ritualized manifestations of loyalty. There was no dissensus in the Supreme Soviet apart from a single procedural matter at its opening meeting in January 1938. Rare and short sessions did not allow it to become even a nominal legislative institution. Some of the Supreme Soviet's functions, however, went beyond symbolism. Individual deputies and the Presidium received petitions and complaints from Soviet citizens and forwarded them to the relevant officials, contributing thereby to the management of the state.

The First Supreme Soviet had 12 sessions in 1938–1945. The sessions were short, with each lasting a few days. On June 18, 1942, there was a one-day session. The Second (1946–1949) and Third (1950–1953) Supreme Soviets only had five sessions each. The Fourth Supreme Soviet had nine sessions in 1954–1957. Like the Congresses of Soviets and the TsIK sessions, all sessions of the USSR Supreme Soviet were curated by the party leadership, that is, by the Politburo (replaced by the Central Committee Presidium in 1952–1966). The party leadership scheduled the sessions, adopted the agendas and the lists of speakers, approved the state budget, and made decisions on legislation, awards, and other matters. The Supreme Soviet and its Presidium had no independent agency. This practice continued after the Second World War[33] and after Stalin's death.[34]

The Supreme Soviet unanimously approved everything that was submitted to it by the party leadership and the government as well as the acts of its own

Presidium. There were occasional amendments to the budget, which originated in the party or the government. All appointments to offices were made without contestation or scrutiny. Most of the laws were adopted without even formal discussion in the Supreme Soviet. Between the start of the German invasion on June 22, 1941, and early 1945, the Supreme Soviet convened only twice. The one-day session on June 18, 1942, ratified the treaty between Great Britain and the USSR on alliance. In 1948–1949, the Supreme Soviet did not discuss any specific legislation, merely approving the budget and the decrees of the Presidium (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1942, 5, 1948, 5, 8, 1953b, 6, 10, 33).

The Supreme Soviet's two chambers often had joint sessions. The configuration of its meeting hall in the Kremlin reinforced the hierarchy between the Presidium and the rank-and-file deputies. The Presidium sat on an elevated platform and faced the deputies, which made the hall reminiscent of a class room. The Supreme Soviet's subordination to Stalin and the party was not concealed. In 1946, for instance, deputies stressed that the plan of postwar reconstruction and other objectives for the USSR were set by Stalin, while the Supreme Soviet's task was to implement rather than change them (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1946, 31, 41–2). Deliberation was hence not implied.

The Supreme Soviet Presidium, which was headed by one of the former TsIK Chairmen, Mikhail Ivanovich Kalinin, in 1938–1946, had no agency in decision-making. For instance, in August 1938, its members discussed the idea of releasing prisoners as a commendation for their effort in construction, but Stalin rejected it to keep the work force and suggested to find other forms of commendation (Khlevniuk 1992, 88–9). Symbolically, the institutional changes did not change Kalinin's status as the "all-union elder." He received personal letters with expressions of gratitude. Children drew his portraits and addressed him as the "Soviet President" and "beloved grandpa."[35] Nikolai Mikhailovich Shvernik, a former trade unionist, replaced Kalinin in 1946. He was not a member of Stalin's innermost circle and did not have the same stature as Kalinin (Fitzpatrick 2017, 179).

The Supreme Soviet and its Presidium played a symbolic role in the transition of power after Stalin. A joint meeting of the Central Committee Plenum, the Council of Ministers, and the Supreme Soviet Presidium formally appointed the new highest officials on March 5, 1953, although the decision about them was made by the Bureau of the Central Committee Presidium. The new appointments were approved by the Supreme Soviet without any discussions at the one-day session on March 15, 1953. Kliment Efremovich Voroshilov headed the Supreme Soviet Presidium, while Georgii Maksimilianovich Malenkov was appointed Prime Minister.[36]

In May 1953, Voroshilov, who was a member of the Central Committee Presidium, initiated some changes in the operation of the Supreme Soviet Presidium and the Supreme Soviet. In a critical memorandum, Voroshilov argued that the Supreme Soviet Presidium hardly ever convened as a collegial body. Most of its members did not participate even in formal decision-making. Voroshilov also pointed out that the sessions of the Supreme Soviet were taking place only once a year, which was against the Constitution, and that neither the Supreme Soviet nor its Presidium adopted any major laws.[37]

On Voroshilov's initiative, the operation of the Supreme Soviet Presidium became more organized, with new regulations on pardons and awards approved by the Central Committee Presidium later in 1953. The position of the USSR Supreme Soviet and its Presidium in the Soviet system, however, did not change. Most decisions continued to be made within the Central Committee. Although supreme soviet presidiums of the USSR and union republics had some agency in making decisions on pardons, the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium had to report such decisions to the Central Committee Presidium. The decisions on awards were also made within the party but could be proposed by supreme soviet presidiums. The USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium also adopted formal resolutions on naturalization, voluntary renunciation of citizenship, and deprivation of citizenship. All this contributed to its operation as an auxiliary bureaucratic body. Much of the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium's public presence pertained to awards. It awarded not only distinguished Soviet citizens but also party leaders on the occasion of their birthdays.[38]

The speeches in the USSR Supreme Soviet, apart from those delivered by the top tier of the party leadership, did not have any original content and relied on propaganda. The "debates" were extremely repetitive, with frequent quotations from Stalin, Lenin, and, less frequently, other Bolshevik leaders as well as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Any rare criticism of the officials was preapproved and inconsequential. In most cases, the responses to official reports simply repeated their main points and praised the party, the state, or Stalin personally. After Stalin's death, he stopped being praised already in 1953, but the overall shape of the "debates" did not change.

There was only one instance of dissensus and non-unanimous voting in the Supreme Soviet until perestroika. Ivan Kupriianovych Tatarenko[39] and Petro Ivanovych Shpyl'ovyi,[40] two party functionaries from Ukraine, had a brief exchange on the meeting times of the Council of Nationalities on January 12, 1938. Tatarenko proposed changing the schedule, insisting that the evening meetings prevented deputies from exploring the cultural life of the capital: "I personally think that we have travelled here from all the republics and we will need to watch movies, theaters, but we will always be deprived of this opportunity." Shpyl'ovyi denounced the proposal, arguing that it disrespected the Council of Nationalities that "convened to deal with big state issues." Tatarenko's proposal was voted down by an unspecified majority of deputies.[41]

The Supreme Soviet served as a rostrum for the party leadership and an amplifier for propaganda. Stalin was the only deputy who could speak independently. Malenkov attempted to claim the same right after Stalin's death. Malenkov's "incorrect" speeches were mentioned when the other members of the party leadership deposed him in 1955. In particular, they denounced Malenkov's speech at the fifth session of the Third Supreme Soviet in August 1953, which focused on shifting the economic balance in favor of light industry and consumer products and was printed in English (Malenkov 1953; Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1953b, 264). Malenkov was accused of making a speech that included "big, economically unjustified promises" and "was more reminiscent of a parliamentary declaration designed to

garner cheap popularity than a responsible speech by the head of the Soviet government." Malenkov's opponents also denounced his speech, delivered at the meeting of voters on March 12, 1954.[42] Admitting to his "errors," Malenkov acknowledged that such speeches could only be made on the basis of a decision by the Central Committee Plenum.[43]

The elections and the sessions of the Supreme Soviet were part of the ritual of total unity of the Soviet citizens and their loyalty to Stalin, the party, and the state. The Soviet people was presented as a single entity.[44] Delivering the report of the credentials commission of the Council of the Union of the First Supreme Soviet, Aleksandr Sergeevich Shcherbakov, a party functionary, claimed that the party enjoyed "the greatest authority and trust of the Soviet people," citing its overwhelming majority in the chamber. He underscored the near total turnout and support for the candidates of the "bloc of Communists and non-party members," arguing that the "Soviet people" demonstrated "the invincible moral and political unity and power of the Soviet society" and "their ardent and boundless love" for Stalin. The points, partially word for word, were articulated during the discussion of the credential commissions' reports in both chambers (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1938a, 33, 37, 39, 71).

The near total turnout and the near total victory of the bloc of Communists and non-party members in 1946 was celebrated in a similar manner as the unity of the Soviet people and their trust in the party and Stalin. The victory in the Second World War was discussed as the victory of the Soviet state system (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1946, 4, 15, 33, 49). The results of the 1950 election were presented in the same way, although the role of Stalin personally was stressed even more. Besides, in the context of the Soviet peace rhetoric, the results were celebrated as a vote in favor of peace.[45] When the results of the 1954 election were discussed, no new leader was mentioned, but they continued to be presented as loyalty to the party, its Central Committee, and the government. The Soviet Union as a whole was to implement the objectives set by the Nineteenth Party Congress (October 5–14, 1952) and the Plenums of the Central Committee (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1954, 3–5).

Descriptive representation became especially important in the context of universal elections. The composition of the Supreme Soviet was supposed to demonstrate that there was full equality between gender, class, national, and other groups of the population, which implied the success of the imperial and social revolution. In 1938, Shcherbakov spoke of the class composition of the Council of the Union, which included workers, peasants, employees (*sluzhashchie*), and Soviet intelligentsia. Among the 247 workers that he mentioned, 201 had party, government, or management positions, which meant that most were actually bureaucrats. Shcherbakov added that all industrial workers were Stakhanovites. Aleksei Grigor'evich Stakhanov, the miner whose name was given to the movement and who at the time was a manager, was also elected deputy. Shcherbakov then listed the multiple nationalities, represented in the chamber, claiming that their presence manifested the "Stalinist commonwealth" of the peoples of the Soviet Union. He also recognized the election of 77 women deputies to the chamber as a

manifestation of full gender equality. Speaking of age groups, Shcherbakov noted that most deputies were no older than 40 and celebrated the 19-year-old weaver Klavdiia Fedorovna Sakharova as the youngest member of a supreme government body in the world (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1938a, 33, 35).

Shcherbakov also acknowledged the ongoing Great Terror. Speaking about the employees of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD), who were elected to the chamber, he claimed that this meant that the Soviet people supported the fight against "the enemies of the people, the vile traitors – the Trotskyist–Bukharinite hirelings of Japanese–German fascism" (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1938a, 36).

Sadyq Nurpei'isov,[46] a Kazakh Komsomol and party functionary, who delivered the report of the credentials commission in the Council of Nationalities in 1938, stressed that the very existence of two chambers was "a clear confirmation of the great victory and the correct implementation" of the nationalities policy in the USSR. Nurpei'isov claimed that the Council of Nationalities was unique globally as a chamber that reflected the peculiar interests of the toilers of various nationalities. He then listed the 54 nationalities represented in the chamber, which was met with praises of Stalin in different languages. Nurpei'isov also maintained that the nationalities policy brought "huge masses of working women of previously backward and oppressed nationalities" – the women who had "always been in especially difficult conditions" – into public life. Nurpei'isov also noted that there were many non-party members in the chamber (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1938a, 67–8).

The reports of the credentials commissions in the subsequent convocations of the Supreme Soviet followed the same pattern with minor adjustments. After the Second World War, the Red Army deputies and the special role of women in the war effort were celebrated in 1946 (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1946, 26–33, 38–43). The hierarchical nature of the Soviet community of nationalities, with the special status of the Russians, was underscored since the 1930s (Martin 1999, 348–9), but after the war it became even more accentuated. Speaking in the Council of Nationalities in 1946, P'et're Sharia,[47] a Georgian party functionary, reinforced the asymmetry between the "Great Russian people" and all other Soviet peoples, citing the former's assistance to the "formerly oppressed and backward peoples" in "economic, political, and cultural development" and its "main, decisive role in achieving the victory" in the war (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1946, 31). In 1954, special attention was paid to the 300th anniversary of the "reunification" of Ukraine and Russia (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1954, 238–44, 294–9).

Rank-and-file deputies were treated not as individual lawmakers but as distinguished representatives of specific occupational or other categories. This trope became prominent in photography, with deputies frequently pictured in occupational settings (Figure 6.4).

Many of the future deputies had been famous, at least locally or regionally, but the nomination and election to the Supreme Soviet elevated their status to that of country-wide celebrities. Deputies stressed that being nominated



Figure 6.4 E. Ia. Vashukova, a milkmaid of the collective farm "New Life" and deputy of the USSR Supreme Soviet, makes her daughter, a young milkmaid, acquainted with an electric milking machine. Arkhangelsk Region, Kholmogorsky District, March 14, 1954. Photo by L. M. Porter. RGAKFD, 1-38645.

to the Supreme Soviet was a great honor.[48] Mariia Sofronivna Demchenko[49] (Figure 6.5), a collective farmer from Ukraine, who became famous after collecting a record crop of beets in 1935,[50] was featured in the press as a deputy of the First Supreme Soviet.[51]

The status of deputy did not protect individuals from the Great Terror. On December 1, 1938, after the biggest wave of arrests and executions, the Sovnarkom and the Central Committee adopted new rules for arresting deputies of the USSR and republican supreme soviets: the arrests were to be approved by the presidiums of the respective assemblies (Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) 1938).

The deputies of the Supreme Soviet had functions beyond symbolism. Receiving numerous complaints and petitions, they performed as mediators between the state and citizens. The amount of correspondence received by individual deputies was satirized (Figure 6.6). As noted by Peter H. Juviler, in the official Soviet discourse, the deputies were presented as parental helpers. The range of problems spanned from job searches and family matters to the organization of local bus lines. Deputies, however, were not always taken seriously by the officials to which they took matters of their constituents (Juviler 1960, 137–41, 144).



Figure 6.5 Deputies M. S. Demchenko (left) and P. E. Panchenko (right) during the second session of the First USSR Supreme Soviet. Moscow, August 10–21, 1938. The sign reads, "The USSR Supreme Soviet." GMPIR, F. III-4042.

Ol'ga Alekseevna Olenich-Gnenenko, an émigré author, who worked as a journalist during the term of the First Supreme Soviet, claimed to have witnessed how deputies worked with petitioners. Most of the appeals concerned arrests and persecutions, but deputies were not allowed to help those who were arrested or their families and could only forward the appeals to the Procurator's Office or the NKVD. Overall, she concluded that rank-and-filed deputies could achieve little results (Lidiia Nord 1958, 61–5).

Although the Supreme Soviet was barely active during the Second World War, its deputies continued to mediate between the state and the populace. Dmytro

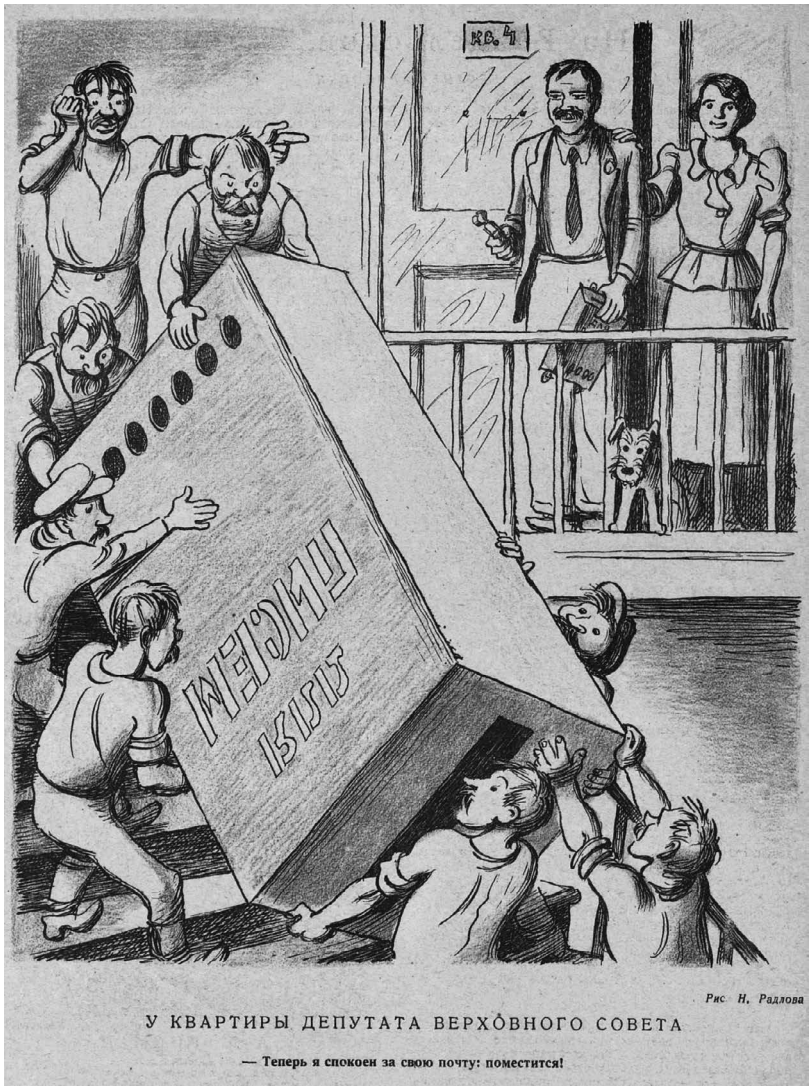


Figure 6.6 "By the apartment of a deputy of the Supreme Soviet. 'Now I am not worried about my mail: it will fit!'" Caricature by N. E. Radlov. The text on the mailbox reads, "For letters." *Krokodil*, No. 16, 1938: 2.

Zakharovych Manuil's'kyi, who at the time worked in the Main Political Directorate of the Red Army, for instance, acted on a complaint by a regional official from Kazakhstan on the lack of bread, initiated assistance to a widow of a Red Army serviceman, and assisted Akmolinsk municipal authorities in obtaining goods. He also acted on complaints by disabled war veterans who did not receive proper financial support and by an active serviceman whose mother was not taken care of.[52]

Numerous petitions were submitted to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, which inherited this function from the TsIK Presidium. Kalinin received a lot of letters and in-person petitioners as a deputy and as the Chairman of, first, the TsIK Presidium and, then, the Supreme Soviet Presidium. The petitioners asked for help in finding work and accommodation, in getting a place to study, in getting permission to travel or to reside in a particular area, and on many other everyday issues.[53] Many petitions pertained to the Great Terror. Nina Mechislavovna Maistrakh complained to the TsIK Presidium in November 1937 about being resettled due to the arrest of her husband, Boris Vladimirovich Maistrakh, a veteran of the First World War and the Russian Civil War and later a lecturer in the Red Army Academy. She asked for a passport, a job, and the right to move elsewhere. In February 1938, Kalinin's Secretariat received a note from the district authorities of the Komi ASSR that she had been employed as a statistician and was "content" with it.[54] In some cases, Kalinin requested milder sentences for minor crimes.[55]

Sometimes letters were quite demanding. One complainant, for instance, insisted that Kalinin resolved his long overdue issue as "a deputy of the USSR Supreme Soviet," that is, "an elected servant of the people."[56] Many petitions were not granted. Kalinin had a pre-typed response: "Unfortunately, I cannot help you in any way. M. Kalinin."[57] Another response was used by his staff: "Your appeal could not be granted by Kalinin."[58] In some cases, petitioners were accused of lying.[59]

Kalinin communicated with other deputies on petitions. Instructing one of them, he explained the general principles. The deputy was supposed to read the petitions and send them for resolution to district, regional, or republican agencies depending on the matter; these agencies were to consider the petitions and respond to the deputy; if the deputy considered their decision incorrect, he or she could take up the matter with the higher authorities. District and regional agencies had to help the deputy in the practical work of considering the complaints. If a matter could not be resolved locally, it could be submitted to the Supreme Soviet Presidium or the people's commissariats and other agencies. The deputy could also hire a secretary to be paid from the allowance that deputies received for performing their duties.[60]

International functions

The 1936 Constitution and the Supreme Soviet served as models for the structural adjustments in Soviet dependencies during the USSR's imperial expansion. Parliaments were used in the annexations of 1939–1940. After the Second World War, most of the constitutions in dependent contexts proclaimed parliaments supreme bodies of state power and introduced standing bodies with broad competence between parliamentary sessions. The Supreme Soviet also acquired some foreign policy functions through exchanges with foreign delegations.

Unlike in the USSR, universal elections were not introduced in the two early Soviet dependencies, Tuva and Mongolia. Although the 1940 Mongolian Constitution and the 1941 Constitution of Tuva had significant borrowings from the 1936 Soviet Constitution, they retained non-universal, unequal, and indirect elections. Institutionalizing Tuva's dependency on the USSR, its 1941 Constitution granted Soviet

citizens in the country active and passive voting rights (Mongol'skaia narodnaia respublika 1947, 36, 46–7; Dubrovskii and Serdobov 1958, 295, 300–1; Iaskina 2007, 112).

The USSR signed a non-aggression treaty with Nazi Germany, the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, on August 23, 1939. The treaty had a secret protocol on dividing spheres of influence in Eastern Europe. The USSR Supreme Soviet quickly ratified the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact. By invading Poland on September 17, 1939, and annexing Western Ukraine and Western Belarus, the Soviet Union entered the Second World War. Later that year, the Red Army invaded Finland, starting the Winter War (1939–1940). In the summer of 1940, the USSR occupied and annexed Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. The annexations of 1939 and 1940 were formalized through universally elected parliaments in Western Ukraine, Western Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania as well as the USSR Supreme Soviet. The elections took place in the context of the Soviet military occupation and featured numerous violations. These parliaments initiated entry into the USSR, which was approved by the Supreme Soviet. The parliaments were then replaced by Soviet institutions. Deputies from the annexed territories were added to the USSR Supreme Soviet through byelections (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1939b, 5, 1939c, 9–10, 1940, 13–14; Roberts 2006, 5, 30, 33, 43, 45; Naimark 2017, 63–4).

Violence preceding the elections occurred with the participation of local forces. In Western Belarus, for instance, local volunteers made up most of the Workers' Guard or Militia, which was the main perpetrator of violence, including the persecution of Polish elites (Rozenblat 2011, 47). The elections to the People's Assembly and, later, the USSR and republican supreme soviets in Western Belarus were orchestrated by the Moscow leadership, with the party functionaries, NKVD representatives, and the Red Army officers playing a major part in them (Petrovskaia 2011, 211–15). In Western Ukraine, Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev, then the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Ukraine, played an important role in organizing the elections to the People's Assembly, together with the military command and the NKVD leadership of the Ukrainian SSR (Naumenko 2011, 372). In Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, there was considerable resistance, with efforts to nominate alternative candidates. In Estonia, for instance, multiple alternative candidates were nominated but then removed by a combination of threats, violence, and invalidation by Soviet-controlled authorities. In the end, the elections were uncontested (Misiunas and Taagepera 1993, 26–8).

Molotov stressed the importance of "democratic elections" in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania when reporting on their annexation in the USSR Supreme Soviet in August 1940 (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1940, 25–7). No parliamentary bodies were, however, created during the annexation of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina in 1940. In 1944, Tuva was annexed following the decision of its standing legislative body, the Small Khural, and not that of a universally elected parliament. Unlike the annexations of 1939–1940, which were formalized by the Supreme Soviet, Tuva was annexed by a Supreme Soviet Presidium decree (Soiuz Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik 1956, 21–4, 46; Alatalu 1992, 888–9).

After the Second World War, the USSR refrained from annexing dependent regimes. After the war ended, the Red Army remained a major factor in most of Eastern Europe, with the exception of Yugoslavia and Albania, where the Axis powers were defeated by their own partisan forces, and Czechoslovakia, from which it withdrew in December 1945. Besides, the USSR retained military presence in North Korea and Mongolia. Soviet secret police and advisors also played an important role in the postwar political developments, facilitating the establishment of communist-dominated regimes across Eastern Europe in 1945–1946 (Békés et al. 2015, 9–15, 18; Naimark 2017, 66–7).

Military occupation was not the only source of dependency. In the case of Yugoslavia, Albania, and China, where the Communists also won with no direct involvement of the Red Army, the dependency had ideological and pragmatic features (Li 2001). In the 1940s, the Soviet informal empire gained an institutional framework with the establishment of the Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers' Parties (Cominform, 1947–1956) and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon, 1949–1991), but both organizations only had European members at the time. The Cominform, like the Communist International (Comintern) in its later stages, was used to ensure Soviet control of foreign parties, which was one of the reasons for the Soviet–Yugoslav split in 1948. Following the split, a more direct Sovietization took place in the remaining Eastern European dependencies (Naimark 2017, 68–70).

Structural adjustments in all dependent regimes included the adoption of new constitutions or the amendment of the existing ones. The involvement of domestic communist leaders and jurists was significant in most cases. In some cases, Soviet jurists and diplomats played a central role. Direct involvement of the VKP(b)/CPSU leadership in writing and editing the texts was rare and was documented in the cases of North Korea, Poland, and Romania. Most of the constitutions were adopted by legislative assemblies after a "public discussion," similar to the USSR. In several cases, non-communists had the opportunity to express their opposition to the texts (Sablin 2022, 185).

There were major differences between the constitutions of Albania (1946), Bulgaria (1947), China (1954), Czechoslovakia (1948), East Germany (1949), Hungary (1949), North Korea (1948), Mongolia (1940[61]), Poland (1947[62] and 1952), Romania (1948 and 1952), and Yugoslavia (1946). In most cases, however, the 1936 Soviet Constitution served as the main reference. With the exception of the Small Constitution of Poland, universal elections were mentioned in all constitutions, although several groups of population were disenfranchised in China, Hungary, and Romania. The Chinese Constitution did not introduce equal elections either and made urban votes more important than rural ones, which made it similar to the pre-1936 Soviet constitutions. Following the Soviet model, most of the constitutions proclaimed a universally elected parliament as the supreme body of state power. The only exceptions were the Small Constitution of Poland and the Constitution of Czechoslovakia, which called the Legislative Sejm and the National Assembly, respectively, the supreme legislative bodies. Most of the constitutions, with the exception of the East German, Hungarian, Polish, and Yugoslav

ones, specified that the parliament was the sole legislative authority (Sablin 2022, 178, 195, 199).

In Yugoslavia, the Federal Council and the Council of Nationalities, the two chambers whose names and designs were adapted from the Supreme Soviet, were established as directly elected and equal. The departure from the Soviet model in the amendments of 1953 included the absorption of the Council of Nationalities into the Federal Council and the creation of a new chamber, the Council of Producers, consisting of delegates from workers' councils and other economic organizations. Direct universal elections were partially kept only to the Federal Council (Chernilovskii 1947, 50–1, 62; Nikiforov 2011, 608–10). Soviet officials denounced the 1953 amendments to the Yugoslav Constitution. In particular, they decried the introduction of presidency, claiming that it gave one man the "supreme legislative, executive, and military power" (Volokitina, Islamov, and Murashko 1998, 2: 1949–1953:907). There were, however, presidents in Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and Poland (until 1952) as well. The Chinese Constitution gave broad executive and military competence to the Chairman of the Chinese People's Republic (Sablin 2022, 200).

All constitutions, except those in Poland (until 1952) and East Germany, established standing bodies that were active between parliamentary sessions. In most cases, they were the parliaments' presidiums, modeled after the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium. The standing bodies had broad competence, including the right to issue decrees. In Czechoslovakia, provisional legislation adopted by the National Assembly Presidium, however, had to be supported by the President and the Prime Minister. East Germany remained the only Soviet dependency where a potent standing body had not been created by the end of 1954, but the People's Chamber still formed three standing commissions. In Yugoslavia, the People's Assembly Presidium was abolished in 1953. Instead, the President and the Federal Executive Council, led by the former, were to be elected by the People's Assembly (Sablin 2022, 199–200).

The operation of legislatures in Soviet dependencies resembled that of the USSR Supreme Soviet. None of them engaged in deliberative legislation. Central bodies of the ruling parties became the *de facto* supreme government agencies, and the party leaders performed as heads of state irrespective of their government offices. The goals were set by the parties and the parliaments were to implement them. Similar to the USSR Supreme Soviet, the linkage between the party authorities and the populace, political and ideological education and socialization, and the integration of diverse social groups within one state became primary tasks of other state socialist parliaments (Nelson 1982, 4, 7–9, 11; Gjuricŏvá 2019; Sablin 2022, 204).

At the end of the Second World War, deputies of the Supreme Soviet became part of parliamentary exchanges. In 1945, British parliamentarians visited the USSR and met with Supreme Soviet deputies. Members of the US Congress also visited the USSR in 1945. The Supreme Soviet exchanged delegations with the National Assembly of Czechoslovakia in 1946. A delegation of the Grand National Assembly of Bulgaria visited the USSR in 1947. The same year, delegations of the Supreme Soviet visited Finland (to participate in the celebration of the 40th

anniversary of the Finnish Parliament) and Great Britain.[63] Between 1948 and 1954, the Supreme Soviet rarely participated in bilateral parliamentary exchanges. In 1950, several members of the Albanian People's Assembly were part of a delegation to the USSR. In 1954, parliamentary delegations from Finland and Great Britain visited the USSR (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1955, 254–7).

In 1945–1948, the Supreme Soviet had relations with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). The first contacts were established already during the war through the Allied Control Commission in Finland. In 1946, the Supreme Soviet received an invitation from the Egyptian National Group of the IPU to the organization's conference in Cairo in 1947, the first one since 1939. Further invitations followed from the IPU Secretary General in 1947 and from the Italian National Group in 1948, but the Soviet side refused.[64] The attitude to the IPU started to change after Stalin's death. The parliaments of Poland, Bulgaria, and Hungary participated in the 43rd IPU Conference in 1954 despite the opposition of the US delegation.[65]

The Soviet peace rhetoric became important in the USSR Supreme Soviet since 1950. On March 8, 1950, the Standing Committee of the World Peace Congress, an institution which coordinated the pro-Soviet peace movement at the time, presented its appeal to the parliaments of all countries to the Supreme Soviet. The appeal stressed that the USSR and the countries of people's democracy were proponents of peace. The Supreme Soviet supported the Stockholm Appeal on banning nuclear weapons, presenting the USSR as a champion of peace and Stalin as the leader of "all progressive humanity" (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1950, 375–9, 387–8). The second session of the Third Supreme Soviet adopted the Law on Defending Peace based on the appeal to parliaments of all countries, which was adopted at the Second World Congress of Peace Partisans in Warsaw in November 1950. The law criminalized propagation of war (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1951, 6, 336–42, 357–8).

Parliaments in the official Soviet discourse

The quasi-discourse of the Stalinist period meant that there were no innovative ideas outside of the scope permitted by Stalin. The same statements were constantly repeated in Soviet assemblies and publications, from the central newspapers and journals to children's and satirical magazines. Quotations from Stalin were omnipresent. Although the main contents of propaganda did not change very much between the second half of the 1930s and the first half of the 1950s, there were some nuances pertaining, in most cases, to the international situation.

A massive propaganda campaign accompanied the preparation and adoption of the 1936 Constitution, the elections, and the convocation of the Supreme Soviet. The understanding of Soviet institutions remained relational and they were constantly juxtaposed to their "bourgeois" counterparts. Propaganda pointed, for instance, to voting restrictions and violations in "capitalist countries." Publications on the Supreme Soviet referenced "bourgeois parliaments." Special attention was paid to fascist regimes and the final dismantling of "bourgeois democracy." Molotov, for instance, pointed to Italy in Germany, where parliaments still existed but were not taken seriously (VII s"ezd Sovetov SSSR 1935, 17:18–20, 27;

Serdobol'skii 1936; Anon. 1937; Vyshinskii 1937; Trainin 1938; Kravtsov 1954, 21, 37, 39–40, 47, 50, 58, 62, 67, 69, 84, 87–8, 102, 117–18; Burbank 1995).

Lenin's interpretation of parliaments was also part of propaganda. Excerpts from Lenin's *State and Revolution* and other works were used to criticize "bourgeois parliaments" (Vyshinskii 1939, 27). His acknowledgment of the progressive role of bourgeois parliamentarism in historical terms was, however, also cited (Radek 1936, 33; Gak 1945, 59–60). The Supreme Soviet was compared to the institutions of the Russian Empire was well. Vasilii Fedorovich Popov, formerly a worker and at the time the RSFSR People's Commissar of Finance, for instance, contrasted the Supreme Soviet's ostensible budget rights with those of the State Duma and the State Council (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1938b, 51).

Parallel to the discussions of institutional changes in the USSR, the Bolshevik-dominated international communist movement became more open to cooperation with social democrats. On August 1, 1935, the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern supported the tactics of a united front of the proletariat and "all toilers" against capital, fascism, and war. Its resolution mentioned the need to defend the "remains of bourgeois democracy," although it reaffirmed the need to win most of the working class over to communism (Kommunisticheskii internatsional 1935, 3, 5). The explicit antiparliamentary character of the draft did not make it into the final resolution (Drabkin, Babichenko, and Shirinia 1998, 881–2).

In this context, the notion of people's democracy gained prominence. Following the congress, Nikos Zachariadis, the leader of Greek Communists, mentioned the "parties of people's democracy" when discussing an anti-fascist united front in December 1935 (Zakhariadis 1936a, 104, 1936b, 74). After the victory of the Popular Front in the Spanish legislative election in February 1936, Jesús Hernández Tomás of the Communist Party of Spain called for advancing the "people's democratic" revolution in Spain (Ernandes 1936, 52–3). At the onset of the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), in September 1936, Georgi Dimitrov, who then headed the Comintern's Executive Committee, argued that if the Republicans won, a republic of a new type, "a state with genuine people's democracy," would be established. Such a state would not yet be "Soviet," but it would be an "antifascist, left state, with the participation of the genuine left part of the bourgeoisie."[66] In 1937, Spanish Communists reaffirmed the understanding of "people's democracy" as "a democratic parliamentary republic of a new type." A parliamentary republic hence became an acceptable albeit contested goal in the international communist movement (Pozharskaia and Saplin 2001, 260, 299).

In Asia, the notion of people's democracy was in use already in 1926, when the Korean Communist Party, under the auspices of the Comintern, proclaimed the slogan of a "people's democratic republic" as a means of struggle against Japan. Such a republic would have a universally elected parliament as its supreme body, would be allied to the USSR, and protect workers' and peasants' interests (Vada et al. 2007, 386–8). Wang Ming of the Communist Party of China advocated a "people's democratic republic" in China, reaffirming the need for a universally elected parliament and a government of national defense against Japan in 1936 and 1937 (Van Min 1936, 93, 1937, 79–80).

The notion of "people's democracy" was also used in relation to the reformed Soviet regime (Manuil'skii 1935, 90; Editorial 1936, 9). A *Bol'shevik* editorial interpreted the victory of the bloc of Communists and non-party members as the emergence of the "Soviet united popular front." It also reaffirmed the superiority of the Soviet system: "Bourgeois parliaments, even those created on the basis of the most 'democratic' bourgeois constitutions, are not and cannot be people's [parliaments]" (Editorial 1937, 8). Although the notions of "people's democracy" and "popular front" were not used for the USSR later, the Supreme Soviet was firmly established as a "parliament" that was superior to its bourgeois counterparts. Molotov called it a "socialist people's parliament" during the opening session, which became a common practice (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1938a, 159).

The introduction of universal elections meant that the Soviet political community was not exclusionary anymore. Soviet deputies were called "representatives of the people," while the Supreme Soviet was said to manifest "the collective, popular will," although the word "toiling" was still frequently added before "people." Its connection to the whole people was used to juxtapose the Supreme Soviet to "bourgeois parliaments," where "all deputies, except for communists" were separated from the people and which remained tools of the bourgeoisie (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1938a, 159, 167–8, 185). Descriptive representation was also important. Shcherbakov, for instance, stressed that "no bourgeois parliament" had ever had "such a large number of women" (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1938a, 35). The poet Vasilii Ivanovich Lebedev-Kumach celebrated the First RSFSR Supreme Soviet in verse, pointing to the representation of occupational groups and women that made it different from "bourgeois parliament" (Verkhovnyi Sovet RSFSR 1938, 53–4).

Even the term "parliamentarism," which had been vilified in the Bolshevik discourse, was occasionally used in relation to the Supreme Soviet. Aleksandr Fedorovich Gorkin, the Secretary of the Supreme Soviet Presidium claimed that "Soviet parliamentarism" became "a factor in socialist construction" when celebrating the Supreme Soviet as the "first and only genuinely people's, socialist parliament in the world" (Gorkin 1940, 49).

The non-symbolic functions of the Supreme Soviet were also reflected in propaganda. Much attention was devoted to the deputies being "servants of the people" (Figure 6.7), which made them different from deputies of "bourgeois parliaments."[67]

Soviet propaganda also addressed the use of parliaments in expansionism, stressing that the entry of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia to the USSR was initiated by parliaments, elected through "universal, direct, and equal elections by a secret ballot" and sanctioned by the Supreme Soviet (Ul'ris 1940, 30–2).

After the end of the Second World War, the celebration of Soviet democracy as "democracy of the highest type" continued, but the expressions "socialist parliament" and "Soviet parliament" became less frequently used in relation to the Supreme Soviet.[68] The comparisons between Soviet and "bourgeois" democracy in the context of the Cold War reminded those before 1935. Soviet authors downplayed the elements of separation of powers in the 1936 Soviet Constitution and underscored the unique character of the Soviet system. The special volume of the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, devoted to the USSR, stressed that having soviets as



Figure 6.7 "A deputy is a servant of the people." Poster by L. F. Golovanov. Moscow and Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1947. GTsMSIR, 31104/13.

its political foundation made the Soviet Union different from other states, including parliamentary republics. It also maintained that there was no formal separation of powers in the USSR since the Supreme Soviet was the supreme body of state power and controlled the supreme administrative, judicial, and oversight bodies (Levin 1947, 27, 31).

As the jurist Andrei Ivanovich Denisov put it, "bourgeois" parliaments were a façade of "bourgeois democracy," while behind-the-scenes, there were "machinations of bourgeois political dealers," trade in public offices for donations to election campaigns, and "antidemocratic activities of lobbyists and party bosses." Discussing parliamentarism as a system, he claimed that the "artificial separation" of legislative and executive power was its main feature. Denisov also reiterated that parliamentarism only created an illusion that the people governed state affairs through their deputies, while they were always "enslaved" by the state power under any form of bourgeois dictatorship (Denisov 1951, 28, 34). "Bourgeois parliaments" continued to be a recurring subject in visual propaganda (Figure 6.8).

In the early 1950s, the political system of Western states was criticized with the same language as that of fascist states in the 1930s. *Literaturnaia gazeta* argued, for instance, that the "conventional methods of bourgeois parliamentarism" were not effective anymore, which led to the increasing use of fascist methods in the



Figure 6.8 Bourgeois parliament. Poster by V. M. Briskin and K. L. Ivanov. 1954. Top text: "Bourgeois parliament." Left column: "Peace, freedom, prosperity. Deception." Middle column: "Educational qualification, property qualification, age qualification, race qualification, residence qualification. Electoral hurdles." Right column: "Bribes." GTsMSIR, 30338/8d.

USA, Great Britain, France, and Italy.[69] Discussing the "fascisation" of the USA, Soviet authors referred, *inter alia*, to the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947, which limited the operation of trade unions, the McCarran Internal Security Act of 1950, which required the registration of communist organizations, and the discriminatory Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952. They also denounced racism and legalized forms of racial discrimination. Soviet authors condemned US imperialism, claiming that in Japan, West Germany, Italy, and France elections to parliaments took place under American pressure (Levin 1951, 72, 74–5, 78; Dmitriev 1952, 62; Lepeshkin 1953, 76; Fedoseev 1954, 13, 16–17).

The classification of democracy into three types – "bourgeois," "socialist," and "people's" – emerged together with the establishment of the "democratic states" in Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Bulgaria in 1946 (Aleksandrov 1946, 12). The jurist Il'ia Pavlovich Trainin explained in 1947 that "during and after the war, in the struggle against fascism and imperialism, in several individual countries, due to peculiar historical conditions of their development, a peculiar type of democracy emerged." This type of democracy was "neither socialist nor bourgeois." It got a foothold in Eastern and Southeastern Europe but originally emerged in Spain during the leadership of the Popular Front there in 1936–1938. Although Trainin did not discuss the slogan of a democratic and parliamentary republic in the analysis of this new type of democracy, he quoted the program of the Communist Party of Spain, which proclaimed it (Trainin 1947, 1–4).

The concept of "people's democracy" consolidated in relation to the Soviet dependencies in Eastern Europe by the end of the decade. In a 1949 editorial, *Bol'shevik* defined people's democracy as a form of dictatorship of the proletariat, the power of the toiling masses, led by the working class and its communist vanguard. "People's parliaments, elected by the toilers, exercise power in the name of the people and in their interests." The editorial argued that the old "bourgeois" nations in the countries of people's democracy were "leaving the stage," and the new nations, which were on the path toward socialism, were emerging (Editorial 1949, 1–2).

There was a hierarchy between the different types of democracy. Viktor Fomich Kotok, another jurist, argued that although the people's republic and the Soviet republic were different forms of the same type of government, the latter was on a higher stage of development of the socialist state. He also stressed the importance of representative bodies in the people's democratic states since it was through them that "the working class" governed the society in alliance "with the peasantry and other segments of the toilers under the leadership of the communist party." The sovereignty of the people was manifested in these representative bodies. Implying its similarity to the Soviet system in its renewed official interpretation, Kotok claimed that people's democracy rejected the principle of separation of powers and relied on the principle of "oneness of state power." It hence did not have parliamentarism, even though there was a "clear separation of competence" between "state bodies" (Kotok 1949, 37–8, 41).

Although Soviet ideology tried to distance the Soviet system from parliamentarism, it became more open to the idea of a parliamentary path to socialism. Speaking to the delegation of the British Labour Party on August 7, 1946, Stalin claimed that "Marxists–Leninists" did not believe that the "Russian path" to socialism was the only one and that socialism could only be achieved through soviets. He claimed that the "Russian path" was shorter but bloodier, while the path "through parliament" was slower but less violent.[70]

Stalin reaffirmed the possibility of the parliamentary path in a letter to Harry Pollitt, the leader of the Communist Party of Great Britain, when commenting on the party's draft program in 1950.

> The draft program correctly sets the task of using the traditional British institutions (Parliament) in the struggle for the cause of socialism. […] It is therefore essential that the draft program should say more clearly and definitely that the British Communists are not going to abolish Parliament, that England will come to socialism in its own way, not through soviet power, but through people's democracy […]. The Communists must declare that the government will act through Parliament. […] The program should talk about the people's democratic path of England's movement toward socialism, about the path along which the countries of people's democracy are advancing towards socialism.[71]

Following Stalin, Pollitt claimed that people's democracy was the way for Britain to achieve socialism. According to his party's final program, Parliament was to be

transformed into a weapon of democracy, a weapon of the majority of the British people. The next step was to create a people's government on the basis of Parliament. This would be possible by means of a broad popular coalition or a union of all segments of the toilers (Kommunisticheskaia partiia Velikobritanii 1951, 55, 57–8). The Labor-Progressive Party in Canada also declared its intention to establish Parliament's supremacy and gain "national independence" from US domination (Labor-Progressive Party 1952, 5, 15–16).

Reception of the Supreme Soviet and alternatives to it

In the absence of any legal opposition, there was no public criticism of the new Soviet institutions within the country. Some Soviet citizens still criticized them but rarely offered alternatives. The international reception was conditioned by the commentators' political views and the information available to them. The involvement of moderate socialist and liberal émigré intellectuals in English-language academia, however, contributed to the emergence of the standard critical interpretation of the Supreme Soviet. As for alternatives to it, there were heated debates among émigrés in the 1930s, but after the Second World War, the support for a liberal democratic system predominated.

The reports of Soviet security agencies provided a glimpse into the public attitude toward the new system. It was reported in 1935 that soldiers, stationed in the Caucasus, denounced the new electoral system as a step toward "capitalist parliament" and cautioned against its benefits to the class enemy. One soldier argued that equal elections would diminish the role of the working class in socialist construction and become a step from a worker to worker–peasant state. Whereas such opinions reflected the efficiency of official propaganda, there was also criticism of the Soviet political practice. One soldier questioned the possibility of democracy in a situation when the party nominated all candidates (Danilov, Manning, and Viola 2002, 4:425–6). There were reports of organized local opposition. In October 1936, during the "public discussion" of the draft constitution, the NKVD claimed that in the vicinity of Stavropol former SRs anticipated free democratic elections and a Bolshevik defeat (Iakovlev et al. 2003, 775–6).

Writing in his diary, the writer Mikhail Mikhailovich Prishvin, formerly an SR, initially welcomed the 1936 Constitution as a check against bureaucracy. After the execution of Grigorii Evseevich Zinov'ev and Lev Borisovich Kamenev in August 1936, Prishvin became more pessimistic. In December 1936, he noted that no one believed in the constitutional freedoms (Prishvin 2010, 241, 319, 384).

Despite the Great Terror, there were objections to the nominees during the 1937 campaign. In Leningrad, there was opposition to Anastas Mikoyan, Kalinin, and A. N. Tolstoi. In Novosibirsk, Stalin's nomination was failed with 150 votes to 50 on the grounds that he was nominated in many other constituencies. There was opposition to individual candidates due to their ethnicity, often formulated in anti-Semitic terms. Soviet citizens across the country were occasionally accused of dismissing Soviet elections as pointless and inconsequential. In 1937, one worker from Leningrad, for instance, noted that there were no actual elections

and that people voted for the official candidates out of fear (Davies 1997, 87–8, 109, 128–9; Fitzpatrick 2000, 182). As noted by Olga Velikanova, people were disappointed to find only one name on each ballot (Velikanova 2021, 272).

Viktor Andriiovych Kravchenko,[72] a Soviet official who defected to the USA, recounted his experience of the 1937 elections.

> No one took the "elections" seriously, of course. Like the mass meetings and the resolutions, it was a ritual that men went through, out of fear, in undisguised boredom, while the agitators and the radio horns shouted slogans.
>
> (Kravchenko 1947, 268–9)

The widespread discontent did not necessarily lead to political opposition. Many Soviet war refugees who were interviewed for the Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System did not have any concrete solutions for their concerns with state terror and low living standards. The prompted Alex Inkeles and Raymond A. Bauer to conclude that there was a general acceptance of the system and that Soviet citizens had little interest in "the strictly constitutional apparatus of guarantees, rights and safeguards that characterize the democracy of Western Europe," preferring to have a good and empathetic ruler instead (Inkeles and Bauer 1959, 381, 393; Firsov 2008, 39–40).

Kravchenko claimed that many Soviet fighters in the Second World War anticipated a democratic change after its end (Kravchenko 1947, 376). No democratic change, however, arrived. On February 10, 1946, the election day to the USSR Supreme Soviet, Prishvin left critical remarks in his diary.

> During the election, I understood for the first time that this is not some kind of comedy for abroad, but a serious state business, containing a census of the entire population, plus, perhaps, an oath of allegiance. […] Thanks to this [the lack of alternative candidates], there was no need for an envelope (this saves money!) and no need for a booth: there is no need to be alone. […] There is cleanliness, order, politeness, decorations, radio, [and] overdressed young people all around. And so the whole country, one-sixth of the world passes in front of the ballot boxes on one day, celebrating and congratulating each other.
>
> (Prishvin 2013, 44–5)

He interpreted the election hence as a festive ritual of loyalty. Later the same month, Prishvin noted that only those who wanted to "cheat" during the elections would go into the voting booth and thereby made themselves visible (Prishvin 2013, 47–8). Commenting on the election to the RSFSR Supreme Soviet in 1947, Prishvin interpreted Soviet elections as a ritual of ceding one's subjectivity to the state: "dropping the name of the appointed person into the ballot box, thereby I renounce myself in favor of the state: there is no me, there is the state, or the state and I are one" (Prishvin 2013, 425).

The fear of repercussions for disloyalty persisted, but there were cases of disobedience at polling stations, with vocal criticism of Soviet elections and denunciation of leaders. Some circulated oppositional leaflets. Leaflets with oppositional or simply offensive comments were occasionally dropped into ballot boxes; such comments were also written on the ballots. Most Soviet citizens, however, embraced elections as a "nationwide holiday" (Edelman 2011, 167–70, 172–3; Kozlov, Fitzpatrick, and Mironenko 2011, 176–80; Yekelchyk 2014, 180, 214–15).

Despite the total absence of venues for public criticism and the still extremely repressive regime, in the 1940s and the first half of the 1950s, some Soviet citizens formed oppositional groups across the country. Many of these groups had young members and a communist ideology: the discrepancies between the official discourse and practice were a major factor in their establishment. Some of the groups called themselves democratic. There were reports of dissatisfaction with the Soviet system in the Soviet elite as well. In December 1946, generals Vasilii Nikolaevich Gordov, a Supreme Soviet deputy at the time, and Filipp Trofimovich Rybal'chenko reportedly discussed the horrible situation in the countryside and agreed on the need for genuine democracy. Both of them were soon arrested and executed (Firsov 2008, 134–5, 174–8).

Émigré authors unanimously denounced the new Soviet Constitution and the Supreme Soviet. Moderate socialist and liberal authors, including Aleksandr Fedorovich Kerenskii, agreed that Soviet institutions were a sham,[73] with one of them calling the Supreme Soviet not a parliament but an "expanded plenum" of the party's Central Committee (Toropetskii 1938, 189–90). They continued to support democracy. *Poslednie novosti*, for instance, rejected all forms of dictatorship (Raeff 1990, 83, 85, 150, 152). Mark Veniaminovich Vishniak (1938, 361, 365) argued that no technique of elections mattered in a dictatorial context, putting the USSR into the category of totalitarian states together with Italy and Germany.

Moderate religious thinkers continued to develop the idea of a new democracy. Ivan Mikhailovich Kheraskov, for instance, opposed "materialism, Americanism, and everyday positivism." Democracy, for him, was not confined to liberty, equality, and self-government but meant a spiritual renewal of humans into "responsible and spiritually free" individuals. In the immediate context of the rise of "communism and fascism," however, Kheraskov proposed a temporary restoration of the "old" democracy with a legitimate "representation of the people" (Kheraskov 1935, 80, 87–8, 90–1).

Radical émigré authors also denounced the new Soviet institutions. Lev Davidovich Trotskii denounced the 1936 Constitution, claiming that it liquidated the dictatorship of the proletariat and returned to bourgeois democracy based on universal suffrage of "an automized population" (Trotsky 1973, 261). In 1938, Trotskii's *Biulleten' oppozitsii* ("The Opposition's Bulletin") argued that the Supreme Soviet constituted "Stalin's plebiscitary entourage, appointed by him alone, dependent on him alone" and stressed that not a single deputy represented the masses. It also pointed to the credential commissions' attempts to mask the data on the

composition of the Supreme Soviet by claiming that the majority were workers and peasants, whereas most of them were, in fact, bureaucrats (M. P. T. 1938).

Right-wing authors condemned the existing Soviet regime but did not necessarily oppose dictatorship as such. Ivan Aleksandrovich Il'in, for instance, argued in 1937 that Russia needed "strong" but "differentiated" authority based on law and supported a one-man dictatorship or monarchy. He envisioned a legislative chamber, to which the ruler would not be accountable, and a smaller consultative council. Il'in opposed universal suffrage, advocating for age, educational, and other qualifications. He, however, supported the inclusion of women as well as different religious and national groups into the franchise. The ballot was to be open, with each vote motivated in writing. According to Il'in, only parties with national rather than class or occupational programs could be formed (Il'in 2016, 638–42, 645–7).

Some right-wing émigrés built Soviet institutions into their own projects of a future Russian state. Members of the Young Russian movement, which transformed into a party in 1935, reaffirmed the slogan of "the Tsar and the soviets" (Zakutin 1937, 12–13). The Eurasianist Nikolai Nikolaevich Alekseev opposed the establishment of a new totalitarian regime, "Russian fascism or national socialism," in place of the Communist dictatorship. He nevertheless advocated a strong government for Russia and such a state system "that would be devoid of the shortcomings of the weak-willed and inert liberal parliamentarism and, at the same time, would definitely not resemble the state Leviathan in the sense of Stalin and Hitler." An imposed ideology and a single-party regime of totalitarianism and "individualistic atomism" of democracy were both unacceptable for Russia. Alekseev proposed establishing a permanent presidency and a parliamentary body based on the old soviet system of territorial and particularistic representation, including that of occupational groups and nationalities (Alekseev 1938, 104–13).

Writing in English in 1940, Alekseev claimed that in nominal terms the soviets became parliaments according to the new Constitution and that it definitely adopted the principles of the "constitutional law of bourgeois countries," for instance, the separation of powers. He nevertheless had no illusions about the political practice, stressing that the hopes for a "constitutional era" in the USSR were "cruelly deceived." Similar to Trotskii, Alekseev noted that despite the ostensible worker and peasant majority in the First Supreme Soviet, it predominantly included the lower administration, which made it "a representation of Soviet bureaucracy" (Alexeiev 1940, 469–70, 473–5).

The start of the Second World War undermined the position of Russian fascist and profascist activists. It pushed the Young Russians away from fascism, and some members of the party fought on the side of France, while the organization itself was disbanded in 1942. The National Toilers' Alliance disbanded its branch in Germany in 1938 after a series of Gestapo raids, although some of its members fought in the German Army or joined the Nazi collaborators (Stephan 1978, 30; Klimovich 2008, 150).

After the Second World War, Russian émigrés continued to criticize Soviet institutions. Comparing the composition of the first three Supreme Soviets, Lev Vladimirovich Dudin, a journalist and former Nazi collaborator, noted the sizable

NKVD representation in the first convocation and that of the military personnel in the second one. As for the Third Supreme Soviet, Dudin pointed to the non-inclusion of union ministers into its members, the increased representation of regional and district leadership and of intelligentsia. In all three convocations, the state and party bureaucracy were the largest groups. Dudin concluded that the Supreme Soviet was a body of party authority, representing rather than concealing the dictatorship and standing in for the All-Union Party Congress (Gradoboev 1952, 250, 253–4, 259–61, 265–7).

Some émigrés continued to see positive features in Soviet institutions. V. Avilov, a Cossack activist, argued that despite the nominal character of Soviet institutions, they contributed to particularistic nation-building in the USSR. The existence of the "masquerade national" parliaments and governments strengthened and deepened particularism of republics and regions. Avilov predicted that in the future these "paper rights" would be demanded in their real meaning, rendering it impossible to confine different peoples into a former or new "Russian prison of peoples." For Avilov, this meant that before convening the future all-Russian constituent assembly, national parliaments of republics and regions needed to be convened first (Avilov 1949, 17–18).

Democratic alternatives became dominant among émigrés, even those who had supported fascism. The Union for the Struggle for the Liberation of the Peoples of Russia, which was based in Germany and included Nazi collaborators, advocated universal elections and a bicameral parliament in Russia. The parliament was to consist of the State Duma, elected directly, and the National Assembly, which was to be divided between representatives of "toiling estates" and nationalities. The two chambers were to be equal, although the National Assembly was to have the initiative in social and national matters. The Union supported the separation of legislative and executive power. A universally elected president was to perform the latter through a cabinet accountable to the parliament. Another planned body was the Supreme Senate, which was supposed to be an institution of legal oversight and the supreme judicial authority (Kapitan-Galkin 1949, 56).

The Central Association of Postwar Emigrants from the USSR, which was also based in Germany and included Nazi collaborators, claimed that its ultimate goal was to build a free democratic Russia. It defined the democratic system in the conventional liberal sense as "the power of the people, implemented by the people itself." Its program, however, also included elements of corporatism, as it was groups of population that were to have their representatives in the supreme government bodies (Tsentral'noe ob"edinenie poslevoennykh emigrantov 1955, 11–13).

There were, however, those who continued to support monarchy. Ivan Luk'ianovich Solonevich, who managed to escape from the USSR in 1933, reaffirmed the myth of *zemskii sobor* as the "classical form of the Russian representation of the people." He stressed its non-party character and opposed the attempts to implant "Western European parliamentarism" in Russia. Solonevich insisted that the republican form of government was impossible in Russia, suggesting that only monarchy could save it from another totalitarian regime after the eventual Soviet collapse (Solonevich 2016, 713, 729).

Broader international reception of the new Soviet institutions varied. Communist commentators praised them.[74] Soviet propaganda also managed to sway many on the broader left. *Soviet Communism: A New Civilization?* by Sidney and Beatrice Webb, which dropped the question mark in the subsequent editions (Sakwa 1999, 215), argued that the USSR was "the most inclusive and equalized democracy of the world," providing the legal provisions on the Supreme Soviet as a proof and reproducing Soviet propaganda (Webb and Webb 1947, xxi). Metz T. P. Lochard, editor of the African-American newspaper *The Chicago Defender*, stressed its "tremendous importance to the black race in particular, and to other peoples in general," citing the provision on equal rights and the ban of "propaganda of racial or national exceptionalism or hatred and contempt."[75] Iqbal Singh, a progressive Indian intellectual, praised the Soviet electoral campaign, which he witnessed on his visit to the USSR. He also celebrated the Supreme Soviet, citing the names and professions of several deputies and insisting that it was "far more representative" than parliamentary bodies in places "where money talks" (Singh 1951, 151–2). Some newspapers globally simply reprinted the information from the Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union (TASS), reproducing Soviet propaganda.[76]

European social democratic commentators were highly critical. The Danish *Social-Demokraten* claimed that the one-party regime in the USSR was a "caricature of democracy," compared it to that in Nazi Germany, and dismissed the new Constitution as a "foreign-policy maneuver."[77] Western liberal commentators expressed some optimism about better governing personnel.[78] Some US commentators even saw it as a step toward liberal democracy.[79] The lack of contestation, however, made many commentators globally dismiss the new Soviet institutions as non-consequential.[80] As it could be expected in the context of the Soviet–Japanese border conflicts, the Japanese-controlled *Xin Shenbao* (新申報) dismissed the election of the First Supreme Soviet as one of the "funniest" political developments in the world, relying in its report on the coverage of the Soviet system in the Western press.[81]

After the Second World War, Soviet institutions continued to be praised by communist press.[82] Some commentators among the broader left also expressed optimism. Harry F. Ward, an American Christian socialist, who visited the USSR, claimed that the elections were not completely controlled by the party and that there was contestation during the nomination of candidates. He was also under the impression that the criticism of ministers in the Supreme Soviet had consequences (Ward 1947, 20–1, 40). Some non-communist newspapers also continued to reproduce elements of Soviet propaganda uncritically, such as the large shares of workers and peasants in the Supreme Soviet.[83]

Non-communist US commentators, however, tended to stress the rubber-stamp character of the Supreme Soviet, its hand-picked composition, and the predominance of officials and party functionaries rather than workers and peasants.[84] West German commentators also treated the Supreme Soviet as a rubber stamp, although some pointed to its role as a "safety valve" that allowed the party leadership to get a glimpse into public opinion.[85] When used to describe institutions, the word "Soviet" had pejorative connotations. Citing Western press and criticizing the 1952

legislative election in Romania, *El universal gráfico* ("The Universal Illustrated") claimed that it was "typically Soviet."[86]

The field of Soviet and Communist Studies, which was developing in the USA since the second half of the 1940s, provided in-depth analyses of the Soviet system. Julian Towster, an American political scientist, argued that despite something akin to the "supremacy of parliament" in the USSR, the Supreme Soviet "operated primarily as a ratifying and propagating body." Towster nevertheless recognized the role of the Supreme Soviet deputies as part of a feedback mechanism (Towster 1948, 251–2, 263).

Émigré authors also participated in the making of the field. Solomon Meerovich Shvarts (Monoszon), formerly a Menshevik politician, stressed that "the Supreme Soviet from its inception" had been "deprived of the regular functions of a parliament," as its meetings were very seldom and its sessions very short, while all legislation submitted to it was adopted after "token" debate by a "unanimous" vote. He noted that the drafting of the budget had become a mere formality, and that it did not "usually reach the Supreme Soviet for approval until several months after the beginning of the fiscal year." Shvarts pointed out that laws that changed the Constitution, such as the raising of the voting age in 1946, were adopted without the Supreme Soviet (Schwarz 1953, 8–9).

Georgii Konstantinovich Gins became a prominent expert on Soviet law in the USA, where he taught at the University of California, Berkeley. In his 1954 *Soviet Law and Soviet Society*, Gins argued that "in comparison even with the pre-revolutionary Duma, the Supreme Soviet" was "an inefficient and purely decorative institution." Gins also accurately described the way the system functioned. All decisions were made behind "constitutional curtain" in the CPSU Central Committee and its "subservient party organizations." The party organization as a whole was parallel to the nominal state organization. The system itself demanded top-down direction and hampered self-administration, the Supreme Soviet and other soviets were, for the most part, composed of people "not trained for administrative or legislative work" and of persons in direct connection to the party and hence subject to its discipline (Guins 1954, 20, 200–2).

Gins also contributed to English-language studies on people's democracy and the Soviet notion of the three types of democracy. He noted the differences in the constitutions of Soviet satellites but stated that there were few political differences. In particular, he pointed out that the supreme bodies of the satellites were national assemblies, which corresponded to the Supreme Soviet, and that only in Poland and Czechoslovakia the assemblies were considered permanent institutions. He also mentioned the establishment of presidiums that replaced national assemblies, again with the exception of Czechoslovakia and Poland. The political power, however, belonged to communist parties (Guins 1950, 64–5).

Conclusion

The new Soviet Constitution did not alter the Soviet regime that remained a single-party and, until Stalin's death, personal dictatorship. The USSR Supreme Soviet

was *de facto* appointed by the party leadership and had no autonomous agency at all. The main functions of the Supreme Soviet as a whole were symbolic and propagandistic. Its members, however, performed the additional function of connecting the state to the populace by receiving and acting on petitions and complaints. The Supreme Soviet also became a model for the parliaments of people's republics, the standard form of Soviet dependencies in 1945–1954.

The official propaganda pertaining to the Supreme Soviet and, after the war, to the parliaments of people's democracies was determined by Stalin and, after his death, by the top leadership of the party. The Supreme Soviet was presented as a new type of parliament upon its establishment, but after the Second World War, the use of the term parliament for the Supreme Soviet subsided. The main ideological innovations pertaining to parliaments in the postwar period were the development of the notion of three democracies – socialist, people's, and bourgeois – and the acceptance of a parliamentary path to socialism.

Although some of them found merit in individual Soviet institutions, Russian émigré authors unanimously denounced the practice of the Soviet regime. The official Soviet views on the Supreme Soviet circulated internationally thanks to the efforts of communist organizations and to the uncritical reproduction of propagandistic tropes. The confluence of the critical émigré discourse and the English-language academia in the context of the early Cold War, however, contributed to a wider circulation of detailed criticism of the Supreme Soviet and other Soviet institutions. This criticism reinforced a normative liberal understanding of parliamentarism in the context of a new global parliamentary moment in which the Supreme Soviet became a point of negative reference.

Notes

1 *Izvestiia* (Moscow), January 12, 1938: 1.
2 RGASPI, f. 558, op. 1, d. 3275, l. 3, 6–8, 10 (From A. S. Enukidze to I. V. Stalin, January 10, 1935).
3 RGASPI, f. 558, op. 1, d. 3275, l. 12 (Excerpt from the Politburo Minutes No. 20, January 30, 1935).
4 RGASPI, f. 558, op. 1, d. 3275, l. 13 (Excerpt from the Minutes of the Central Committee Plenum No. 4, February 1, 1935).
5 Karl Berngardovich Radek.
6 RGASPI, f. 558, op. 1, d. 3275, l. 15–16 (Minutes of the Constitutional Commission No. 1, July 7, 1935); RGASPI, f. 558, op. 1, d. 3275, l. 20 (List of members of the subcommission on central and local bodies of government, July 8, 1935).
7 RGASPI, f. 558, op. 1, d. 3275, l. 16 (Minutes of the Constitutional Commission No. 1, July 7, 1935).
8 RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 142, l. 6 rev. (V. N. Durdenevskii, Inostrannoe konstitutsionnoe pravo v izbrannykh obraztsakh (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1925) with I. V. Stalin's notes).
9 RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 143, l. 36–54, 67 (Iu. V. Kliuchnikov, ed., Konstitutsii burzhuaznykh stran, vol. 1: Velikie derzhavy i zapadnye sosedi SSSR (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoe izdatel'stvo, 1935) with I. V. Stalin's notes).
10 RGASPI, f. 558, op. 1, d. 3275, l. 42 (From I. V. Stalin to the chairmen of the subcommissions of the constitutional commission, [April 1936]).

11 RGASPI, f. 558, op. 1, d. 3275, l. 96 (Excerpt from the Minutes No. 7 of the Central Committee Plenum, June 1, 1936).
12 RGASPI, f. 558, op. 1, d. 3275, l. 58, 60, 62, 79, 81 (Draft Constitution of the USSR, prepared by the TsIK constitutional commission, 1936).
13 RGASPI, f. 558, op. 1, d. 3275, l. 68–70, 77–78 (Draft Constitution of the USSR, prepared by the TsIK constitutional commission, 1936).
14 RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 142, l. 6 rev. (V. N. Durdenevskii, Inostrannoe konstitutsionnoe pravo v izbrannykh obraztsakh (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1925) with I. V. Stalin's notes).
15 RGASPI, f. 558, op. 1, d. 3275, l. 66–67 (Draft Constitution of the USSR, prepared by the TsIK constitutional commission, 1936).
16 RGASPI, f. 558, op. 1, d. 3275, l. 69–70, 73–78 (Draft Constitution of the USSR, prepared by the TsIK constitutional commission, 1936).
17 RGASPI, f. 558, op. 1, d. 3275, l. 83–84 (Draft Constitution of the USSR, prepared by the TsIK constitutional commission, 1936).
18 RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 1119, l. 8 rev.–10 (Verbatim Report of the Plenum of the Central Committee, June 1–4, 1936, printed).
19 RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 1119, l. 10–10 rev. (Verbatim Report of the Plenum of the Central Committee, June 1–4, 1936, printed).
20 RGASPI, f. 558, op. 1, d. 3275, l. 98 (Excerpt from the Politburo Minutes No. 40, June 11, 1936).
21 RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 1119, l. 10 rev. (Verbatim Report of the Plenum of the Central Committee, June 1–4, 1936, printed).
22 GARF, f. R-3316, op. 41, d. 134, l. 14, 15, 16, 22 rev., 23, 26, 30 (Information reports on the discussion of the draft Constitution of the USSR for the Mordovian ASSR, October 1936).
23 RGASPI, f. 558, op. 1, d. 3275, l. 112 (Draft Constitution of the USSR, prepared by the TsIK constitutional commission and approved by the TsIK Presidium, 1936); (VIII chrezvychainyi s"ezd Sovetov SSSR 1936, 1:25, 12:3–4, 12, 15, 38).
24 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 2, d. 586, l. 7 (Verbatim Report of the Central Committee Plenum with visible edits by A. A. Zhdanov, February 26, 1937).
25 RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 18, l. 27 (Remarks by I. V. Stalin at the Central Committee Plenum, February 26, 1937).
26 RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 1120, l. 89–91 (Speech by I. V. Stalin at the Central Committee Plenum, October 12, 1937). In 1935, for instance, the desired share of the non-party members in the Seventh USSR TsIK was set at 30 percent, and that of women at 20 percent. There were also quotas for different organizations and occupations. RGASPI, f. 78, op. 1, d. 529, l. 15, 18 (Materials of the commission for leading the Seventh USSR Congress of Soviets, January 16, 1935).
27 *Literaturnaia gazeta* (Moscow), December 1, 1937: 1.
28 Russian: Veiland Leonardovich Rodd.
29 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 1054, l. 47 (Minutes No. 47 of the Central Committee Presidium, December 29, 1945).
30 GTsMSIR, 20131/3 (Archbishop of Vilnius and Lithuania Kornilii (K. K. Popov) voting in the election to the Supreme Soviet of the Lithuanian SSR. Photograph, February 9, 1946).
31 RGAKFD, 4-30918 (G. M. Malenkov at Polling Station No. 2 of the Krasnopresnensky Precinct on the day of the election to the USSR Supreme Soviet. Photograph, May 14, 1954).
32 See, for instance, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 1076, l. 9–11 (Minutes No. 69 of the Central Committee Presidium, June 17, 1949).
33 RGANI, f. 2, op. 1, d. 7, l. 1, 3–8 (Verbatim Report of the Central Committee Plenum, March 11, 14, 18, 1946).

34 RGANI, f. 3, op. 8, d. 34, l. 35–47, 68 (Minutes No. 15 of the Central Committee Presidium, July 16, 1953); RGANI, f. 3, op. 8, d. 36, l. 3 (Minutes No. 17 of the Central Committee Presidium, July 20, 1953); RGANI, f. 3, op. 8, d. 38, l. 5 (Minutes No. 19 of the Central Committee Presidium, July 23–25, 1953).
35 RGASPI, f. 78, op. 1, d. 673, l. 4, 18 (Correspondence of M. I. Kalinin with Young Pioneers and schoolchildren, 1938–1939).
36 RGANI, f. 3, op. 8, d. 16, l. 22–4 (Central Committee Presidium Bureau Minutes No. 13, March 4–5, 1953); (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1953a, 3–7).
37 RGANI, f. 3, op. 8, d. 25, l. 9–15 (Central Committee Presidium Minutes No. 7, May 9, 1953).
38 GARF, f. 7523, op. 72, d. 1, l. 2–4, 6–30, 63, 68–76 (USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium Minutes No. 1, April 28, 1954); RGANI, f. 3, op. 8, d. 25, l. 2–7 (Central Committee Presidium Minutes No. 7, May 9, 1953); RGANI, f. 3, op. 8, d. 27, l. 19–23, 29–30 (Central Committee Presidium Minutes No. 9, June 12, 1953); RGANI, f. 4, op. 9, d. 72, l. 24, 56, 79, 230–1 (Secretariat Minutes No. 38, August 14, 1953); RGANI, f. 4, op. 9, d. 73, l. 19–20, 27–8 (Secretariat Minutes No. 38. August 14, 1953); RGANI, f. 4, op. 9, d. 77, l. 23 (Secretariat Minutes No. 40, September 10, 1953); RGANI, f. 4, op. 9, d. 98, l. 275 (Secretariat Minutes No. 53, February 6, 1954).
39 Russian: Ivan Kupriianovich Tatarenko.
40 Russian: Petr Ivanovich Shpilevoi.
41 See Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR (1938a, 49–50). This dissent had no major consequences for Tatarenko's life and career.
42 RGANI, f. 3, op. 8, d. 195, l. 19–20, 23 (Draft Resolution on G. M. Malenkov, [January 1955]).
43 RGASPI, f. 83, op. 1, d. 4, l. 33 (Speech by G. M. Malenkov at the Central Committee Plenum of the CPSU, January 31, 1955).
44 Kalinin mentioned the united Soviet people and the multiple peoples of the USSR during the TsIK session in 1936. RGASPI, f. 78, op. 1, d. 553, l. 2–4 (Speech of M. I. Kalinin at the opening of the Session of the USSR TsIK, 1936).
45 See Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR (1950, 3–4, 22, 60–5, 97–102). On the soviet peace discourse, see Johnston (2008).
46 Russian: Sadyk Nurpeisovich Nurpeisov.
47 Russian: Petr Afanas'evich Shariia.
48 See, for instance, Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR (1939a, 255).
49 Russian: Mariia Safronovna Demchenko.
50 *Pravda* (Moscow), October 20, 1935: 1.
51 *Ogonek*, No. 36, 1937: 8.
52 RGASPI, f. 523, op. 1, d. 114, l. 1, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14–15, 23 (Correspondence of the USSR Supreme Soviet deputy D. Z. Manuil's'kyi, 1943–1944).
53 GARF, f. R-7523, op. 24, d. 1, l. 6, 7, 121–125 (Letters and petitions from citizens with a personal resolution of M. I. Kalinin, letters A–M, 1939).
54 Ibid., 299, 301–301 rev.
55 RGASPI, f. 78, op. 1, d. 886, l. 44–5 (Correspondence between M. I. Kalinin and Leningrad voters, 1941).
56 RGASPI, f. 78, op. 1, d. 750, l. 73 (Correspondence of M. I. Kalinin, 1938).
57 RGASPI, f. 78, op. 1, d. 886, l. 3, 18–20, 21, 35–6 (Correspondence between M. I. Kalinin and Leningrad voters, 1941).
58 RGASPI, f. 78, op. 1, d. 886, l. 119 (Correspondence between M. I. Kalinin and Leningrad voters, 1941).
59 GARF, f. R-7523, op. 24, d. 2, l. 1–4 (Letters and petitions from citizens with a personal resolution of M. I. Kalinin, letters N–Ia, 1939).
60 RGASPI, f. 78, op. 1, d. 883, l. 6, 8 (Letters from M. I. Kalinin to deputies of the USSR Supreme Soviet, 1938).
61 The Mongolian Constitution of 1940 was amended several times, in 1944, 1949, and 1952. Universal elections were introduced in 1944. In 1946, Mongolia's independence was recognized by the Guomindang's government of China, and in October 1949, the

Mongolian and Chinese People's Republics established relations (Mongol'skaia narodnaia respublika 1947, 50; Iaskina 2007, 177–8, 186).

62 Major amendments to the 1921 Polish Constitution, which became known as the Small Constitution of 1947, predated the adoption of the Constitution of the Polish People's Republic in 1952.

63 GARF, f. R-7523, op. 46, d. 31, l. 1–25 (F. S. Sazikov, Information on the visit of the USSR Supreme Soviet delegation to Great Britain, April 17, 1947); GARF, f. R-7523, op. 46, d. 33, l. 1–2 (Information on the visits of English, US, French, Italian, and other delegations to the USSR, [1946]); GARF, f. R-7523, op. 46, d. 33, l. 12–13 (List of members of the Albanian delegation to the USSR, August 1950); GARF, f. R-7523, op. 65, d. 113, l. 5–6 (List of Supreme Soviet deputies, living in Moscow and invited to the reception of the British parliamentary delegation, received on January 9, 1945); GARF, f. R-7523, op. 65, d. 115, l. 22–50 (A. F. Gorkin, Report on visit of the USSR Supreme Soviet delegation to Czechoslovakia, November 30, 1946); GARF, f. R-7523, op. 65, d. 116, l. 132–140 (F. S. Sazikov, Information on the visit of the delegation of the National Assembly of Czechoslovakia to the USSR, December 20, 1946); GARF, f. R-7523, op. 65, d. 119, l. 7–10 (List of members of the delegation of the Grand National Assembly of Bulgaria to the USSR, July 17, 1947); GARF, f. R-7523, op. 65, d. 121, l. 31–46 (A. G. Kalashnikov, Brief Report on the visit of the delegation of the USSR Supreme Soviet to Finland for the celebration of the fortieth anniversary of the Finnish Parliament, June 6, 1947).

64 GARF, f. R-7523, op. 65, d. 120, l. 1, 2, 12, 22, 46 (Correspondence on the participation of the Supreme Soviet delegation in the Conference of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, 1945–1947); GARF, f. R-7523, op. 65, d. 125, l. 1–15 (Correspondence on the participation of the Supreme Soviet delegation in the Conference of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, 1948).

65 *Pravda*, September 11, 1954: 3.

66 See Dam'e et al. (1999, 36). The author is grateful to Aleksandr Shubin for his comment on the matter.

67 *Izvestiia*, December 12, 1940: 1; February 20, 1953: 2 ("K Itogam Pervoi Sessii Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR" 1938, 3).

68 *Gudok* (Moscow), March 13, 1946: 1; March 14, 1947: 1; February 12, 1950: 2; (Korneev 1945).

69 *Literaturnaia gazeta*, December 4, 1948: 1.

70 RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 286, l. 5 (Notes on the conversation between I. V. Stalin and the delegation of the British Labour Party, August 7, 1946).

71 RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 288, l. 85 (I. V. Stalin to Henry Pollitt, September 28, 1950).

72 Russian: Viktor Andreevich Kravchenko.

73 *Novoe russkoe slovo* (New York), March 4, 1935: 3; (Kerenskii 1938, 281–2, 290–2).

74 RGASPI, f. 495, op. 15, d. 86, l. 20–21 (Newspaper Summaries, [1936]); *Xinhua ribao* (新華日報) (Hankou), June 26, 1938: 3; (Coates and Coates 1938, 264–78).

75 *The Chicago Defender*, July 18, 1936: 24.

76 *Shenbao* (申報) (Shanghai), December 14, 1937: 4.

77 RGASPI, f. 495, op. 15, d. 86, l. 17–18 (Newspaper Summaries, [1936]).

78 *The Scotsman* (Edinburgh), December 23, 1936: 11.

79 *The New York Times*, July 19, 1936: SM3, 19; *The Christian Science Monitor*, November 25, 1936: 3; (Starr 1936, 1150–1).

80 *The Sphere* (London), January 29, 1938: 10–11.

81 *Xin Shenbao* (新申報) (Shanghai), January 18, 1938: 1.

82 *Unser Tag* (Offenburg), February 14, 1950: 3.

83 *The New York Times*, June 12, 1950: 8; *The Washington Post*, March 5, 1952: 4.

84 *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 10, 1952: A6; *Los Angeles Times*, August 12, 1953: 21; *The Christian Science Monitor*, June 27, 1950: 18.

85 *Südkurier* (Konstanz), April 2, 1952: 1.

86 *El universal gráfico* (Mexico City), December 2, 1952: 4.

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7 The supreme body of state power

The Supreme Soviet normalized and contested, 1955–1985

> The Supreme Soviet of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics recognizes that the parliaments [of all states] bear great responsibility for the preservation and consolidation of peace. It is they who adopt legislative acts on issues of war and peace.
>
> The Supreme Soviet of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics believes that the establishment of direct ties between parliaments, the exchange of parliamentary delegations, speeches by parliamentary delegations of one country in the parliament of another country will meet the aspirations of the peoples [of all states] for the development of friendly relations and cooperation.
>
> (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1955a, 506)

This declaration of the USSR Supreme Soviet to "the peoples and parliaments of all states," adopted on February 9, 1955, and the accession of the Soviet parliamentary group to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) later the same year marked institutional and discursive developments of the USSR's *de jure* "supreme body of state power" (Kukushkin and Chistiakov 1987b, 291). The semi-formal international representation of the state became one of the Supreme Soviet's most significant functions, involving the dispatch and reception of hundreds of parliamentary delegations between 1955 and 1985. These exchanges and the recognition by the IPU also meant that the Supreme Soviet was normalized as a parliament in conceptual terms (Juviler 1961, 25).

The domestic functions of the Supreme Soviet and its position within the Soviet political system were barely affected by the so-called "Thaw" under Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev, a period that included criticism of Iosif Vissarionovich Stalin at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), held on February 14–25, 1956. Elections remained uncontested, with nearly total turnout and almost unanimous support for the "bloc Communists and non-party members," in which all candidates were pre-appointed by the CPSU Central Committee. The Supreme Soviet had no control over the Council of Ministers. Its sole role in legislation was to officially sanction premade laws, which was always done unanimously. Due to their brevity and infrequency, the sessions rarely allowed for

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substantial discussions or the passage of drafts, which prepared by the CPSU Central Committee and the Council of Ministers, and most legislation was approved by the Supreme Soviet's standing Presidium. There were no significant differences in the functioning of the Council of the Union and the Council of Nationalities, which often had joint sessions.

As part of the regime's legitimation, both the elections, which featured festive elements (Tsipursky 2011), and the sessions of the Supreme Soviet became rituals of loyalty. The speeches made during the "campaign" and in the Supreme Soviet amplified the official discourse set by the CPSU leadership. Descriptive representation of the social groups that constituted the Soviet society from the party's perspective (gender, nationality, class, occupation, and age) remained an important symbolic function of the Supreme Soviet. So did the horizontal (in the sense of elimination of differences) and vertical (in the sense of loyalty to the party and the state) integration of the community of a singular Soviet people.[1]

In practical terms, vertical integration also included the cohesion of deputies (other than the party's leader), who could not deviate from the prescribed discourse, and the top-down transfer of information to and through the deputies, which also occurred within the Supreme Soviet's standing commissions.[2] The hierarchy between the rank-and-file deputies and the top CPSU leadership, which overlapped with the Supreme Soviet Presidium, was reflected in the classroom-like setup of the frequent joint meetings of the two chambers. The absence of sectors or opposing benches indicated the presumed lack of dissensus in Soviet society (Figure 7.1).

Furthermore, the large body of deputies in the USSR, republican, regional, and local soviets contributed to elite recruitment, with many non-party deputies joining the party, and recognition of individuals. Apart from honor, membership in the USSR Supreme Soviet made non-party members part of the *nomenklatura*, the party-appointed privileged stratum. The privileges included free travel on public transport, admission to special stores, and preferential access to services, although for those deputies who did not have other positions of leadership, these privileges were temporary (Zemtsov 1985, 152–53, 234–35; Voslenskii 1990, 159).

The Supreme Soviet also continued to function as part of the feedback mechanism through which Soviet citizens could inform the government of their grievances. This function was performed through direct communication with individual deputies and the Presidium. Petitions and complaints were not only addressed individually but also analyzed *en masse* contributing to fine-tuning of official policies. The Supreme Soviet Presidium also had a further important function of issuing pardons, which did not rely on clear legal criteria in the USSR (Zemtsov 1989, 74).

In 1966, new standing commissions were established in the Supreme Soviet's two chambers, but this had little effect on the body's operation. The provisions on the Supreme Soviet in the new Constitution, adopted under Leonid Il'ich Brezhnev in 1977, were only slightly different from those in the 1936 Constitution (Kukushkin and Chistiakov 1987a, 346–53). Symbolically, there were some changes related to the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet Presidium. Between 1977 and 1985, the *de jure* highest government office was taken up by the General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, who was the *de facto* head of state. This was due to



Figure 7.1 Joint meeting of the Council of the Union and the Council of Nationalities of the second session of the Fourth USSR Supreme Soviet. Moscow, February 3–9, 1955. RGAKFD, B-617.

the strengthening of Brezhnev's position in the leadership in the second half of the 1970s and his fondness for honors (Gill 2018, 220–1, 239). The practice of combining the highest *de jure* and *de facto* offices was continued by his successors, Iurii Vladimirovich Andropov (1982–1984) and Konstantin Ustinovich Chernenko (1984–1985), and interrupted by Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev in 1985.

In the global context, the Supreme Soviet remained a model for structural adjustments within the informal Soviet empire (Duara 2007), encompassing both the existing dependencies and the countries of "socialist orientation," predominantly in Africa. Similar to the period before 1955, there existed no strict template for a state socialist assembly, yet the presence of a standing derivative body remained its pivotal feature. In some cases, the respective ruling party or another political organization was not only included in the constitution as the leading force of society, akin to the CPSU in Article 6 of the 1977 Constitution (Kukushkin and Chistiakov 1987a, 319) but was also more directly incorporated into the political system. Even after their dependency on the USSR ended, as seen in the cases of Albania and China, communist dictatorships kept the Soviet-like assemblies.

The exchanges between the Supreme Soviet and the assemblies of dependent regimes contributed to the cohesion of the Soviet informal empire. After some participants of the Bandung Conference (April 18–24, 1955) argued that the USSR was one of imperialist powers, the Soviet leadership sought to increase its prestige in the postcolonial states (Appadorai 1955, 224). The interparliamentary exchanges with developing countries served this purpose, apart from promoting state socialism and serving other foreign-policy objectives. Delegations to and from "capitalist" countries were supposed to reduce the intensity of the Cold War and promote the USSR's image in the public circles of the respective countries. All of these exchanges were also intended to advance the Soviet peace rhetoric, but these efforts were significantly undermined by the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, the quelling of the Prague Spring in 1968, and the Soviet–Afghan War in 1979–1989.

The official Soviet discourse, and by extension, Soviet legal scholarship, on the Supreme Soviet and parliaments, in general, remained relational (Burbank 1995), with persistent juxtapositions between socialist and "bourgeois" democracies and criticism of "bourgeois parliamentarism." Interestingly, normalizing the Supreme Soviet as a parliament through interparliamentary contacts did not consolidate it as a Soviet version of this modern institution in conceptual terms. Since the 1970s, the Supreme Soviet was rarely called "parliament" by Soviet deputies and authors (Kotov 1966; Tiutekin and Lungu 1970), even though its equivalence to foreign parliaments continued to be implied when exchanges were being discussed.

There was systematic criticism of the Supreme Soviet both domestically and internationally. The individual instances of dissent in the 1940s and 1950s (Firsov 2008) gave way to organized political opposition in the USSR in the form of the dissident movement.[3] A major role was played by the "scientific-technical intelligentsia" (Sakharov 2006b, 69): physicists, mathematicians, and other Soviet-educated specialists. Virtually every dissident author discussing the Supreme Soviet denounced it. The circulation of texts in *samizdat* ("self-published") and *tamizdat* ("published abroad") forms contributed to the emergence of an unofficial Soviet public sphere, despite the relatively small number of dissidents and their persecution. The publication of oppositional texts abroad and emigration

(including involuntary after the deprivation of Soviet citizenship) connected the oppositional Soviet discourse to the older Russian-language émigré discourse and critical Western scholarship. Along with the disagreements between the CPSU and Western European communists in the 1970s, this contributed to a broader international recognition of the USSR Supreme Soviet as neither a parliament nor a democratic institution.

Although the slogan of democratization was popular, dissident and émigré authors did not necessarily support Western-style parliamentarism in the normative liberal sense. Some of them relied on the antiparliamentary discourses of the previous generations of Russian imperial and émigré intellectuals, proposing to embrace Christianity or nationalism as new ideologies and to use parliaments for their promotion. Others suggested political organization based on contemporary socialist ideas, deeming them more democratic than Western parliamentarism.

The Supreme Soviet and its domestic functions

Potential reforms of the Supreme Soviet and the necessity to enhance its efficiency were discussed by the Soviet leadership in the 1960s and 1970s. However, the main features of the institution largely persisted, even with the introduction of additional standing commissions. Elections and plenary sessions legitimized the regime through the affirmation and performance of loyalty. Descriptive representation and the integration of the Soviet community, both horizontally and vertically, also remained important functions. The Supreme Soviet Presidium and its deputies also played a role in the communication between the Soviet leadership and citizens, amplifying the official discourse in a top-down manner and receiving as well as systematizing complaints and petitions from below.

While the 1936 Constitution defined the USSR as a state of "workers and peasants," the design of the Supreme Soviet as a universally elected assembly (Kukushkin and Chistiakov 1987b, 285, 311) implied the sovereignty of the entire people rather than the two classes. In 1961, the new CPSU Program formally extended sovereignty to encompass the entire people. However, the working class was to keep its leading role until communism was built and classes disappeared. The program also announced the transformation of the proletarian democracy into "popular socialist democracy" (Kommunisticheskaia partiia Sovetskogo Soiuza 1962, 3:303, 306).

In early 1962, the CPSU Central Committee initiated the development of a new constitution, forming a working group that included Boris Nikolaevich Ponomarev, the head of the Central Committee's International Department, and Fedor Mikhailovich Burlatskii, a Central Committee functionary. The Supreme Soviet established the Constitutional Commission under Khrushchev. Brezhnev, the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet Presidium in 1960–1964, headed the subcommission on the political system and, following Khrushchev's ousting in 1964, the entire commission. The drafting faced several interruptions, and new working groups within the party were formed in 1968 under Aleksandr Nikolaevich Iakovlev, the deputy head of the Central Committee's Propaganda Department, and in 1973

under Ponomarev. In May 1977, the Central Committee Plenum approved the draft of Ponomarev's group. Later the same year, the draft underwent a "popular discussion" and was ultimately adopted by the Supreme Soviet on October 7 (Strekalov 2018, 41–3, 49, 57–9, 61–2, 64–7, 69, 74–6).

The discussion of the new constitution involved party and government officials, jurists, and members of the broader public who submitted their written proposals. There were multiple suggestions on reforming the Supreme Soviet, including renaming it into the Supreme Soviet of People's Deputies, expanding its competence, and strengthening its standing commissions. There were suggestions to reform the Council of Nationalities, rename it into the Council of Republics, or abolish it altogether.[4] In 1968, a suggestion was made[5] to return to the system of congresses of soviets. The indirectly elected USSR Congress of Soviets of People's Deputies would include some 5,000 delegates and form the bicameral Supreme Soviet of People's Deputies. There were also suggestions to introduce the USSR President (to be elected by the Supreme Soviet), local "people's assemblies" (to work parallel to soviets), and the Committee of Constitutional Oversight. However, Brezhnev insisted on retaining the main features of the existing system (Strekalov 2018, 47, 60, 72, 80–1, 173–7, 179, 210, 224–56).

The operation of the Supreme Soviet was discussed while the work on the draft was on hiatus. The Chairmen of the Supreme Soviet Presidium, Anastas Mikoyan (1964–1965) and Nikolai Viktorovich Podgornyi (1965–1977), called for increasing the role of commissions and making discussions more substantial. In 1966, following the decision of the Twenty-Third Party Congress to strengthen representative bodies, new commissions were formed in each chamber, and in 1967, a decree on their operation was adopted. After the reform, in 1968–1969, members of the Central Committee apparatus still proposed creating a working "parliament" that would consider day-to-day issues of the country, which meant that the goal of strengthening the Supreme Soviet was not achieved (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1966b, 29–32; Lammich 1977, 109; Strekalov 2018, 50–1, 180–7).

During the "popular discussion" of 1977, the Constitutional Commission received multiple amendments pertaining the Supreme Soviet. Some addressed the relations between deputies and voters, suggesting that voter instructions (*nakaz*) be defined and enforced through regular reports from deputies. The instructions were meant to have a legal status and be taken into account when drafting economic plans. Others argued that candidates should be nominated by voters. There were proposals for a more detailed discussion of the CPSU's role, with some suggesting that the constitution should state that the General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee assumed the office of the Chairman of the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium and was the head of state.[6]

Following the 1961 Party Program, the 1977 Constitution extended sovereignty to the entire people but maintained that a "classless communist society" was still a future aspiration. The Supreme Soviet retained its status as "the supreme body of state power." Its chambers, the Council of the Union and the Council of

Nationalities, continued to be universally elected and equal. Between the sessions of the Supreme Soviet, its Presidium had broad competence, including legislating through decrees. The Council of Ministers remained accountable to the Supreme Soviet or the Presidium between the sessions. The passive voting age was lowered from 23 to 21. The Supreme Soviet's term was extended from four to five years. The number of deputies was made equal in both chambers. The 1977 Constitution dropped the provision that the Supreme Soviet was the only legislative body and included new provisions on standing commissions (Kukushkin and Chistiakov 1987a, 317–18, 343–4, 346–54, 1987b, 291–5, 312).

The new Constitution did not impact the elections and operation of the Supreme Soviet. The uncontested elections, predated by an official "campaign" featuring program speeches by leaders (Brezhnev 1974), were a ritual affirming the party and demonstrating loyalty to it. Officially, the elections to the Supreme Soviet in 1958 (1,378 deputies), 1962 (1,443), 1966 (1,517), 1970 (1,517), 1974 (1,517), 1979 (1,500), and 1984 (1,500) recorded nearly 100-percent turnouts (99.99 percent in 1984) and nearly absolute victories of the "bloc of Communists and non-party members," receiving over 99 percent of votes each time (White 1985, 217). The results were celebrated as a unanimous approval of official policies by the entire "Soviet people" and as a sign of unity between the party and the people.[7] Loyalty and affirmation were also demonstrated within the USSR Supreme Soviet. There is no evidence of a single non-unanimous vote between the procedural disagreement at the first session in 1938 (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1938, 49–50) and perestroika. Performatively, the act of raising hands in unanimous approval was a recurring trope in posters and photographs depicting the elections and, especially, the Supreme Soviet (Figure 7.2).

Descriptive representation through the diverse deputies handpicked by the party remained a primary symbolic function of the Supreme Soviet. It was often emphasized that the Supreme Soviet consisted not of professional politicians but of "real" representatives of the people, including workers, collective farmers, and members of the intelligentsia. Numerous photos showed deputies engaged in their main occupation or interacting with colleagues at work (Figure 7.3). Ethnic diversity was highlighted in the reports of the credential commissions of the two chambers, which celebrated the "triumph" of the Leninist nationalities policy. The reports and individual speeches also underscored the presence of women, whose share was typically around 30 percent in line with the unofficial quota.[8]

The Supreme Soviet contributed to the symbolic integration of different groups, the classes of workers and peasants (collective farmers), and nationalities in the first place, into one "fraternal family" or a singular Soviet people, characterized by "moral-political unity." The pursuit of a common goal – building communism – served as the foundation for this unity. Vertical integration meant complete subordination to the party deemed the leader, educator, and inspirer of the Soviet people (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1957c, 133–8, 1966b, 40, 1970b, 5, 1984, 4). The community of the Soviet people was explicitly articulated since the 1970s. An illustrative example in this regard is the opening speech in the Nationalities Council by



Figure 7.2 "Let's elect the worthy to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR!" Poster. Dmitrov, 1970. GTsMSIR, 38103/3.

Fedorov Oleksii Fedorovych,[9] a war veteran and government official from the Ukrainian SSR.

> […] we are all representatives of the great Soviet people that has been formed as a new historical community of people. The Soviet people demonstrate its monolithic cohesion by unanimous approval of the domestic and foreign policy of its dear Communist Party.
>
> (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1974, 7)

It was openly acknowledged that the Supreme Soviet implemented the party's decisions rather than making its own (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1956, 72; 1984, 29). Party

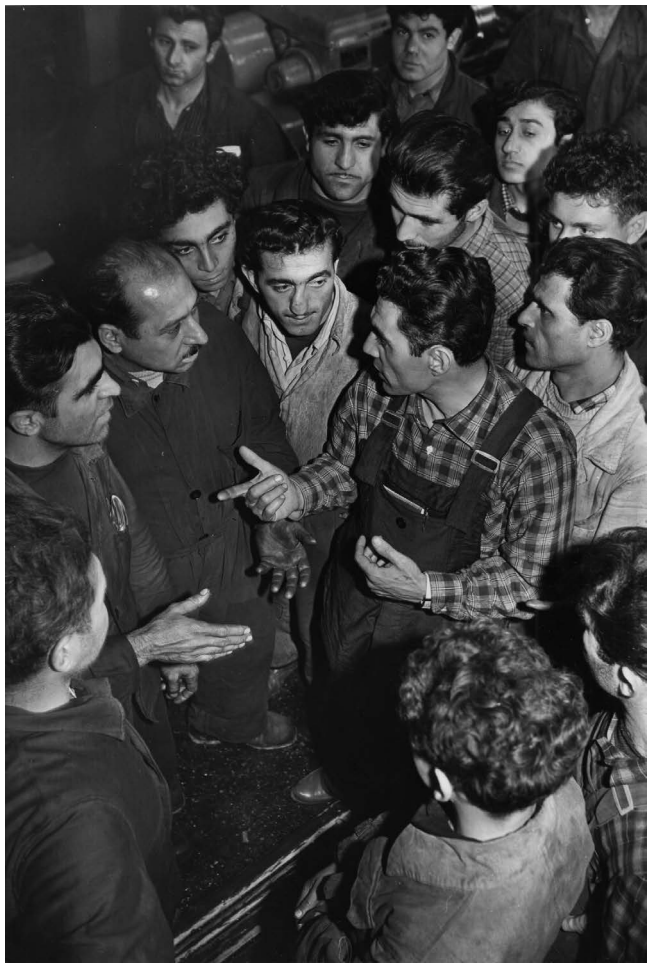


Figure 7.3 "Deputy of the USSR Supreme Soviet Vazgen Ghazaryan shares his impressions of the session of the USSR Supreme Soviet." Yerevan, 1960. GTsMSIR, 34208/41.

leaders continued to use it as a rostrum for amplifying the official discourse. After Stalin's death, the cohesion around a single leader was downplayed. In the 1970s, especially since 1977, Brezhnev was again celebrated personally as the leader of the party and Vladimir Il'ich Lenin's successor. After Brezhnev's death, his successors Andropov and Chernenko were also celebrated personally (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1974, 18, 1975, 53, 1977, 29, 1979, 4, 1982, 6, 1984, 27–8).

Being nominated and "elected" to the Supreme Soviet was treated as recognistion of individual merit and an honor (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1978b, 283; Shestalov 1981, 8). The Supreme Soviet continued to include prominent Soviet citizens, such as the cosmonauts Iurii Alekseevich Gagarin (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR



Figure 7.4 Cosmonaut V. V. Tereshkova (third from right) and People's Poet of the Dagestan ASSR Khhamzatilazul Rasul Khhamzatil vas (third from left) among the deputies of the seventh session of the Eighth USSR Supreme Soviet. Moscow, December 12–14, 1973. Photo by V. P. Borodin. RGAKFD, 0-387118.

1962, 44) and Valentina Vladimirovna Tereshkova (Figure 7.4). The latter was a member of the Supreme Soviet from 1966 to 1989. This status came with material benefits. According to Il'ia Zemtsov, deputies of the USSR and republican supreme soviets received a monetary reward in addition to their salary at their permanent place of work. During the sessions, they used transport free of charge and gained access to the "closed" government stores. They also had preferential access to sanatoriums and medical services. A deputy's badge was a symbol of social distinction that could help with day-to-day matters (Zemtsov 1985, 153, 234).

In practical terms, the Supreme Soviet and its Presidium were fully subordinate to the party's Central Committee and, more specifically, to its Politburo (Presidium until 1966) and Secretariat.[10] The Central Committee Plenums did not have proper discussions between the 1930s and perestroika and unanimously approved all decisions ahead of the Supreme Soviet sessions.[11] Central Committee functionaries, such as Anatolii Sergeevich Cherniaev who worked under Ponomarev in its International Department, wrote Supreme Soviet speeches for the party leaders as well as rank-and-file deputies who were treated as descriptive representatives of the corresponding social groups (Cherniaev 2003, 1984:17; 1985:72). Although the sessions of the Supreme Soviet were ornamental, they were an occasion for regional party leaders to come to Moscow and have in person meetings in the Central Committee, including with the General Secretary (Vorotnikov 2007, 53–5).

As a *de facto* appointed bureaucratic body, the Supreme Soviet mediated between other government bodies and the populace, with its Presidium and individual deputies receiving numerous complaints and petitions (Nudnenko 1982, 62–3). The famous journalist and writer Il'ia Grigor'evich Erenburg, who served as a USSR Supreme Soviet deputy from the Latvian SSR in 1954–1966, treated working with petitions as the main occupation of a deputy.

> A deputy of the Supreme Soviet has to spend his energy not at the short sessions where he listens and votes, but at any time of the year – he fulfills the requests of local authorities and much more often [those of] voters offended by fate; he is a lawyer, an intercessor, a pusher.
>
> (Erenburg 1990, 3:338)

According to Erenburg, requests for assistance with housing and jobs were particularly frequent. Natal'ia Ivanovna Stoliarova, who worked as Erenburg's secretary, recalled that he also helped a group of voters in their efforts to have a Catholic church constructed, despite attempts by local authorities to impede it (Erenburg 1990, 3:339–42, 413–14). Rank-and-file deputies also managed to occasionally assist their constituents (Dodonov 1998, 156).

The volume of correspondence was immense. Vasilii Vasil'evich Kuznetsov, the acting Chairman of the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium at the time, reported that in 1982 and the first two months of 1983, the Presidium received 2,200 proposals, statements, and complaints on healthcare alone. The presidiums of republican supreme soviets and soviets across the USSR received over 152,000 such communications. Complaints were consolidated into confidential reports. Regarding healthcare, Soviet citizens expressed dissatisfaction with the inadequate care provided by medical personnel; incorrect diagnoses; bribery; insufficient funding for medical facilities; the poor condition of buildings; lack of hot water; shortages of hospital beds, furniture, equipment, medicine, and other materials; shortages of medical personnel and doctors; and staff turnover. As Kuznetsov reported, specific grievances were addressed by the Health Ministry and soviets.[12]

Dissidents communicated with the Supreme Soviet and its Presidium through open letters and appeals. The Committee for State Security (KGB) reported that the physicist Andrei Dmitrievich Sakharov prepared an appeal to the Supreme Soviet and the Politburo on June 1, 1977, amidst discussions about the new constitution. The appeal included demands for democratization and the protection of human rights. Along with his wife, Elena Georgievna Bonner, Sakharov gathered over 50 signatures and, on June 2, passed the letter to the West through a foreign journalist.[13] Petitions also concerned issues such as emigration restrictions and the infringement of the rights of specific groups. Some dissidents attempted to deliver their petitions in person (Khronika tekushchikh sobytii 1972, 22).

The functioning of the Supreme Soviet Presidium, comprised of 37 members in 1966, did not differ much from the assembly's plenary sessions. It convened infrequently, with, for example, four meetings in 1971 and seven in 1972. The meetings were often devoted to ratification of international treaties and reports from

ministries and other central agencies. There was no time for deliberation and voting was always unanimous (Reichel 1976, 23, 34–6).

The Supreme Soviet's Presidium and the standing commissions of its chambers functioned as auxiliary bureaucratic bodies (Kirstein 1972, 8; Zemtsov 1989, 76). The commissions of the two chambers (on budget, foreign affairs, agriculture, construction, and so on) were identical in names, sizes, agendas, and meeting schedules. Their agendas were set for a year by a specialized department of the Presidium, while the proceedings were controlled by high-ranking party and government officials. The commissions considered economic plans and state budgets, but the participation of deputies was limited to the most general acquaintance with them. Although some amendments were introduced, this happened in a top-down manner and reflected the goal of fulfilling the respective economic plans. The work of the commissions reflected the overt centralization of the USSR, even though republican leaders had a chance to express their dissatisfaction with it (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1966b, 29–32; Klimanov 2004, 15–20).

The presidiums of the USSR and republican supreme soviets held a degree of autonomy in matters of granting pardons. The USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium was also involved in reviewing cases of those who had been imprisoned during the Stalinist purges.[14] Serving as the collective head of state, it formally bestowed awards, although the decisions on these awards were predominately made in the Central Committee's Secretariat and subsequently sanctioned by the Politburo (Permiakov 2020, 378, 390, 506, 812). Not all awards were bestowed publicly,[15] while some were granted to party leaders on occasion of their birthdays.[16] The Presidium also held the authority to revoke citizenship from individuals deemed to be opponents of the regime and "defectors," yet these decisions also stemmed from the party bodies.[17]

Although the performance and functions of the supreme soviets of union republics were similar to those of the USSR Supreme Soviet, their leaders sometimes took steps against overt centralization and Russification. Kārlis Ozoliņš,[18] the Chairman of the Latvian Supreme Soviet, was among those who were concerned with the Russification of the republic in 1956. The same year, the Azerbaijani Supreme Soviet made Azerbaijani the sole official language of the republic without consulting the central leadership (Smith 2011, 84–5).

The Supreme Soviet in foreign relations

Since 1955, international representation of the country became one of the USSR Supreme Soviet's most important functions. The purposes and content of interparliamentary exchanges depended on specific countries and their alignment in the Cold War.

Speaking in the Supreme Soviet after the Geneva Summit (July 18, 1955), which was interpreted as the end of the Cold War, Vasil Mzhavanadze,[19] a Georgian party leader, emphasized the role of exchanges in ensuring the peaceful coexistence and competition between the socialist and capitalist systems. Erenburg asserted that personal contacts would help overcome mutual ignorance and mistrust

(Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1955b, 41, 43, 77, 81–2, 85, 87–8). On July 29, the formal decision to establish the Soviet Parliamentary Group and join the IPU was made by a conference of Supreme Soviet deputies. Dmitrii Trofimovich Shepilov, a member of the CPSU Central Committee, headed the Committee of the Parliamentary Group, formed on August 5 (Parlamentskaia gruppa SSSR 1955, 3–4).

In December 1955, Vilis Lācis,[20] a writer and Prime Minister of the Latvian SSR, reported that after the Supreme Soviet's declaration was published, parliamentarians from India, Sweden, Syria, Yugoslavia, Japan, Belgium, France, Luxembourg, Albania, Austria, Poland, and Iran visited the USSR in 1955. Besides, 27 congressmen visited the USSR in 1955 as private individuals. The programs of the visits included multiple republics and cities, where the delegations were taken to official agencies, industrial enterprises, collective farms, education and cultural institutions. Many of them visited the nuclear power plant of the USSR Academy of Sciences. Foreign parliamentarians met with the chairmen of the Supreme Soviet's chambers as well as with chairmen and members of the standing commissions. Lācis noted that visitors were interested in the national republics and their rights, trade unions and other civic organizations, and freedom of religion. Foreign visitors expressed some criticism of the labor-intensive industry and shortcomings in city planning and interiors of houses (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1955c, 254–7, 259–60).

French deputies, who met with the leading officials of the Supreme Soviet in September 1955, asked them about the body's role in the adoption of the five-year plans and the state budget, including specific amendments and the number of commission meetings. They also inquired whether there had ever been a case when the cabinet was not supported by a majority, and how candidates were nominated. Aleksandr Fedorovich Gorkin, the Deputy Secretary of the Presidium, explained that organizations nominated different candidates but then agreed on a single candidate at a district electoral meeting.[21] Foreign delegations sometimes did not include any communists, and the Soviet side noted that some of their members were predisposed in a hostile or mistrustful manner.[22]

V. Lācis also reported on the Soviet parliamentary delegations, which in 1955 traveled to the USSR's Eastern European dependencies, Finland, and Yugoslavia. In Czechoslovakia, the Supreme Soviet delegation was greeted with the slogan "With the Soviet Union – for eternity!" In Yugoslavia, which resumed bilateral relations with the USSR in 1954, the Soviet delegation visited all six republics. There, its members were shown a variety of industrial, agricultural, and cultural sites, and they met with workers, employees, peasants, managers, and administrators. As a result of the visit, the Soviet side acknowledged that the Yugoslav people had achieved some success in building the foundations of socialism (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1955c, 261–2).

The Supreme Soviet's resolutions and appeals on international matters, such as those concerning disarmament and the prohibition of nuclear tests, were imbued with peace rhetoric. In 1959, it approved USSR's unilateral decrease in armed forces. Peace rhetoric suffused the assembly's responses to the Suez Crisis and the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 as well as the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. The

Supreme Soviet appealed to parliaments and governments of the world, denouncing the USA after their involvement in the Vietnam War (1955–1975) in 1965 and 1966 as well as Israel in the context of the Arab–Israeli conflict in 1970. In 1983, it urged the US Congress and the parliaments of other North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) members to cease relying on force in foreign affairs and emphasized the need for equal security (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1957a, 683–4, 1957b, 275, 278, 282–5, 1958, 382–8, 1959b, 718–21, 1960, 195–9, 1963, 589–90, 1966a, 470–1, 1966b, 132, 1970b, 172, 174, 1983, 253).

The USSR and its dependent regimes also brought matters of disarmament and the prohibition of nuclear tests to the IPU agenda (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1959a, 573, 1960, 148). Whereas Soviet peace rhetoric was generally supported at the IPU conferences, the USSR's concrete interpretations of world crises remained contested.[23] Besides, the invasions of Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Afghanistan undermined the USSR's effort to present itself as a champion of peace. As reported in the late 1970s, Soviet intelligence sought to promote peace rhetoric and détente as well as bilateral relations with the USA, France, West Germany, Japan, India, and several other countries, through foreign parliaments, prompting speeches and inquiries there (Makarov, Kostenko, and Kuzovkin 2006, 192, 210).

Exchanges in parliamentary delegations, which included republican supreme soviets, remained especially important. Among the bodies involved in the preparation of the exchanges were the CPSU Central Committee, where they were curated by the International Department under Ponomarev, the Committee of the Soviet Parliamentary Group, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The decisions were made in the Secretariat of the Central Committee. In *Izvestiia*, one member of the staff was tasked with dealing with interparliamentary ties (Permiakov 2021, 411, 804).

According to Aleksei Pavlovich Shitikov, who chaired the Council of the Union and headed the Soviet Parliamentary Group at the time, between February 9, 1955, and January 1, 1980, the USSR received 217 official parliamentary delegations from 95 countries, while 187 delegations of the USSR Supreme Soviet traveled to 86 countries. Apart from that, many delegations, groups, and individual parliamentarians visited the USSR. Shitikov reaffirmed that exchanges fell into three categories. The exchanges with socialist countries stimulated cooperation, cohesion, and the sharing of experience with each other. The exchanges with capitalist countries allowed the USSR to explain its Constitution and principles of domestic and foreign policy and demonstrate the advancements of the Soviet people as well as to promote peace. Finally, the exchanges with developing countries served to establish mutually equal treaties, even though here he mentioned those countries that were already dependent on the USSR, such as Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, and South Yemen (Shitikov 1980, 74–5).

Indeed, interparliamentary relations contributed to the cohesion of the informal Soviet empire, which was governed by vernacular parties and exhibited varying degrees of influence and control exerted by the USSR. Some of the dependent countries were part of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon), established in 1949, and the Warsaw Treaty Organization, formed in 1955, fitting the concept of a satellite state. Others were simply described as Marxist–Leninist,

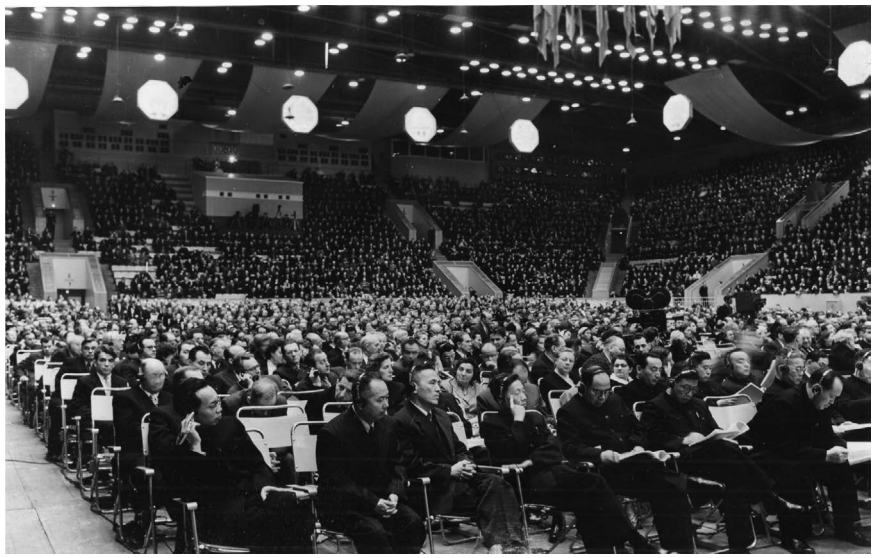


Figure 7.5 Solemn meeting of the USSR Supreme Soviet on the occasion of the Fortieth Anniversary of the Great October Revolution. Moscow, November 6, 1957. GTsMSIR, 32193/8.

"progressive," or "revolutionary" states, and as "countries of socialist orientation," and maintained close bilateral ties with the USSR (Wolf 1985, 997–8). The IPU parliamentary groups of the socialist countries also convened separately.[24]

The jubilee session of the Supreme Soviet, dedicated to the fortieth anniversary of the October Revolution, took place at the Central Stadium in Moscow on November 6, 1957, and included over ten thousand participants (Figure 7.5). Among them were the delegations of dependent regimes and Yugoslavia (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1957c, 64–119). The session celebrated socialism as a world system, encompassing some 950 million people (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1957c, 136), and the USSR as a great socialist power. It also voiced support for the anticolonial struggle. The session accused the Western ruling circles of opposing Soviet peace policy, asserting that the USA aimed for world domination. Once again, it reiterated the call for world peace through disarmament, the prohibition of nuclear tests and, eventually, nuclear weapons, establishment of a collective security system in Europe and Asia, development of economic and cultural ties, and the enhancement of trust between peoples (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1957c, 138–41).

During bilateral exchanges between the USSR and dependent socialist countries, both parties had the opportunity to express their concerns. The Supreme Soviet delegation that visited Hungary in 1961 reported, for instance, that the Hungarian side expressed dissatisfaction with the publication of works by undesirable Hungarian authors in the USSR. The Soviet delegation raised the issue of shortcomings in the distribution of Soviet books and periodicals in Hungary (Afiani 1998, 283, 285).

The relations, however, remained asymmetric. Josef Smrkovský, a member of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, who led a parliamentary delegation to the USSR in June 1968 – that is, during the Prague Spring – claimed that he was asked to avoid discussing the situation in Czechoslovakia, including democratization, in order to prevent confusion among the Soviet people. He had a tense discussion with Soviet journalists about Czechoslovak foreign policy. Smrkovský also met with Brezhnev, who criticized the situation and Alexander Dubček, the leader of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, personally, insisting that changes were needed (Smrkovskii 1975, 347–50).

The exchanges with capitalist states were utilized in Soviet propaganda. Speaking at the session of the USSR Supreme Soviet in 1977, Zoia Pavlovna Pukhova, formerly a worker and at the time a weaving factory director who participated in multiple exchanges, claimed that the position of women in capitalist countries was "a violation of human rights." She also advertised the Soviet system by presenting herself as an example of a working woman who was also a parliamentarian and eventually became a factory director (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1977, 168).

In the context of the Cold War, the exchanges with the USA (Figure 7.6) were also intended to help mitigate tensions and reach concrete agreements (Verkhovnyi



Figure 7.6 Reception in the Soviet Parliamentary Group of a group of US senators, headed by the chairman of the Subcommittee on European Affairs of the Senate Commission on Foreign Affairs Joseph Biden (fifth from left). Among those present: Chairman of the Soviet Parliamentary Group A. P. Shitikov (fourth from left), Deputy Chairman of the Parliamentary Group V. V. Zagladin (sixth from left), Director of the Institute for the USA and Canada of the USSR Academy of Sciences G. A. Arbatov (second from right). Moscow, August 28, 1979. RGAKFD, 0-350297.

Sovet SSSR 1974, 6, 18, 1979, 67). Cherniaev stressed their importance, claiming that Brezhnev's refusal to meet with the US senators in 1978 undermined the success of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT), which were essential for the USSR due to the detrimental effect of the arms race on the Soviet economy (Cherniaev 2003, 1978:31).

The exchanges with the parliaments of postcolonial states were tailored to promote the USSR and state socialism. Senator Chandradasa Wijesinghe, who headed a Ceylonese parliamentary delegation in 1957, addressed the visit during a meeting of the Supreme Soviet. Wijesinghe commended the advancements made by the USSR in its contribution to global decolonization and its pursuit of domestic modernization. Wijesinghe also acknowledged the Soviet support of Bandung's Ten Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1957b, 66). As part of the visit, the delegation was taken to the Tillya Sheikh Mosque in Uzbekistan (Figure 7.7), where they met with the officially sanctioned religious leaders. This was part of the Soviet strategy to showcase freedom of religion (Sablin 2019).



Figure 7.7 Ceylonese parliamentary delegation at the Tillya Sheikh Mosque. Tashkent, Uzbek SSR, April 1957, GTsMSIR, 31878/54.

The decolonization of Africa contributed to an increase in Soviet bilateral ties with the new independent states. According to the Soviet report on the visit of the Togolese parliamentary delegation led by Jonathan Savi de Tové in 1962, the country's leaders were interested in establishing relations with the USSR due to the continued economic dependency on French, German, and American capital. The USSR could potentially serve as an alternative partner, especially given its growing prestige in the context of the space program. The relations could also be leveraged to apply pressure on the Western powers. Some members of the delegation, however, had strongly negative expectations about the USSR, believing that there was a daily curfew in Moscow or that all Muslims had been killed. The mosque demonstration in Leningrad significantly improved the USSR's image. Although the objective of promoting socialism was not attained, as the delegation members displayed little enthusiasm for the economic and state systems of the USSR, they did express interest in Soviet economic and political assistance (Mazov et al. 2021, 243–8).

Apart from facilitating bilateral relations and echoing the Soviet peace rhetoric, Soviet parliamentary delegations made context-specific claims, gaining additional legitimacy for them by incorporating them into joint statements. For instance, they expressed support for the independence of Angola and the decolonization of Africa in general during visits to Kenya and Sudan in 1975 and 1976, respectively (Ministerstvo inostrannykh del SSSR 1985, 2:89, 100). These practices were not one-sided: some Somali state officials presented the visit of the Soviet parliamentary delegation to the country in 1964 as a sign of support for Somalia's territorial claims (Mazov et al. 2021, 583).

Cherniaev highlighted the conflict between propaganda and practical politics when discussing the visit of a US delegation in 1985.

> I am busy with the delegation of US senators led by [William S.] Cohen. Nobody wants to receive it. All these democratic games of ours are not for us, we do not have the people for this. Yesterday, the Congress decided to increase the exchange in delegations and parliamentarians. They have every congressman fit for this, and we have from the entire Supreme Soviet, God forbid, a dozen. Not to mention the fact that their congressmen and senators really influence policy, while in our country they only applaud, and only a few are able to "explain" policy and defend it in an argument.
>
> (Cherniaev 2003, 1985:29)

The same year, he described the strain that the exchanges put on the Soviet system, with Central Committee functionaries needing to prepare scripts even for the party leaders.

> Tomorrow is the final meeting with the English parliamentarians. God, how much fuss with them! But for them, this is ordinary political chatter. I have to prepare for B. N. [Ponomarev] memos, taking into account all options for a possible discussion. And [in such a manner] that each has a quote from Gorbachev. The Brezhnevite–Chernenkovite style continues for him.
>
> (Cherniaev 2003, 1985:55)



Figure 7.8 Deputy of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet L. N. Zaikov (third from left) during the visit of the delegation of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet to the USA. 1977. GMPIR, F. III-44493.

The interparliamentary exchanges also had elements of tourism (Figure 7.8). The book written by Konstantin Aleksandrovich Gubin, a Soviet journalist and deputy of the Supreme Soviet who participated in delegations, contained tourist photos from Switzerland (the site of the 1915 Zimmerwald Conference), France (a view from the Eifel Tower), Monaco, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom (UK) (Karl Marx's grave) (Gubin 1966, inlays).

Official Soviet discourse on parliaments and the Supreme Soviet

The official Soviet discourse on parliaments remained ambiguous. Soviet leaders recognized the "parliamentary path to socialism" as acceptable in certain foreign contexts. Descriptions of the Supreme Soviet remained relational, and it was often contrasted with "bourgeois parliaments." Even though it was rarely referred to as parliament domestically since the 1970s, its involvement in interparliamentary exchanges normalized it as one. The Supreme Soviet also continued to serve as a model of a "socialist parliament" for dependent regimes and countries of "socialist orientation," with similar institutions established in Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

At the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU in 1956, Khrushchev acknowledged the possibility of a "parliamentary path for transition to socialism," although he

reaffirmed that it had never been an option for Russia (Kommunisticheskaia partiia Sovetskogo Soiuza 1956, 1:39). He thereby reaffirmed the idea articulated by Stalin in 1946.[25] Mikhail Andreevich Suslov, a member of the Central Committee Presidium, developed this idea in more detail.

> At the same time, in some other capitalist countries, where the reactionary forces and the military-police machine are less strong, the possibility of a peaceful revolution during the transition to socialism cannot be ruled out. In particular, the possibility of the peaceful coming of the working class to power through winning a majority in parliament and turning the parliament into a *de facto* people's parliament is not ruled out. Such a parliament, based on a mass revolutionary movement of the proletariat, toiling peasants, intelligentsia, and all progressive sections of the population, will be able to break the resistance of the reactionary forces and carry out the socialist transformation of society.
>
> […] Communists and the working class, of course, prefer the most painless forms for the transition from one social system to another.
>
> (Kommunisticheskaia partiia Sovetskogo Soiuza 1956, 1:274)

Given that Khrushchev and Kliment Efremovich Voroshilov, who headed the Supreme Soviet Presidium in 1953–1960, also praised the parliamentary exchanges involving the Supreme Soviet, this can be interpreted as a broader acceptance of parliaments by the CPSU (Kommunisticheskaia partiia Sovetskogo Soiuza 1956, 1:28, 556). This was not uncontested within the party leadership. Prior to the congress, Lazar' Moiseevich Kaganovich objected to the acceptance of the parliamentary path to socialism, claiming at a meeting of the Central Committee Presidium that only the revolutionary path should be supported (Hopf 2012, 244–5).

After the Twentieth Party Congress, Soviet authors defended the new approach. The jurist Georgii Semenovich Gurvich was particularly supportive of the parliamentary path. Citing Jean-Jacques Rousseau, he argued that popular sovereignty lay at the foundation of the parliamentary system. However, the bourgeoisie had turned it into a servant of capital, leading to its criticism by Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Lenin. Under the new conditions, however, it became possible to fight for a "genuine representation of the people" and eliminate the shortcomings introduced into the parliamentary system by the bourgeoisie, employing the communist criticism. Parliament could hence be turned from a body of bourgeois democracy into a weapon of popular will (Gurvich 1956, 34–5). Citing Lenin selectively, Soviet authors concluded that communists needed to utilize everything positive created under capitalism, including parliaments. They nevertheless reaffirmed that parliamentary struggle needed to rely on a mass revolutionary movement led by a vanguard party and continued to write about the crisis of bourgeois parliamentarism (Sobolev 1956, 15; Romashkin 1958, 136–37; Shabad 1958, 112, 114).

Khrushchev clarified the official position in early 1961: parliaments could be used for the transition to socialism in countries where parliamentary traditions

exited. After securing a solid majority, communists were to dismantle the old bourgeois military-bureaucratic apparatus and establish a new "proletarian people's statehood in a parliamentary form" (Khrushchev 1961, 30). Commenting on the draft of the new CPSU Program, Burlatskii cited the experience of building socialism in Czechoslovakia – an industrially developed country with established parliamentary traditions (Burlatskii 1961, 39). The 1961 Program maintained that the "dictatorship of the bourgeoisie" manifested itself in the infringement of voters' rights and arbitrary constraints on representatives of the toilers in parliament. The working class was nevertheless expected to defend democratic liberties and parliamentary authority against the attempts of the "financial oligarchy" to replace parliamentarism with a fascist regime. The program reaffirmed the possibility of a peaceful transfer of power to the working class and "its vanguard," that is, a communist party, after they had won a parliamentary majority. At the same time, it left open the possibility of a "non-peaceful" transition to socialism in situations where "exploiter classes" resorted to violence against the people (Kommunisticheskaia partiia Sovetskogo Soiuza 1962, 3:252, 255, 257).

Some non-Soviet communists, however, challenged the idea of a parliamentary path to socialism. Prior to the Twentieth CPSU Congress, the Communist Party of Indonesia found the role of parliamentary struggle unclear (Fursenko 2006, 2: Postanovleniia, 1954–1958:203). During the development of a joint platform of communist parties in November 1957, in the context of the October Revolution's fortieth anniversary, the representatives of the Communist Party of China proposed removing the notion of transitioning to socialism through a parliamentary majority, but the CPSU Central Committee Presidium insisted on its inclusion (Tomilina, Velichanskaia, and Stykalin 2013, 36). In 1961, Enver Hoxha, the First Secretary of the Party of Labor of Albania, opposed the peaceful path to socialism (Tomilina et al. 2015, 573). These disagreements contributed to Sino–Soviet and Albanian–Soviet tensions, eventually leading both the People's Republic of China and the People's Republic of Albania to move away from the Soviet sphere of influence.

After Khrushchev was ousted, the parliamentary path to socialism did not remain undisputed in the officially permitted Soviet discourse. Some authors continued the previous line of argumentation, highlighting its feasibility in specific cases (Chesnokov 1967, 42). They cited the experience of Poland and Czechoslovakia, where traditional democratic bodies (the Sejm and the People's Assembly) were integrated with the dictatorship of the proletariat (Eremin 1974, 143). Others, however, argued that it was not the traditions of parliamentarism but rather class reasons that dictated the provisional use of bourgeois institutions in East Germany and Poland, where multiparty systems were necessary for the final phase of socialist transformations (Kozhokhin 1967, 28, 63). Aleksandr Pavlovich Kositsyn, the Deputy Director of the Institute of State and Law of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, emphasized that employing parliamentary forms of struggle was not the "parliamentary path" favored by opportunists but rather a form of social revolution (Kositsyn 1969, 19).

In the official discourse, "socialist democracy" continued to be juxtaposed with "bourgeois democracy," with economic, social, and political conditions for

universal participation in managing state affairs being the defining characteristic of the former (Denisov 1958, 7; Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1978a, 169; Kosolapov 1981, 149). The Supreme Soviet, frequently called "socialist parliament," "Soviet parliament," and "people's parliament" in the 1950s and 1960s, was portrayed as a genuine people's institution, embodying popular sovereignty, and deemed superior to any bourgeois parliament in every aspect.[26] This interpretation of the Supreme Soviet persisted even after the word "parliament" became rarely used for it. In the 1970s, Soviet authors argued that under "developed socialism," the law embodied the will of the "entire Soviet people as a new historical community" (Kerimov 1976, 62).

The juxtapositions often focused on the composition of the respective bodies. Writing in the context of the Paris Commune's hundredth anniversary in 1971 and citing Lenin, Vikt'or Chkhik'vadze,[27] a prominent Soviet jurist and the head of the Soviet Association of Political Sciences, reiterated that socialist state bodies were not composed of professional parliamentarians but of people engaged in production (Chkhikvadze 1971, 96). According to Soviet authors, who cited the membership in the US Congress, the UK House of Commons, and the West German Bundestag, antidemocratic bourgeois elections resulted in few or no workers, peasants (petty farmers), and rank-and-file employees being present in parliaments, which mainly comprised representatives of corporations and professional politicians. Consequently, parliaments and local self-government bodies failed to reflect the social structure of society and to manifest the interests of the majority of the population. They were also deemed unrepresentative due to the discrimination of national minorities and women (Guliev and Rudinskii 1984, 38).

The supposed superiority of the Supreme Soviet was emphasized based on the descriptive representation of specific groups. Speaking on the occasion of the October Revolution's Fiftieth Anniversary in 1967, Brezhnev claimed that the USSR Supreme Soviet had a higher number of women than the parliaments of all capitalist Western countries combined (Brezhnev 1967, 16). Züleyxa İsmayıl qızı Hüseynova,[28] an Azerbaijani party and government official, commended "the party and the people" for granting "the women of the Eastern republics" economic and political rights. She asserted that no parliament in the capitalist world could boast "such real guaranteed rights of women" (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1979, 61). In a similar manner, the representation of youth in the Supreme Soviet was contrasted with the ostensible lack thereof in capitalist countries (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1977, 352).

Comparisons also revolved around nominal aspects of the Soviet system, such as the lack of an imperative mandate in "bourgeois countries," or the lack of an upper chamber in the Supreme Soviet (Denisov 1958, 14; Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1959b, 595). The function of the Supreme Soviet as part of a feedback mechanism was celebrated as a unique feature of the Soviet system. Leonid Sergeevich Sobolev, a writer and journalist, called the Soviet deputy a "gear" connecting the "mass of the toilers, the voters" to the "bodies of Soviet government." He viewed the "huge army" of some two million deputies at all levels as an active force that assisted the state agencies (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1959b, 598). In the 1970s, Soviet authors often revisited Lenin's rejection of bourgeois parliamentarism and

the principle of separation of powers. In this regard, the Supreme Soviet was interpreted as a component of the unified representative system rather than a parliament (Kerimov and Chekharin 1970, 33, 107; Tikhomirov 1975, 18; Topornin 1976, 40, 115, 260–1).

Some Soviet publications continued to focus on the supposed crisis of bourgeois democracy and parliamentarism. Eduard Leonidovich Kuz'min portrayed Western parliaments as serving the "monopolistic bourgeoisie" and described bureaucratic centralization as a tendency. He also pointed to the case of Chile, where direct violence had been employed.[29] Other publications, however, did not depict the crisis as insurmountable. The involvement of communists, united with other progressive parties, in parliaments purportedly not only gave them a genuine representative quality but also helped safeguard democratic achievements and resist autocratic tendencies (Guliev and Kuz'min 1975, 139–40). Writing with a coauthor in the late 1970s, Kuz'min himself characterized parliamentarism as a "complex and self-contradictory phenomenon," asserting that throughout the preceding decade, the forces of democracy and progress had been harnessing parliamentary bodies to serve the interests of the toilers (Ageishin and Kuz'min 1978, 94–5).

Some authors referenced specific positive examples. Iakov Mikhailovich Bel'son, who drew on Western scholarship for his nuanced study, concluded that despite the ongoing crisis of bourgeois parliamentarism, there had been a degree of power rebalancing and an elevation of the Congress's role in the USA during the middle of the 1970s (Bel'son 1983, 107). Izabella Semenovna Karpikova characterized the Italian Parliament as more potent than those of other bourgeois countries, thanks to the efforts of the left (Karpikova 1966, 8). Soviet authors were also less critical of the postcolonial regimes with which the USSR had connections. It was also acknowledged that the Indian Parliament, for instance, had the similar shortcomings to parliaments of other bourgeois democratic countries, but "they manifested themselves to a lesser extent" (Mishin 1961, 3).

Although the Supreme Soviet was very rarely called parliament since the 1970s,[30] the implication that it was one persisted. The engagement of the Supreme Soviet in parliamentary exchanges normalized it as a parliament, creating a challenge for any attempt to reinterpret it. The IPU solidified this normalization by not only including the Soviet group but also by uncritically discussing the Supreme Soviet in its publication as a federal parliament, akin to the Swiss Federal Assembly (Ameller 1967, 33). Furthermore, Soviet materials aimed at foreign audiences continued to label the Supreme Soviet as a "parliament" (Schitikow 1978). The structural adjustments in the informal Soviet empire also contributed to this normalization. The USSR Supreme Soviet was frequently discussed alongside the people's parliaments of other socialist states (Topornin 1971, 91) and included in the category of "socialist parliaments," defined through their supremacy in state systems without a separation of powers (Topornin 1974, 174, 1976, 269).

The Supreme Soviet remained a model for both socialist states and states of socialist orientation. The similarities in constitutional documents and state systems,

combined with the presence of a single dominant party or organization, allow for the conceptual delineation of the Soviet empire. As of 1985, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Romania, Bulgaria, Afghanistan, Cuba, Vietnam, Angola, South Yemen, Ethiopia, Syria, Mozambique, Libya, Nicaragua, and North Korea were in varying degrees of dependency on the USSR (Wolf 1985). In the second half of the twentieth century, however, there were multiple other regimes that built their own versions of state socialism not necessarily under direct Soviet influence – in Kampuchea, Laos, Burma, Benin, Algeria, Egypt, Congo, Cabo Verde, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Seychelles, Tanzania, Somalia, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Burkina Faso, Madagascar, and São Tomé and Príncipe, not to mention in China, Yugoslavia, and Albania that split from the Soviet bloc. In many state socialist systems, there was a "supreme" assembly and a standing collegial body with extensive authority, similar to the Supreme Soviet and its Presidium.

In the countries that Soviet jurists deemed socialist and that were Soviet satellites, such a system was introduced or affirmed in the new (or revised) constitutions. This was the case for the People's Republic of Bulgaria (the 1971 Constitution), the Hungarian People's Republic (the amendments of 1972), the German Democratic Republic (the 1968 Constitution and the amendments of 1974), the Polish People's Republic (the amendments of 1976), the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (the 1960 Constitution and the Constitutional Law of 1968), the Mongolian People's Republic (the 1960 Constitution), the Korean People's Democratic Republic (the 1972 Constitution), the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (the 1980 Constitution), and the Republic of Cuba (the 1976 Constitution). The Lao People's Democratic Republic was also recognized as socialist, but it did not adopt a constitution until 1991. There was no strict uniformity. Apart from the USSR, only Czechoslovakia had a bicameral parliament. Besides, Czechoslovakia and North Korea had presidents, which was not the case in the USSR (Strashun, Topornin, and Shakhnazarov 1987a, 1:5, 141–9, 170–5, 212–18, 233, 253–8, 323–7, 1987b, 2:6–9, 33–40, 61–6, 84, 93–6, 150, 184–96).

In the state systems of the countries discussed as having a socialist orientation, there was more diversity. In the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, there was the Supreme People's Council and the standing Presidium (Iu. A. and Siukiiainen 1985, 14, 48–56). In some cases, the competence of the standing body belonged to the president (in Algeria, Guinea, Seychelles, Tanzania, and Congo); to a consultative body under the president (in Madagascar); or to the standing body and the president jointly (in Angola, Benin, Burma, Mozambique, and São Tomé and Príncipe) (Chirkin 1984, 90–1). In the Algerian People's Democratic Republic, the single party system was written in the 1976 Constitution (Iudin 1983, 7, 43–55). In the People's Republic of Angola, the state and the ruling party were merged through the 1975 Constitutional Law and the 1976 Law on People's Power. The President simultaneously held the position of Chairman of the People's Movement for Liberation of Angola (MPLA), and the Revolutionary Council (the supreme body) included the members of the MPLA Central Committee. The convening of the People's Assembly, intended as the supreme body of state power, was slated for the future (Chirkin 1977a, 3, 18–20). In the People's

Republic of Mozambique, the Front of Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO) was also integrated into the 1975 Constitution, and the People's Assembly had not yet been elected (Chirkin 1977b, 4, 11, 17–20). In the People's Republic of Congo, the President held the position of Chairman of the Congo Party of Labor, as stipulated by the 1979 Constitution. The party also compiled the single national candidate list for the election to the National People's Assembly (Chirkin 1983, 3, 5–6, 20–6).

Structures akin to the Supreme Soviet and its Presidium also endured in former Soviet dependencies, which were included in the list of socialist states, such as the People's Republic of China, the People's Socialist Republic of Albania, the Socialist Republic of Romania, and the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia. However, the state system of the latter was significantly more intricate than that of the USSR (Strashun, Topornin, and Shakhnazarov 1987a, 1:99, 108–12, 268–9, 287–94, 1987b, 2:125–34, 233, 342–60).

Reception of Soviet institutions

Reception of the Supreme Soviet and other Soviet institutions outside immediate official influence was overwhelmingly negative. Elections were not considered democratic, while the Supreme Soviet was deemed ornamental. In-depth analysis of the Soviet system was provided by émigré and foreign authors as well as by Soviet dissidents who became the opposition within the country.

Domestic skepticism about the Supreme Soviet and the elections was reflected in jokes that ridiculed the lack of contestation and the party's control (Mel'nichenko 2014, 602), as exemplified in a joke from the 1970s.

> [The Armenian Radio was asked,] "What will be the results of the USSR Supreme Soviet election in ten years?"
>
> "We can't answer that because the exact results of this election were recently stolen from the Secretariat of the CPSU Central Committee."
>
> (Shturman and Tiktin 1985, 21)

Other jokes took aim at the Supreme Soviet, mocking the privileges of deputies, corruption, and the low level of competence within the Supreme Soviet (Mel'nichenko 2014, 133, 139, 259). Cherniaev vividly portrayed the public perception of the Supreme Soviet and its Presidium in his diaries from 1977.

> And yesterday [on June 17, 1977] the whole evening they showed on TV the first meeting of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR under the new chairmanship [of Brezhnev]. There was painful "reading" of [whatever was written] in large letters [in the notes for the speech], without understanding what was being said, rarefied by multi-second pauses between words of one phrase, unbalanced accents, pitiful attempts to give intonation with pointing gestures out of place…

> The members of the Presidium sat and, like schoolchildren, wrote down every word, knowing that tomorrow it would be possible to read all this in all newspapers in a literary transformed form.
>
> […]
>
> The Ukrainian, Lithuanian, and other members began to speak, praising and evoking stormy applause… And this is a meeting of a functioning (!) supreme body! Not a mass performance, as the sessions of the Supreme Soviet themselves are, to which everyone has long been accustomed.
>
> […] Is it really impossible for the KGB to report that Homeric laughter is going around the country, and that complete indifference to all these theatrical spectacles that replace real management and demonstrate the complete impotence of the main character is taking place.
>
> (Cherniaev 2003, 1977:28)

Cherniaev also noted in his diary in 1980 that deputies exchanged critical remarks privately during a Supreme Soviet session (Cherniaev 2003, 1980:38).

The elections, however, were still used as an opportunity to complain about economic and everyday matters. A report from a precinct in the Stavropol Territory, for instance, stated that during the 1955 election to the RSFSR Supreme Soviet, voters complained about the lack of sweets and meat in the local shop as well as the infrequent screening of films (Belokon', Kolpikova, and Nikitenko 2011, 527). Besides, some Soviet citizens found cultural and social meaning in the elections, enthusiastically participating in amateur arts concerts that accompanied them (Tsipursky 2011, 84, 88).

In the 1950s, émigrés remained the primary source of printed Russian-language criticism, although underground oppositional groups existed throughout the USSR as well (Shubin 2001, 332; Firsov 2008). In 1956, the League for the Liberation of the Peoples of the USSR issued a memorandum to the IPU President, signed by representatives of Azerbaijani, Armenian, Belarusian, Georgian, Cossack, Ukrainian, Turkestani, and other émigré organizations. Protesting against the inclusion of the USSR Parliamentary Group in the IPU, the memorandum cited the violent elimination of elected democratic parliaments and governments of national republics by the Bolsheviks. It further argued that free elections were non-existent in the USSR and that the Supreme Soviet was a mere façade parliament, entirely subservient to the CPSU Central Committee. The memorandum specified that Supreme Soviet deputies were appointed by the Central Committee Presidium. Describing the elections as "a mockery of the right to free expression of the peoples' will" and "a comedy," it concluded that the USSR Parliamentary Group did not represent the will of the peoples living in the USSR. The memorandum warned that any relations with the communist "pseudo-parliaments" would bolster the Soviet dictatorship. The memorandum also rejected the USSR's self-presentation as an anti-colonial force, citing oppression and terror, as well as the slogan of peaceful coexistence between socialist and capitalist systems, pointing to the resistance to the Soviet totalitarian regime both within the USSR and in the countries of the so-called people's democracy.[31]

The transboundary circulation of *samizdat* and *tamizdat* publications contributed to the emergence of broadly shared interpretations of the Soviet regime. *The New Class* (1957) by Milovan Đilas, a former Yugoslav Communist leader turned critic of the regime, circulated in the USSR and proved especially influential. Although it was devoted to Yugoslavia, many of Đilas's conclusions applied to state socialism in general. He interpreted the communist bureaucracy as the new ruling class. Đilas acknowledged the use of parliamentary institutions under state socialism for propaganda, foreign policy, and regime legitimation. He argued that the top party bureaucracy, "the political core of the new class," also used parliaments to legitimize itself within the party (Djilas 1957, 114). Another influential work – *The Technology of Power* (1959) by Habdurakh'man Avtorkhanov, a Chechen émigré who had been a Bolshevik functionary and Nazi collaborator – foregrounded the role of groups and individuals within the Soviet elite in the functioning of the system (Avtorkhanov 1976). Within the USSR, two underground groups – the Union of Communards (active since 1963 and suppressed in 1965) and the All-Russian Social-Christian Union for the Liberation of the People (active since 1964 and suppressed in 1967) – expressed ideas similar to those of Đilas.[32]

In a 1964 *samizdat* pamphlet titled *From the Dictatorship of the Bureaucracy to the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, Valerii Efimovich Ronkin and Sergei Dmitrievich Khakhaev, Leningrad engineers and members of the Union of Communards, asserted that the USSR was ruled by "a new class of exploiters, the party-state bureaucracy." This class encompassed members of the economic and administrative apparatus, both appointed and "formally elected," as well as writers and journalists of the official media. The brochure deemed Soviet elections a comedy, as most voters had no information on candidates, and as the elections were uncontested. Ronkin and Khakhaev criticized the composition of the Supreme Soviet, arguing that the bureaucratic class, estimated at two percent of the total population, had over half of all seats. They also stressed that neither the Supreme Soviet nor party congresses gave proper consideration to any documents, as the bureaucracy chose to address the most sensitive issues within purely bureaucratic bodies.[33]

Igor' Viacheslavovich Ogurtsov, a student of philosophy and Oriental languages in Leningrad, and other authors of the All-Russian Social-Christian Union for the Liberation of the People program, which was adopted in 1964 and published abroad in 1975 (Denlop 1975), also viewed the regime as "a dictatorship of communist bureaucracy," "a new ruling class." In this context, all government bodies, from local agencies to the Supreme Soviet, were characterized as extensions of the party that did not represent the people.[34]

The concept of *nomenklatura*, built upon the notion of the "new class" and describing the inner party stratum, gained prominence in dissident and émigré circles (Geller and Nekrich 1982, 2:380). Gennadii Nikolaevich Pospelov, a literary scholar, argued in a 1966 *samizdat* collection *Feniks-66* ("Phoenix-66"), which was reprinted in the émigré journal *Grani* ("Facets") in 1968, that the "party bureaucracy in its 'nomenclature' hierarchy" ruled the country not through the soviets, but through party committees and executive state bodies. This regime was called "Soviet" only because party bureaucrats were also members of soviets, including

the Supreme Soviet. While there were rank-and-file deputies in the soviets, they were also nominated by the "party-bureaucratic" leadership and thus lacked the capacity to influence decision-making. The main function of the soviets was to communicate with the populace through petitions and complaints and to support these petitions before the bureaucratic authorities, an endeavor in which success was not always achieved. The elections to the soviets were an empty form, a "parody of Soviet democracy." The population, coerced into voting for pre-appointed candidates, had no interest in their results. Rank-and-file party members also had no political rights, as any form of political dissensus in the party was suppressed.[35]

In the narrow sense, the dissident movement was a movement for legality and human rights, relying on non-violent methods of public struggle (Horvath 2007). Petro Hryhorovych Hryhorenko, a Soviet Ukrainian military commander, urged voters not to support Aleksei Nikolaevich Kosygin in the 1966 USSR Supreme Soviet election, deeming him responsible for the "mistakes" of Stalin's and Khrushchev's governments due to his participation in them. Hryhorenko's appeal was rejected by Soviet newspapers and published in the magazine *Posev* ("Seeding") of the People's Toiling Alliance of Russian Solidarists.[36] The suppression of the Prague Spring through the Warsaw Pact invasion in 1968 served as a significant catalyst for the Soviet dissident movement, with *samizdat* authors discussing civil rights, democratic socialism, and the rights of non-Russian nationalities, for instance, in Ukraine and Latvia (Saleniece and Šķiņķe 2018, 266–7; Wojnowski 2018, 85–8). In his 1969 *Open Letter to the Deputies of Soviets of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic*, later published in the émigré journal *Suchasnist'* ("Modernity"), the Ukrainian philosopher Vasil' Semenovich Lisovyi argued that the soviets were ineffective and lacked authority due to the parallel systems of party and state bodies.[37]

Some opponents of the Soviet regime continued clandestine activities. The Democratic Movement of the Soviet Union, led by Sergei Ivanovich Soldatov, an engineer from the Estonian SSR, criticized the Soviet system and the Supreme Soviet in its 1969 program, which was published in Amsterdam in 1970.[38] The 1970 *Memorandum of the Democrats to the USSR Supreme Soviet on the Illegal Seizure of Power by the CPSU Leadership and its Unconstitutional Actions*, co-authored by Soldatov, asserted that the CPSU leadership had usurped power belonging to the soviets and thereby deprived the Soviet people of sovereignty. According to the memorandum, the Council of Ministers was appointed by the Politburo. The Supreme Soviet turned into "a puppet theater" directed by the CPSU leadership, with its session being reminiscent of a "ritual prayer service" rather than a "legislative forum." The Supreme Soviet Presidium was likewise subservient to the Politburo and did not exercise its constitutional rights to convene sessions of the Supreme Soviet, which were infrequent and brief, or to hold referendums. Besides, the Supreme Soviet was unrepresentative due to the absence of proper elections.[39]

Roi Aleksandrovich Medvedev, a teacher who had edited the *samizdat* magazine *Politicheskii dnevnik* ("Political Diary"), presented the most comprehensive critique of the Soviet system written within the country. In *The Book on Socialist*

Democracy, written in 1970–1971, he asserted that Stalin had reduced the soviets to mere extensions of party committees. The bureaucratic nomination and uncontested elections lessened the accountability of both voters and deputies. The elections exhibited numerous violations. The principle of secret balloting was not upheld, and only those voters who wished to vote against the sole candidate had to enter the voting booths, making it straightforward for authorities to identify them as opponents of the approved candidate (Medvedev 1972, 160–3, 167, 172–3, 176–7).

Advocating for the separation of powers, R. A. Medvedev argued that the Supreme Soviet, due to its brief and infrequent sessions, could not become a functioning parliament despite increased activity in its standing commissions since the late 1950s. He lamented that the Supreme Soviet did not exercise its right to initiative nor engage in critical discussions or rejections of drafts; that urgent laws were passed as the Presidium's decrees with minimal discussion; that the Presidium and the commissions lacked transparency and challenged the sovereignty of the Supreme Soviet within the system by taking over its functions (Medvedev 1972, 157–9, 166).

Denouncing the lack of democracy within the CPSU, R. A. Medvedev argued that the appointed party apparatus replaced legislative and executive authorities. Legal acts were drafted by the party bureaucracy, adopted by the Central Committee's Secretariat, Politburo, or Plenum, and only then passed to the Council of Ministers or the Supreme Soviet for nominal approval. Some acts were drafted within the ministerial apparatus, but they were also discussed and approved in the Central Committee. Given that the most influential Supreme Soviet deputies also occupied prominent positions within the government, the military, and the party, they viewed a new discussion at the final formal stage as unnecessary. Medvedev also highlighted the issues related to elite recruitment, in which nepotism, personal loyalty, and the ethnic background of candidates were the primary factors influencing their appointments. This contributed to a dearth of capable statesmen, the prevalence of retirement-age people, and the resulting lack of competence (Medvedev 1972, 126–34, 137, 166–7).

Medvedev's critique of the system garnered significant attention, but the physicist Sakharov and other human rights activists strongly criticized R. A. Medvedev's political position, which he formulated in 1973. Medvedev asserted that the statements in defense of human rights in the USSR, made by Western and Soviet figures, impeded détente and consequently hindered progress in the situation with human rights the country ("Diskussiia o Sviazi Problem Prav Cheloveka i Razriadki Mezhdunarodnoi Napriazhennosti" 1974). Medvedev's tactical approach proved to be unpopular. The Helsinki Final Act (1975) stimulated the human rights movement, leading to the formation of numerous "Helsinki groups" in the USSR (Roth 1987, 76).

The Supreme Soviet was briefly mentioned in several articles and open letters written in response to the official draft of the 1977 Constitution (Kallistratova 1977). Much criticism revolved around Article 6, which proclaimed the CPSU as the leading force of society. Ernst Semenovich Orlovskii, an engineer, pointed out the lack of legal norms pertaining to the party and the nomination of candidates to state bodies, done through fictitious meetings rather than openly from the party.[40]

Gleb Olegovich Pavlovskii, a worker, concluded that the new Constitution formally deprived the Supreme Soviet of its authority by assigning the responsibility for shaping domestic and foreign policy of the country to the CPSU (Pavlovskii 1979, 11, 24, 54–5, 58–9).

In the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Vladimir Konstantinovich Bukovskii, a dissident who had been a victim of punitive Soviet psychiatry and later became an émigré author, argued that Brezhnev and the rest of the Communist leadership were not elected or accountable to a parliament, thus posing a threat to world peace. He dismissed the Soviet peace rhetoric and the Soviet-sponsored World Parliament of Peoples for Peace (Sofia, September 23–27, 1980), which he saw as merely reiterating Ponomarev's ideological messages (Bukovskii 1982, 7, 38–9, 55, 63).

The Marxist Civic Group 68–80, a dissident organization that was part of the new antiauthoritarian socialist wave,[41] studied the elections to the USSR Supreme Soviet in 1979, the RSFSR Supreme Soviet in 1980, and regional and local soviets in 1982. It concluded that the elections were falsified, with the authorities manipulating the turnout data and excluding those who did not vote from the lists of voters to create the appearance of near-total turnout. The organization also argued that the results, which showed the required margin of 1–2 percent of votes against the only candidates, were simply invented without the actual counting of ballots (Marksistskaia obshchestvennaia gruppa 68–80 1984, 142–5). The émigré author Aleksandr Petrovich Babenyshev made a similar argument about the manipulation of turnout data. He also noted that in the Tenth Supreme Soviet, elected in 1979, the most significant group consisted of party, state, and military officials. Comparing its composition to the previous convocation, he observed that mainly young women, workers, and collective farmers were elected only once, whereas the officials and the cultural elite were reelected (Maksudov 1984, 13–14, 18–19).

Apart from the official publications in foreign languages (Schitikow 1978), the press of foreign communist parties played an important role in promoting Soviet institutions.[42] The invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the persecution of dissidents in the USSR contributed to disagreements between the Soviet leadership and Western European communists (Schapiro 1979). Chinese authors also criticized the Soviet system. Feng Shengbao argued that elections in the USSR were a mere formality, as they were never contested. He also criticized the Supreme Soviet as an inadequate political institution for the socialist system. Feng acknowledged the development of the committee system, which he viewed as an appropriation of elements from Western parliamentarism, but pointed out that no detailed reports of their discussions were available. Furthermore, consultation with experts was not carried out within the Supreme Soviet. Finally, Feng argued that since Brezhnev's time, party, government, and military authority had concentrated in the hands of one person, despite constant talk of strengthening the soviets (Feng Shengbao 1984, 39–43).

Some newspapers without an explicit affiliation with communists published Soviet press releases uncritically, thereby promoting the Soviet system.[43] In general, however, the non-communist international press was critical. In 1956, some

commentators anticipated a democratization of the system in the context of Khrushchev's campaign against Stalinism, but this expectation was never fulfilled.[44] The international press highlighted the uncontested elections and the ornamental character of the Supreme Soviet as well as the central role of the party leadership in decision-making.[45] Some commentators pointed out that the Supreme Soviet was handpicked by the party leadership[46] and lamented the lack of access to any unofficial information about the body.[47] *The New York Times* wrote about the privileges of the Supreme Soviet deputies.[48] *Die Zeit* argued that the USSR was openly governed by extraconstitutional authorities, citing the joint resolutions adopted by the Central Committee, the Council of Ministers, and, occasionally, the Supreme Soviet Presidium.[49]

The Western press was predominately critical of the involvement of the Supreme Soviet in foreign policy[50] and Soviet peace rhetoric in general. *La Stampa*, for instance, noted that the unilateral reduction of the armed forces, as announced by the USSR, had economic and other practical reasons.[51] An American commentator pointed out the loose character of the IPU, which included the Soviet Parliamentary Group, along with those of Albania, Liberia, and Spain – all of them also undemocratic.[52]

The coverage of political persecution in the USSR and the publication of dissidents' opinions[53] in the Western press contributed to the negative reception of Soviet institutions. *Der Bund* reported on the arrest of 57 Jewish activists who had planned to publicly support political prisoners during a session of the Supreme Soviet.[54] *Der Spiegel* covered the futile attempts of the "Elections-79" dissident group, which included R. A. Medvedev, to nominate their own candidates for the Supreme Soviet.[55]

In Western scholarship, the Supreme Soviet was seldom referred to as a parliament (Lane 1970, 128; Lammich 1977, 41), and critical interpretations were prevalent (Guins 1955, 21). While the Supreme Soviet was often referred to as a "rubber stamp," scholars explored the peculiar functions of the Soviet institutions. Leonard Schapiro, a British political scientist, outlined the purposes of Soviet elections: demonstrating the regime's legitimacy, providing propaganda training for millions of activists, and testing the system's control over the populace. The campaign was also used to emphasize the propaganda line of the moment (Schapiro 1967, 107–8, 163). Stephen White, another British political scientist, saw an additional function: bottom-up political communication, wherein canvassers reported back on the complaints, grievances, and comments during their interactions with voters, including those written on the ballots (White 1985, 225–7). Eberhard Schneider, a West German political scientist, however, contended that elections under state socialism could not theoretically legitimate the regime since it was based on class relations within the society (Schneider 1981, 490).

While discussing the Supreme Soviet's composition, Schapiro noted that the arrangement of membership to represent nationalities, occupations, and women was intended to foster a sense of inclusion among major population groups. The presence of celebrities suggested that all outstanding citizens supported the regime (Schapiro 1967, 163). A. H. Brown, a British scholar, however, regarded the

representation of women in the Supreme Soviet as insignificant, citing their sparse presence in the Central Committee and its Politburo (Presidium), with only Ekaterina Alekseevna Furtseva being the Presidium's member between 1957 and 1961. In 1966, only 5 out of 195 full members of the Central Committee were women (Brown 1974, 115–16). Similarly, Robert K. Furtak (1979, 189), a West German political scientist, argued that the representation of the union republics did not result in meaningful political participation due to the decision-making within the Politburo of the centrally organized CPSU. Roger A. Clarke (1967, 54, 60), a British scholar, observed that party and state officials constituted the largest group in the Supreme Soviet, which undermined the official claim that the assembly primarily comprised toilers. Challenging another point of Soviet propaganda, the West German jurist Siegfried Lammich (1977, 83) pointed out that the right of recall was used only in a few cases.

Discussing Soviet assemblies, John N. Hazard (1968, 13, 53–4), an American legal scholar, argued that they served as "focal points from which the influence of leaders" was "radiated throughout populace." John A. Armstrong, an American political scientist, made a similar argument about the transmission of the official discourse through the Supreme Soviet deputies to their constituents. He also noted the Supreme Soviet's functions in elite recruitment, the testing of public opinion through the indirect sounding of deputies, and the international propaganda of the Soviet system (Armstrong 1978, 163–6).

In the 1950s, a revisionist approach emerged in English-language Soviet Studies. Rejecting the totalitarian model, multiple authors argued that the Soviet system was evolving toward a Western-style democratic setup. This assumption established the groundwork for the theory of convergence. In this context, some indicated the Supreme Soviet's significance beyond a "rubber stamp" (Siegler 1982, 2–3, 7; White 1982, 127, 155). Revisionists paid particular attention to the standing commissions. David Lane (1970, 151) presumed that within the commissions, the claims of various groups were articulated and compromises were reached. Robert W. Siegler (1982, 16–18, 104–8) saw the commissions as institutions for consultation. White (1982, 156) assumed they played an important role in overseeing government performance and shaping legislation. Tatjana Kirstein (1972, 8, 10) underscored the role of commissions and subcommissions in the Supreme Soviet's bureaucratization, which consequently heightened its significance in the system. D. Richard Little (1972, 41, 43) asserted that the parliamentary government in the USSR was not a mere façade, citing the increased number of commissions. Nonetheless, the conclusions about standing commissions were speculative. As summarized by Shugo Minagawa (1975, 46), due to the limited and fragmentary evidence, the "actual functions of the Supreme Soviet organs" remained unclear.

In India, some authors uncritically reproduced Soviet propaganda. A volume edited by Jitendra Sharma (1978) praised the 1977 Constitution. In his political systems textbook, Narinder Mehta argued that Soviet elections were uncontested due to the absence of "rival social forces or parties with opposing interests" in the USSR, with the people entrusting the CPSU to represent their interests. He emphasized the significance of nomination meetings for selecting the "most worthy"

candidate. Mehta viewed the information about non-elected deputies to local soviets in 1967, published by the Soviet press, as indicative of a free vote. Furthermore, he viewed the turnout as reflective of the "wholesale support of government policies." Nonetheless, Mehta did incorporate some Western criticism of the Supreme Soviet, describing it as a "rubber stamp," challenging its role as the supreme body of state power or the sole legislative body, and characterizing the USSR as a single-party dictatorship (Mehta 1977, 264–5, 268).

Dismissing the dissidents as marginals (*otshchepentsy*),[56] the Soviet leadership did not respond to their criticisms of the system. Western criticism, however, was discussed publicly (Deev and Kintsel' 1980, 30). Soviet authors rejected the notion that the Supreme Soviet was merely a "rubber stamp" and a "clapping body," asserting that heated debates occurred in subcommissions.[57] The infrequent Supreme Soviet meetings and the practice of unanimous voting were explained through the alleged intense work conducted outside the plenaries, which allowed deputies and interested agencies to engage in comprehensive discussions and produce the best possible drafts (Guliev and Kuz'min 1975, 188; Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1979, 65). Defending the single-party regime and the absence of contestation, one author argued that under socialism, the people's influence on government bodies occurred not through oppositional groups fighting against the ruling party but rather through the direct influence of voters on their deputies and representative bodies (Mitin 1964, 67). Shitikov explained that contestation typically accompanied a multiparty system and, therefore, was illogical in the USSR (Schitikow 1978, 29).

Oppositional alternatives

Émigré and dissident intellectuals continued to propose alternatives to the Soviet regime. Since the second half of the 1960s, democratization became a popular slogan among the domestic opposition. However, some dissidents doubted the population's readiness for democracy or rejected Western parliamentarism altogether.

The clandestine groups of the 1960s had different visions for a Soviet or post-Soviet future. The Union of Communards called for a multiparty system (or multiple factions within a single party) as a means of countering the arbitrariness of bureaucracy and ensuring basic democratic freedoms in 1965.[58]

The All-Russian Social-Christian Union for the Liberation of the People envisioned a theocratic system, asserting that social justice and freedom required a "growing religious consciousness of the society." Its 1964 program advocated religious freedom and autonomy for the Orthodox Christian Church; however, the Church was to play a pivotal role in the state. The program suggested the separation of four powers – legislative, executive, oversight (*bliustitel'naia*), and judicial. The Supreme Sobor, embodying the "spiritual authority" of the people, would be the supreme oversight authority that could veto decisions conflicting with the "social-Christian order." It would elect the Head of State, pending approval by a popular vote. The "highest Church hierarchy" would constitute one-third of the Sobor, with the rest being "outstanding representatives of the people" elected for life. The People's Assembly, the supreme legislative body, would be elected from

rural and municipal communities, trade and industrial corporations, associations of "liberal occupations," and non-party political organizations. The cabinet, appointed by the Head of State, would answer to both the People's Assembly and the Head of State. A legitimate opposition would have the right to expression and legal criticism of the government in the People's Assembly. The program also envisioned the supreme body of "industrial administration" – the "Corporate Chamber" or the "National Council of Trade-Industrial Unions."[59] The focus on religious consciousness and corporatism resonated with the ideas of interwar émigré thinkers, although corporatism also evoked the assemblies of the 1917 Revolution. The four branches of power and the Supreme Sobor were drawn from the 1820s project of the Decembrist Pavel Ivanovich Pestel' (2010, 330); however, the Sobor was given an explicitly ecclesiastical meaning.[60]

The Democratic Movement of the Soviet Union initially aimed to replace the USSR with the Union of Democratic Republics. Its political system would be based on universal elections, preceded by unrestricted peaceful campaigning. Nomination rights would belong to organized groups of at least 500 members. The system would include the separation of legislative, executive, and judicial powers, with the Supreme Soviet of Republics serving as the legislature.[61] Subsequently, the organization and an affiliated group called "Moral-Political Revival" declared societal evolution toward a "free theocracy," based on moral authority, love, and freedom, as their goal. Soldatov, the main author of the movement's texts, drew inspiration from Christianity and anticipated a new religion emerging from the fusion of world religions. He acknowledged that should the movement lose elections, it would become a legal opposition and use that time to rectify its mistakes.[62] This project was influenced by the religious philosophy of Nikolai Aleksandrovich Berdiaev as well as various spiritual ideas that Soldatov encountered in Estonia, including those of Sri Aurobindo (Aurobindo Ghose) and Mahatma Gandhi (Soldatov 1984, 154, 225–30, 356).

Some dissidents used their own names when circulating their visions of a future state system. In the 1970 *Letter to the Leaders of the Party and the Government*, Sakharov, R. A. Medvedev, and the physicist Valentin Fedorovich Turchin called for gradual reform, acknowledging the achievements of socialism as a viable economic system and the leading role of the CPSU. They presented democratization as the only way to avoid an economic collapse and to rectify the "antidemocratic perversions" of Stalinism. They advocated for the gradual introduction of contested elections and the expansion of the USSR Supreme Soviet's competence.[63]

Sakharov, R. A. Medvedev, and Turchin held different views on a multiparty system. Turchin opposed it, advocating for a non-party approach. He argued that openness, public participation in politics, and society's intolerance for ethical violations would suffice to keep authorities in check (Turchin 1978, 212–17). While initially considering a multiparty system unimportant, Sakharov later embraced the notion, making it one of his slogans. His ultimate vision centered on the convergence of socialist and capitalist systems to harness their combined advantages. Politically, a future system would be built on human rights, legality, freedom, and pluralism (Sakharov 1975, 71, 2006a, 168, 2006b, 124,; Iankelevich 2006, 12, 32–6).

R. A. Medvedev considered a multiparty system optional but advocated for an open political struggle to educate a more skilled generation of Communist leaders. Medvedev proposed downsizing the CPSU apparatus so that the party would be a leader in building communism rather than a surrogate government. The Supreme Soviet was to improve legislation quality and oversight over the executive. Medvedev emphasized transparent discussions and deliberation to educate the "popular masses" in the spirit of political activity. The Supreme Soviet was to evolve into a permanent and professional legislature, requiring elected members to resign from other roles. Elections were to be contested, with bottom-up candidate nominations. Medvedev considered a return to the pre-1936 system possible, with direct elections only at the lowest level. He favored occupational representation over territorial representation in both the soviets and the CPSU. Representative democracy, he argued, was the best guarantee of popular sovereignty in a socialist society (Medvedev 1972, 111–12, 122–4, 130–1, 141, 144–6, 159, 163–70, 173–5, 177). In addition to the earlier Soviet experience, the Yugoslav system, in which the party was nominally detached from the government in the 1950s and where occupational representation was implemented, appears to have influenced Medvedev (Scott 1954; Riddell 1968, 54–5).

Some émigré and dissident authors questioned the feasibility or necessity of democratic transformations in the USSR. Leonid Vladimirovich Vladimirov (Finkel'shtein), a Soviet journalist who defected in 1966, argued that Russia had never experienced democratic institutions based on free expression and discussion of different views, except for a brief period in the 1900s and 1910s when they were developed. This lack of experience prevented the Russian populace from seeking their establishment (Vladimirov 1969, 291). Vadim Anatol'evich Iankov, a mathematician, had a similar view. He observed that in 1977, all parliaments in Western Europe were democratically elected for the first time, with regimes built on the ideas of freedom and human rights. Regarding the future of Eastern Europe, Iankov anticipated swift liberation of Soviet dependencies if external constraints were removed. Past experiences with varying degrees of freedom and recent encounters with totalitarianism and national oppression would be key factors in their liberation. For the USSR, which Iankov described as an empire born from the most powerful antiliberal movement and as a model for other anti-Western regimes, prospects were dimmer due to the extended development of totalitarianism, state socialism, and the almost non-existent experience with freedom. All this led to the loss of the ability for self-organization and self-government among the populace. According to Iankov, however, the opposition could contribute to their revival (Iankov 1978, 194–7).

Anatolii Emmanuilovich Krasnov-Levitin, an Orthodox Christian activist and writer who left the USSR in 1974, proposed incorporating religious norms into governance. His political program leaned heavily toward social democracy. Similar to Russian moderate socialists from the 1900s and 1910s, he saw trade unions and cooperatives as key elements of a reformed system. The supreme legislature (the Supreme Soviet) would be formed through universal, contested elections. Similar

to Ogurtsov's group, Krasnov-Levitin rejected political parties in favor of "movements" originating "among the people." He claimed that social democracy was an "inevitable" stage in human development, followed by an "anarcho-syndicalist" phase in which "potent associations of toilers" would replace the state, marking complete liberation. The socialist period would be followed by a "mystical period," marked by the rise of "occult sciences" and Christianity, ultimately resulting in Christianity's predominance and humanity's attainment of "eternal happiness."[64] Krasnov-Levitin's vision thus combined the ideas of anarchists and religious writers like Berdiaev.

Other Soviet critics of Western parliamentarism did not necessarily see a solution in combining political and religious systems. In 1971, a *samizdat* publication cited the "almost" universal crisis of Western democracy and proposed "scientific-democratic" governance as an alternative (Gruppa "Seiatel'" 55–72, 64, 67). The scientific-democratic approach to politics, economy, and culture relied on Sakharov's notion of a scientific method of governance. He defined it as a method based on "a deep study of facts, theories and views, involving an unbiased, dispassionate in its conclusions, [and] open discussion" (Sakharov 2006b, 70, 72).

Some dissidents completely rejected parliamentarism. Responding to Sakharov in 1969, the writer Aleksandr Isaevich Solzhenitsyn questioned the necessity of a multiparty parliamentary system. In a 1973 supplement to the original response, he rejected the prevalent support for such a system among Soviet opposition, viewing it as passive imitation of the West. Solzhenitsyn contended that the multiparty parliamentary system had exhibited "dangerous, if not deadly vices" over preceding decades, including the lack of ethical foundations for party struggle and the disproportional influence of minor parties. He also pointed to the limited efficacy of historical democracies against terrorist threats. Solzhenitsyn argued that Russia's readiness for the Western parliamentary system was low in 1917 and had only declined since. He highlighted the marginal status of democratic republics in human history and the advantages of authoritarian regimes, such as stability, continuity, and independence from political upheavals. Solzhenitsyn saw incorrect moral guidelines as the main danger of authoritarian regimes. In the Soviet case, the regime also relied on pervasive falsehoods (Solzhenitsyn 1974a, 22–3, 25–8). In his *Letter to the Leaders of the Soviet Union*, also written in 1973, Solzhenitsyn reiterated these ideas of Russia's unpreparedness for a multiparty parliamentary system and the merits of morally grounded authoritarianism (Solzhenitsyn 1974b, 44–5).

Writing in 1974, Mikhail Samuilovich Agurskii, a cyberneticist, also questioned the merits of contemporary parliamentary systems. He criticized conformism, the dominance of political parties, "the tyranny of the majority," and the lack of media control in democratic societies. Opposed totalitarianism as well, Agurskii envisioned a political system built on moral values. This system would integrate democracy with "self-discipline" and control over certain "aspects of public life." It would prioritize decentralization, shifting politics to the local level. Along the classless nature of the future society, decentralization would facilitate the elimination of political parties as bureaucratic entities. The media would be devoid of both commercial and propagandistic characters (Agurskii 1974, 82–3, 92–4).

The proponents of political universalism rejected such visions as utopian, arguing that the global developments over the three postwar decades had shown that the only alternatives were "single-party totalitarianism" and "multiparty parliamentarism" (Nilov 1978, 121). Parliamentary democracy remained widely endorsed. Avtorkhanov asserted that a "legal state with parliamentary democracy" was the highest level of a modern nation's development. Similar to some of the dissidents, he considered it possible to reform the USSR. With the backward political system as hindering the advancement of the scientific and technological revolution, it was the responsibility of the more reasonable segment of the Soviet ruling class to initiate a top-down change of the system, akin to what had occurred in Spain and Portugal (Avtorkhanov 1980, 54–5).

Democratic socialist intellectuals and activists proposed original designs for democratic systems. Vadim Vladimirovich Belotserkovskii, a chemist who had emigrated in 1972, presented a vision of a self-governing society where all citizens would possess the right to a decisive vote in the affairs of all territorial and occupational associations to which they belonged. The system would also include a parliament, which Belotserkovskii described as a council of representatives from collectives; however, in a broader sense, all citizens would be decision-makers. The combination of occupational and territorial representation bore a resemblance to the early Soviet system. While his project also shared similarities with the system in Yugoslavia, Belotserkovskii argued that the amalgamation of totalitarian state power with self-government in industry there rendered the position of collectives similar to that of individuals in a totalitarian society (Belotserkovskii 1974, 199, 208–10).

In 1985, Belotserkovskii outlined a more detailed project. The system would be based on group property and incorporate political democracy, including referendums, at all levels. The supreme oversight and legislative body – the Council of Representatives of Self-Governing Collectives – would be elected based on an occupational principle (and territorial representation in rural areas). It would not be a "professional" parliament, with representatives serving only one term to remain connected to their constituents. While they could belong to any party, they would be constrained by the interests of their collectives. The executive would be composed of "professional" politicians capable of representing state interests, and could be elected from among the nominees of political parties. However, Belotserkovskii expected parties to eventually go extinct. He also suggested the separation of political, economic, and cultural-scientific spheres, with each having its own legislative and executive authority (Belotserkovskii 1985, 43, 58–63).

The ideas of economic and local self-government also contributed to the Solidarity movement in Poland (Trencsényi et al. 2018, 2, Part 2:150–1). One of the movement's splinters, Fighting Solidarity, led by Kornel Morawiecki, addressed the Soviet citizens in Poland in 1983. It explained that solidarism was a social order that looked after the interests of individuals and took care of their implementation jointly with those of society. In political terms, it would include parliamentary rule and multiparty elections. In economic terms, it would mean a market economy but without large private property for the means of production (Boriushchaiasia

Solidarnost' 1984, 31). Although the appeal was also inspired by democratic socialism, it leaned toward more conventional forms of political democracy.

For some non-Russian dissidents in the USSR, national independence was the central aspect of a post-Soviet future. It was often framed in democratic terms.[65] Estonian dissidents increasingly directed their focus toward national rights. In 1978, the Lithuanian Freedom League was established with the goal of restoring Lithuanian statehood. It sought to bring greater to the secret protocols of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact (Trencsényi et al. 2018, 2, Part 2:81–2).

Supreme Soviets were part of some national projects. In his letter to the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet, Lisovyi urged all deputies in Ukraine to transform the existing soviets into genuine bodies of people's (national) self-government.[66] The National United Party, an Armenian clandestine organization, had the goal of gradually attaining Armenia's independence. While it aimed to conduct a referendum and convene a constituent assembly, it also considered the republican Supreme Soviet an alternative means of achieving its goal. If the party were unsuccessful in the referendum, its plan was to participate in the elections to the republican Supreme Soviet and work toward future independence within it and with its assistance. For instance, the Supreme Soviet was expected to aid in establishing diplomatic relations with other states and the UN.[67]

According to a study by Liudmila Mikhailovna Alekseeva, a historian and cofounder of the Moscow Helsinki Group, Russian nationalists among the dissidents tended to reject Western-style democracy, with many of them considering Solzhenitsyn's *Letter to the Leaders of the Soviet Union* their program document, and favored an authoritarian government. The notion of the Russian people's exceptionalism was also gaining popularity (Alekseeva 1983, 38–9).

Some émigré authors still supported the reestablishment of monarchy. Igor' Ol'gerdovich fon Glazenap, a historian, rejected political parties. He envisioned a transition to monarchy through an initial authoritarian regime under the Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus' as the provisional leader, followed by the formal approval of the new monarch by a *zemskii sobor* (Glazenap 1980, 83, 85, 95–97).

Conclusion

Despite the discussion of reforms within the party leadership and the development of the standing committee system, the Supreme Soviet remained a nominal legislative body. Its main functions included the performance of loyalty, descriptive representation, integration of the Soviet people, and the amplification of the official discourse. Alongside these domestic functions, which had developed soon after its establishment in 1938, it also became permanently involved in foreign policy starting from 1955. Following that, its functions and operation remained stable and were barely affected by the political and economic developments in the country.

The official discourse on parliaments and the Supreme Soviet was, in many respects, ambiguous. While the Party Program of 1961 considered a parliamentary path to socialism possible in certain contexts, some authors sought to downplay it. The comparisons between Soviet and "bourgeois" institutions persisted,

but individual authors recognized that "bourgeois parliamentarism" was a complex rather than entirely negative phenomenon. Since the 1970s, the term "parliament" was rarely used to refer to the Supreme Soviet. However, a complete rejection of parliamentarism was not possible, partially due to the Supreme Soviet's normalization as a parliament through the admission of the Soviet Parliamentary Group into the IPU and the numerous exchanges in parliamentary delegations. The Supreme Soviet remained an important model of a nominal legislature in a single-party regime.

Domestically and internationally, the Supreme Soviet was received critically. The uncontested elections, the nomination of all candidates by the party, the absence of plenary debates, and the unanimous adoption of all proposed drafts were widely known, and the Supreme Soviet was often called a "rubber stamp." Proponents of the revisionist approach to Soviet institutions and politics paid special attention to its standing committees. However, due to the lack of data, their conclusions about the Supreme Soviet remained speculative.

Dissident and émigré intellectuals proposed a variety of alternative approaches to political organizations. Many of them supported democratization, and some deemed a reform of the Soviet system possible. Others proposed establishing an entirely new system. The criticism of Western parliamentarism, particularly the rejection of political parties, was common among oppositional intellectuals of various orientations. Various versions of democratic socialism were popular among Soviet dissidents. Some sought to imbue government with a moral or religious content. While Russian nationalists tended to reject Western democracy altogether, relying on imperial and earlier émigré antiparliamentary discourses, non-Russian intellectuals generally envisioned democratic futures.

Notes

1 See Nelson (1982, 4, 7–9). For the discussion of an inclusionary Soviet community, see Aktürk (2012, 197–228), Whittington (2018), and Wojnowski (2015).
2 For the only detailed study of the standing commissions, see Klimanov (2004).
3 In the broad sense, the dissidents were all those who voiced their opposition to the Soviet regime publicly while in the Soviet Union, although they could continue their criticism in emigration, see Alexeyeva (1987, 3, 15–16).
4 Suggestions to abolish it were made during the adoption of the 1936 Constitution and resumed since 1959 Strekalov (2018, 224–5).
5 According to a personal account, Anatolii Ivanovich Luk'ianov, a functionary in the Supreme Soviet Presidium's apparatus, was the author of the suggestion within A. N. Iakovlev's working group (Strekalov 2018, 244).
6 GARF, f. R-7523, op. 131, d. 129, l. 12, 25, 32–3, 67, 121, 128, 163, 179, 187, 189–90, 235 (Summarized proposals and comments on the draft constitution of the USSR submitted by executive committees of regional soviets of toilers' deputies of the RSFSR, 1977); GARF, f. R-7523, op. 131, d. 144, l. 2, 25, 59 (Summarized proposals and comments on the draft constitution of the USSR submitted by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Kyrgyz SSR, 1977).
7 See, for instance, Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR (1974, 7).

8 See Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR (1966b, 41–2; 1970a, 242, 1970b, 28–9, 1979, 19–20, 1984, 19–20, 28–9). According to the 1961 Party Program, at least one-third of deputies of all levels was to be renewed during every election so that "new millions of toilers" would get educated in governance (Kommunisticheskaia partiia Sovetskogo Soiuza 1962, 3:304). Despite the quota in the Supreme Soviet, the percentage of Soviet women in the party leadership was below 5 percent (Dumančić 2017, 428).
9 Russian: Aleksei Fedorovich Fedorov.
10 See, for instance, RGANI, f. 2, op. 1, d. 748, l. 23 (Minutes No. 9 of the Central Committee Plenum, October 14, 1964); GARF, f. 7523, op. 82, d. 152, l. 51–52 (For the materials of the Supreme Soviet Presidium meeting, October 15, 1964); (Permiakov 2020, 249, 251).
11 See, for instance, reflections of their participants (Cherniaev 2003, 1977:23; Vorotnikov 2007, 59).
12 RGANI, f. 82, op. 1, d. 12, l. 71–75 (V. Kuznetsov, On the appeals of citizens to the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet on healthcare, CPSU Central Committee, March 18, 1983). For a similar analysis of correspondence on drug addiction, see GARF, f. R-7523, op. 108, d. 82, l. 6–9 (Deputy Head of the Reception Office of the Chairman of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet M. Skliarov and Head of the Legal Department F. Kalinychev to Chairman of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet L. I. Brezhnev, January 30, 1963).
13 RGANI, f. 5, op. 73, d. 1877, l. 45–46 (Chairman of the KGB Iu. V. Andropov to the CPSU Central Committee on the provocative appeal of Academician Sakharov, June 4, 1977).
14 Arkhiv Aleksandra N. Iakovleva (Note by G. K. Zhukov to the CPSU Central Committee, March 22, 1957), accessed June 18, 2022, https://www.alexanderyakovlev.org/fond/issues-doc/1003175.
15 GARF, f. 7523, op. 105, d. 178, l. 95 (Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on awarding Comrade Iu. V. Andropov with the Order of Lenin, December 2, 1971).
16 RGANI, f. 80, op. 1, d. 69, l. 43 (Draft congratulations of the Central Committee of the CPSU, the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet, and the USSR Council of Ministers for N. S. Khrushchev on the occasion of his seventieth birthday, April 1964).
17 RGANI, f. 3, op. 69, d. 1850, l. 91 (Chairman of the KGB Iu. V. Andropov to the CPSU Central Committee on the publication of the Decree of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet on the deprivation of V. E. Maksimov of Soviet citizenship, October 15, 1975); GARF, f. R-7523, op. 116, d. 480, l. 80 (Decree of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet "On the deprivation of citizenship of the USSR of M. L. Rostropovich and G. P. Vishnevskaya," March 15, 1978); GARF, f. R-7523, op. 116, d. 573, l. 68 (Decree of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet "On the deprivation of citizenship of the USSR of V. L. Korchnoi," December 28, 1978).
18 Russian: Karl Martynovich Ozolin'.
19 Russian: Vasilii Pavlovich Mzhavanadze.
20 Russian: Vilis Tenisovich Latsis.
21 GARF, f. R-7523, op. 45, d. 229, l. 13, 28–33 (Materials on the meeting of members of the standing commissions of the USSR Supreme Soviet with the French parliamentary delegation, September 23, 1955).
22 GARF, f. R-7523, op. 45a, d. 234, l. 14, 15, 18, 20 (Materials on the exchange of delegations between the USSR Supreme Soviet and parliaments of foreign states, March 14, 1955–August 1957).
23 *Biulleten' parlamentskoi gruppy SSSR*, No, 43, 1978: 18.
24 *Biulleten' parlamentskoi gruppy SSSR*, No, 36, 1974: 14.
25 RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 286, l. 5 (Notes on the conversation between I. V. Stalin and the delegation of the British Labour Party, August 7, 1946).

26 *Gudok* (Moscow), June 7, 1966: 2; (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1956, 73; 1958, 98; Editorial 1962, 7; Vasil'ev 1962, 67).
27 Russian: Viktor Mikhailovich Chkhikvadze.
28 Russian: Zuleikha Ismail kyzy Guseinova.
29 See, for instance, Kuz'min (1973, 91–5).
30 It was still occasionally called parliament in the press. *Izvestiia* (Moscow), November 9, 1972: 6; *Gudok*, March 6, 1984: 3.
31 *Kazachii vestnik* (Munich), No. 104, January 1957: 2–3.
32 Veniamin Viktorovich Iofe, a member of the Union of Communards, claimed later that its program was written before the authors read Đilas's book, see Peskov (1978, 272).
33 Memorial, Saint Petersburg (V. E. Ronkin and S. D. Khakhaev, *Ot diktatury biurokratii k diktature proletariata*, 1963, 1–2, 7).
34 AS 2070, HU OSA, 300-85-9, Box 53 (*Programma Vserossiiskogo sotsial-khristianskogo soiuza osvobozhdeniia naroda (Narodno-revoliutsionnaia khartiia),* February 2, 1964, 4, 8, 13–15, 17–18).
35 See Varga (1968, 144–5). On the attribution of the text, see "Dissidentskaia Aktivnost': Personalii" (n.d.).
36 AS 240, HU OSA, 300-85-11, Box 2 (P. G. Grigorenko, *Prizyv k izbirateliam Mosk. izbirat. okruga golosovat' protiv A. N. Kosygina*, June 3, 1966, 1).
37 AS 265, HU OSA, 300-85-11, Box 2 (Anton Koval' [Vasil' Lisovyi], *Otkrytoe pis'mo deputatam sovetov USSR*, April 1969, AS translation from Ukrainian, 1).
38 AS 340, HU OSA, 300-85-11, Box 2 (*Programma Demokraticheskogo dvizheniia Sovetskogo Soiuza, 1969*, 15–16).
39 AS 602, HU OSA, 300-85-9, Box 15 (*Memorandum Demokratov Verkhovnomu Sovetu SSSR "O nezakonnom zakhvate vlasti rukovodstvom KPSS i ego antikonstitutsionnoi deiatel'nosti,"* [December 5, 1970], 1, 19–21, 36).
40 See Kallistratova (1977) and Vershik (2002, 47–51, 240). For a more detailed discussion of individual opinions, see Kazakov (2018).
41 It combined the years 1968 – the Prague Spring and the May 68 student protests in France – and 1980 – the Solidarity trade-union movement in Poland – in its name (Shubin 2001, 366).
42 See, for instance, *l'Unità* (Rome), March 23, 1963: 3.
43 See, for instance, *The Eastern Examiner* (Chittagong), June 16, 1972: 3.
44 *Nuova Stampa Sera* (Torino), July 9, 1956: 1; *The New York Times*, July 15, 1956: E3.
45 *Die Zeit* (Hamburg), March 16, 1962, accessed February 1, 2023, https://www.zeit.de/1962/11/997-oder-998-prozent; *El Tiempo* (Bogota), March 16, 1958: 6; *La Stampa* (Torino), November 18, 1981: 5; *The Iraq Times* (Baghdad), February 5, 1957: 9; March 11, 1958: 9.
46 *Der* Spiegel, no. 7, 1980, accessed February 1, 2023, https://www.spiegel.de/politik/wer-bestimmt-den-kreml-kurs-a-2473b36d-0002-0001-0000-000014324663.
47 *Nieuwe Leidsche Courant* (Leiden), January 11, 1969: 17.
48 *The New York Times*, December 10, 1970: 9.
49 *Die Zeit*, March 27, 1964, accessed February 1, 2023, https://www.zeit.de/1964/13/hinter-der-kreml-mauer.
50 *The New York Times*, December 26, 1955: 1.
51 *La Stampa*, January 16, 1960: 1.
52 *The Christian Science Monitor* (Boston), September 7, 1955: 16.
53 See, for instance, *Die Zeit*, March 18, 1983, accessed February 1, 2023, https://www.zeit.de/1983/12/meine-erste-wahl; *Leidsch Dagblad* (Leiden), October 5, 1977: 4.
54 *Der Bund* (Bern), December 19, 1972: 36.
55 *Der Spiegel*, no. 11, 1979, accessed February 1, 2023, https://www.spiegel.de/politik/leere-kabinen-a-109548ab-0002-0001-0000-000040350409.

56 National Security Archive (Note of Chairman of the KGB Iu. V. Andropov to General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee L. I. Brezhnev "Report on the Work of the Committee for State Security in 1977," March 27, 1978), accessed December 1, 2022, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/rus/Dissidents.html.
57 *Literaturnaia gazeta* (Moscow), December 2, 1970: 10.
58 Memorial, Saint Petersburg (Volgin, "O mnogopartiinoi sisteme," *Kolokol* 24, 1965, 4–6).
59 AS 2070, HU OSA, 300-85-9, Box 53 (*Programma Vserossiiskogo sotsial-khristianskogo soiuza osvobozhdeniia naroda (Narodno-revoliutsionnaia khartiia),* February 2, 1964, 31, 36, 39–42).
60 AS 2070, HU OSA, 300-85-9, Box 53 (*Programma Vserossiiskogo sotsial-khristianskogo soiuza osvobozhdeniia naroda (Narodno-revoliutsionnaia khartiia),* February 2, 1964, 31, 36, 41).
61 AS 340, HU OSA, 300-85-11, Box 2 (*Programma Demokraticheskogo dvizheniia Sovetskogo* Soiuza, 1969, 17).
62 AS 1175-zh, HU OSA, 300-85-11, Box 3 (K. Vol'nyi [S. I. Soldatov], "Bor'ba za svobodu – dolg narodov Rossii," *Luch svobody* 7, 1973, 40, 49–50).
63 AS 360, HU OSA, 300-85-11, Box 2 (A. D. Sakharov, V. F. Turchin, and R. A. Medvedev, *Pis'mo rukovoditeliam partii i pravitel'stva* [March 19, 1970], 2–3, 5, 10–11).
64 AS 1876, HU OSA, 300-85-9, Box 48 (A. E. Krasnov-Levitin, *Zeml'ia dybom*, 1974, 29–30, 35, 51, 71, 73–5, 82).
65 As Dina Zisserman-Brodsky (2003, 185–6) argued, *samizdat* itself "became a social institution for the formation of ethnic politics."
66 AS 265, HU OSA, 300-85-11, Box 2 (Anton Koval' [Vasil' Lisovyi], *Otkrytoe pis'mo deputatam sovetov USSR*, April 1969, AS translation from Ukrainian, 2).
67 AS 3119, HU OSA, 300-85-11, Box 12 (*Organizatsiia nezavisimosti Armenii "Natsional'no-ob"edinennaia partiia," 1976*, 5, 8).

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8 Soviet parliamentarism

The Supreme Soviet and the Congress of People's Deputies, 1985–1991

Perestroika, announced in 1985 as an economic reform, led to a complete overhaul of the Soviet system[1] and ultimately to the dissolution of the USSR. In 1988, a new supreme government body, the USSR Congress of People's Deputies, was introduced. The reformed USSR Supreme Soviet was turned into a permanently active legislature. By the time the two bodies convened in 1989, the Soviet Union found itself amidst multiple entangled crises. The party leadership had largely lost control of the economy. The economic crisis contributed to national and regional particularism, while the policy of glasnost ("transparency") made nationally defined grievances public. With the violent suppression of protests in Kazakhstan (1986), the start of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict (1988), and the declaration of sovereignty[2] by the Estonian Supreme Soviet (1988), the USSR was ushered into a nationalities crisis, with many more conflicts to follow. The Chernobyl disaster (April 26, 1986) became an environmental catastrophe of global scale and contributed to both economic problems and national mobilization. The attempt to decouple the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) from the state and unsystematic institutional adjustments that followed the 1988 reform resulted in a government crisis. The dramatic increase in crime led to a public safety crisis. Finally, the Soviet–Afghan War and the Cold War were still ongoing, even though Gorbachev's "new political thinking" in international relations suggested their imminent end (Dashkov 1992, 160; Smith 2005, 51; Steiner 2017, 220–1; Zubok 2017, 252–4; Bauer and Penter 2022, 1). Archie Brown (2007, 4–7, 10–20) argued that it was the reforms that destroyed the foundations of the Soviet regime and not the crisis of the regime that produced the reforms. Stephen Kotkin (2008, 2–3) underscored the failure of the Soviet leadership to reform the planned economy and the party. In the case of the political system, the reform predated the government crisis as well.

Just like they did not seek a transition to market, Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev and other reformers did not envision a Western-style parliament as the result of the political reform. Its proclaimed goal was to empower the soviets. Vladimir Il'ich Lenin's (1969, 304–5) claim that the soviets allowed to combine the benefits of parliamentarism with those of direct democracy was taken out of context and made into the reform's motto. The notion that the new Soviet assemblies were parliaments, however, prevailed despite the original plans. Although the election to the

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First Congress of People's Deputies (May 25–June 9, 1989) was only partially contested, it became an institution of dissensus. With its live television broadcast reaching some 90–100 million people, it also became a union-wide rally during which deputies expressed their concerns, grievances, and criticisms of the state and the party (Brown 2007, 120).

The Congress had features of an imperial parliament (Semyonov 2009). Only one-third of the 2,250 seats was to be elected on the basis of individualized political rights. One-third was reserved for the political representation of nationalities. Finally, the nomination of one-third from the official "civic organizations" introduced elements of corporatism. These features extended to the reformed Supreme Soviet, which the Congress elected. During the debates in the two assemblies, grievances were often formulated in group, predominately ethno-national terms, which made the situation comparable to the imperial revolution of the early twentieth century (Gerasimov 2017). For some participants of the debates, the goal was not to reconfigure the shared economic and political space but to achieve independence in anti-imperial, national revolutions, with the USSR being called "empire" explicitly.[3]

As anticipated by some (Avilov 1949, 17–18), nationally defined institutions within the Soviet federation contributed to its crisis and ultimate dissolution (Suny 1993). National parliaments rather than "empowered" soviets emerged in the union republics and autonomous units through universal elections in 1990. Compared to the unequally and indirectly elected central institutions, which by then had also lost credibility due to the continued crises, these parliaments played a central role in the national revolutions by adopting declarations of sovereignty and independence as well as engaging in parallel legislation.

The unclear division of competence between the central bodies, between the government and the party, and between the union and its subdivisions contributed to the failure of the USSR Congress of People's Deputies and the Supreme Soviet. So did the lack of a stable parliamentary majority and the persistence of the bureaucratic approach to policymaking, reflected in the proliferation of state bodies. With the looming threat of economic collapse, an increasing number of people began to lose faith in parliamentary institutions altogether and looked toward a potentially strong leader (de Robinson 1993; Zubok 2017, 257, 267; Stefano 2020).

The impending signing of the new union treaty by several republics that had not yet chosen independence galvanized the conservative opposition to Gorbachev. The attempted coup on August 18–22, 1991, known as the "August Coup," was foiled by the RSFSR government. The coup attempt reinvigorated the anti-imperial campaign that interpreted the central Soviet institutions as remnants of "imperial Russia" that needed to be dismantled.[4] In its aftermath, transitionary institutions were introduced. The Council of Republics, where each of the remaining republics had one vote, became the USSR Supreme Soviet's upper chamber. No transition to a reformed union, however, happened. The collapse of central institutions led to direct relations between republics, culminating in the dissolution of the USSR on December 26, 1991.

These events were accompanied by public discussions of an unprecedented scale in print and *samizdat*,[5] on television, and at numerous rallies and meetings.

Their participants included party and government officials, foreign and domestic legal scholars, journalists, dissidents, "informal" political activists, and members of the broader public, thanks to the near-total literacy. The participation of dissidents in parliaments and new political organizations ensured continuity of the discussions from before 1985 (Shubin 2001, 423).

Foreign, émigré, and previously banned texts became available, with transboundary discussions accelerating in 1988 (Gibbs 1999, 60). The publication of foreign experts' opinions in the Soviet press and the collaboration of Soviet politicians with émigré and foreign press contributed to the transboundary nature of the discussions.[6] In these discussions, the new Soviet assemblies were treated as parliaments, analyzed, and criticized, while alternative institutional solutions were put forward.

Gorbachev's foreign policy, including the secret decision to refrain from any military intervention in Eastern Europe, and the bottom-up political movements across the region led to drastic changes there in 1989. Perestroika and the economic crisis in the USSR, as well as the demise of state socialist regimes in Eastern Europe, affected the situation in other Soviet dependencies and pro-Soviet regimes. In Mongolia, the regime also fell due to the pressure from below. In Afghanistan, the pro-Soviet regime started transforming before the USSR's withdrawal in 1989 but ultimately collapsed. In Africa, several pro-Soviet single-party regimes, such as those in Ethiopia and the People's Republic of Congo, came to an end after losing strategic allies. In some cases, single-party regimes persisted following economic transformations (Vietnam and Laos) and the abandonment of most socialist rhetoric (Benin and Mozambique). In North Korea and Cuba, the single-party state socialist regimes survived, although adjustments were made there as well (Moore 1996, 14; Halliday and Tanin 1998; Pitcher and Askew 2006, 1; Kramer 2011, 1535–6; Dimitrov 2013). The institutions of the informal Soviet empire, the Warsaw Treaty Organization and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon), were dissolved in 1991 (Prozumenshchikov 2015, 247).

The making of the new system

The political reform of perestroika unfolded under the slogans of democratization and empowering the soviets. Its introduction followed the pattern of the previous decades, with little to no dissensus within formal government bodies, particularly the Supreme Soviet. However, participants of the "informal" political movement challenged the official plan.

A symbolic change followed shortly after Gorbachev became General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee in 1985. Unlike his predecessors, he did not head the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium. Instead, Andrei Andreevich Gramyka,[7] who had previously served as the Foreign Minister, took the office. The mode of operation of the Supreme Soviet did not change, and the Central Committee remained the *de facto* legislature.[8]

Soon, however, the party leadership started discussing political reforms. In late December 1985, Aleksandr Nikolaevich Iakovlev, who headed the Central

Committee's Propaganda Department at the time, submitted a memorandum to Gorbachev. Citing the importance of separating the "functions" of different government bodies, Iakovlev proposed changing the relations between the legislative and executive bodies. Similar to the suggestion of the Propaganda Department in the late 1960s (Strekalov 2018, 187), he supported a "permanently active parliamentary apparatus" and proposed establishing new issue-oriented commissions. According to the memorandum, the legislature's decisions were to become mandatory; the executive branch was to be accountable to it; and the practice of discussions had to change. The Supreme Soviet was to become a "working parliament" that dealt "with the daily life of the country" instead of one that "ceremonially" considered "two or three issues." The elections were to become contested; the imperative mandate was to function in practice. Iakovlev especially detested the existing "allotment" of candidates according to categories (women, non-party members, and occupational groups), although the party was still to control the nomination.[9]

A. N. Iakovlev's project included a USSR presidency as part of the reformed party system. The President, universally elected for ten years, was to head the newly formed Communist Union (Union of Communists) of the USSR, a bloc of two hypothetical parties ("Socialist" and "People's Democratic") with a single politburo. There were to be two vice presidents, one for party and one for state affairs. The cabinet was to be headed by the general secretary of the party that won the elections.[10]

A. N. Iakovlev also advocated universal glasnost.[11] Gorbachev mentioned glasnost at the Central Committee Plenum in April 1985 and called it a prerequisite of democratism at the Twenty-Seventh CPSU Congress (February 25–March 6, 1986) (Kommunisticheskaia partiia Sovetskogo Soiuza 1985, 20, 1986, 55, 60). The Chernobyl disaster demonstrated, however, that the circulation of information was still tightly controlled (Gibbs 1999, 40). The poor response to the accident was not addressed in the Supreme Soviet when it convened in June 1986 (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1986a, 78, 136, 151, 239). In November 1986, its standing commissions expressed their approval of "the measures taken to eliminate the consequences of the accident" (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1986b, 29).

In 1985–1986, the Supreme Soviet remained ornamental, but Gorbachev and others celebrated its ever-increasing effectiveness at the Twenty-Seventh Party Congress, as was customary for the preceding period (Kommunisticheskaia partiia Sovetskogo Soiuza 1986, 55, 107–8). The Supreme Soviet remained an amplifier of the official discourse. Reinforcing Gorbachev's "new thinking" in foreign policy, the Supreme Soviet issued appeals on international peace, security, and nuclear disarmament after the US–USSR summits in 1985 and 1986 (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1985, 348, 1986b, 384–7).

The situation started to change after the Central Committee Plenum endorsed democratization in January 1987. In the summer of 1987, contested soviet elections took place in some districts (Pikhoia 2000, 450). Criticism of the official policies was voiced in the USSR Supreme Soviet. Commenting on the draft regarding popular discussions of important state matters in June 1987, Džemma Lija Skulme,[12] a Latvian artist, referred to several cases of public opposition to environmental

policies. Supporting democratization, Skulme also denounced the apathy of Soviet citizens, which was a result of the "years of stagnation" (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1987a, 158–9). Anatolii Sergeevich Cherniaev noted in his diary that the discussion of social security in the Supreme Soviet in October 1987 displayed unprecedented frankness (Cherniaev 2003, 1987:83). Indeed, deputies from Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Georgia, and elsewhere criticized social, economic, and environmental policies (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1987b, 95–6, 98–100, 133–4, 136–7). Voting in support of official proposals, however, remained unanimous.

In conceptual terms, the political reform remained within the paradigm of "socialist democracy." Speaking to representatives of a US think tank in February 1987, A. N. Iakovlev rejected the notion that the USSR was evolving toward Western-style democracy and following the model of capitalist countries. He argued that there were differences between the development of "socialist democracy" and democracy in capitalist countries.[13]

"Socialist pluralism" became a key concept. On October 15, 1987, the Politburo discussed Gorbachev's upcoming speech on the 70th anniversary of the October Revolution. Nikolai Ivanovich Ryzhkov, the USSR Prime Minister, asked Gorbachev what he meant by "socialist pluralism." Stressing its differences from "bourgeois pluralism," Gorbachev explained that "socialist pluralism" meant taking into account the diversity of interests and points of view as represented by "civic organizations." Ryzhkov welcomed this interpretation that precluded a multiparty system. Heydər Əlirza oğlu Əliyev,[14] the USSR Deputy Prime Minister, opposed the use of the word "pluralism," seeing it as foreign and rooted in Western ideology. Anatolii Ivanovich Luk'ianov, who was a Central Committee secretary at the time, proposed using "socialist pluralism of opinions" in order to prevent its interpretation as a departure from the single-party system.[15]

The discussions within the party leadership and the broader public intensified in 1988, ahead of the anticipated Nineteenth Party Conference. The Central Committee's *Points* for the Conference, adopted in May 1988, proclaimed the objective of transferring all power to the soviets. The structure and operation of the "supreme body of power" was to rely on the experience of the Soviet political system, including the practice of the Congresses of Soviets and the Central Executive Committee (TsIK) that emerged under Lenin. The *Points* highlighted the proposals on the increased duration of the "supreme body," a clear separation of competence between its chambers, and direct representation of "civic organizations" (Kommunisticheskaia partiia Sovetskogo Soiuza 1988a, 20–1). Luk'ianov, who supposedly had such an idea already in the late 1960s, was seen as the main advocate for returning to the system of congresses (V (vneocherednoi) S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1991b, 27; Dzasokhov 2004, 69; Strekalov 2018, 244). The *Points* also specified that establishing a "socialist legal state," characterized by the supremacy of law as a manifestation of the popular will, was the goal of democratization (Kommunisticheskaia partiia Sovetskogo Soiuza 1988a, 24).

Fedor Mikhailovich Burlatskii, who was Vice President of the Soviet Association of Political Sciences at the time, published an alternative project in *Literaturnaia gazeta* under the title "On Soviet Parliamentarism." His project included the President,

elected by a Party Congress as General Secretary and then approved in universal elections. The Cabinet of "main" ministers, formed by the President and approved by the Supreme Soviet, would replace the Supreme Soviet Presidium. The Council of Ministers with a Chairman, however, would remain. Burlatskii proposed a proper separation of powers between the legislative, executive, and judicial (the Constitutional Court and other courts) branches. The Supreme Soviet of 700–800 deputies would become a permanently operating "Soviet parliament." It would express the pluralism of opinions, prepare legislation, oversee the executive, and allocate finances and resources. The party's authority would be indirect.[16]

Members of several Moscow-based "informal" organizations offered their vision of the reform in "Public Instructions" for the Party Conference, adopted on June 12, 1988, and circulated in *samizdat.* The "Instructions" decried the insufficient public discussion of the anticipated reform. According to the project, the CPSU was to be completely separated from the government, with amendments to Article 6 of the Constitution (which stipulated for the party's leading role in the country) and a popular discussion of the single-party system. The supreme soviets of the USSR and the union republics were to become permanently active bodies. During the elections to all soviets, candidates were to compete based on platforms and programs. The sessions of the USSR Supreme Soviet were to be broadcast on television. The "Instructions" also envisioned a reform of the security forces; an independent constitutional court; bodies for interethnic affairs and national soviets at enterprises and organizations; potent trade unions; and a set of measures for democratizing the party (Shubin n.d.).

At the Nineteenth Party Conference (June 28–July 1, 1988), Gorbachev presented the plan for the political reform. The parallel party and state systems were to be merged, with the leaders of party organizations heading the respective soviet bodies. The elections were to be free and competitive. Proportional representation of different population groups was not anticipated. The main features outlined in May, however, were not affected by the broader discussion. Gorbachev once again praised the system of congresses, calling them "broad and sovereign popular assemblies," and reiterated the proposal to introduce direct representation of "civic organizations." It was supposed to supplement the existing dual system of representing the entire population in the Council of the Union and nationalities in the Council of Nationalities. In addition to the existing 1,500 seats, "approximately" 750 seats were be filled through nomination by the congresses or plenums of party, trade union, cooperative, youth, women's, veteran, academic, artistic, and other official organizations. All these seats were to be in a new "representative supreme body," the Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR, with a five-year term. The Congress was to assemble once a year to address the most important matters. Legislative, regulatory, and control functions were to be performed by a permanently active "supreme body," the bicameral Supreme Soviet of 400–450 people, elected by the Congress and accountable to it (Kommunisticheskaia partiia Sovetskogo Soiuza 1988b, 1:55–8).

The two Supreme Soviet chambers retained their names, but their competence was to be separated. The Council of Nationalities was to focus on the economic

and social development of the union republics and autonomous units as well as interethnic relations. The Council of the Union was to concentrate on large-scale socio-economic programs and plans, pricing, taxation, labor relations, civil rights, defense, and international treaties. Laws and decisions on the most important matters were to be discussed and adopted by both chambers. In addition to the standing commissions of the chambers, standing committees of the whole Supreme Soviet were to be formed. All deputies of the Congress, not just Supreme Soviet members, could join the commissions and committees. Gorbachev endorsed deliberation and dissensus (Kommunisticheskaia partiia Sovetskogo Soiuza 1988b, 1:58–61).

The plan included the new office of the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet. Elected by the Congress and accountable to it, the Chairman was to have broad competence in preparing legislation and socio-economic programs as well as in foreign-policy and defense. The Chairman of the Supreme Soviet was to nominate the Chairman of the Council of Ministers. The plan retained the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet and included the Committee of Constitutional Oversight, elected by the Congress (Kommunisticheskaia partiia Sovetskogo Soiuza 1988b, 1:59–60).

Two Moscow delegates proposed universal elections of soviet chairmen, including the Supreme Soviet Chairman. Gorbachev rejected this suggestion, interpreting it as a presidential office that was unacceptable and undemocratic in the Soviet multinational state. The Conference unanimously approved the plan, but a "popular discussion" was to follow. The elections to the Congress of People's Deputies were to be held in April 1989 (Kommunisticheskaia partiia Sovetskogo Soiuza 1988c, 2:128–9, 185–6). Ahead of the government reform, the Secretariat of the CPSU Central Committee was reorganized in September 1988. The number of its internal divisions was reduced, rendering it unable to monitor and control all political processes in the country. In the context of merging party and state offices, Gorbachev became Chairman of the Supreme Soviet Presidium on October 1.[17]

Commentators noted the unprecedented discussions in the Supreme Soviet in May 1988.[18] The first non-unanimous vote since 1938, however, took place only in October. It concerned the approval of the Supreme Soviet Presidium's decree on the use of internal troops for maintaining public order. In the Council of Nationalities, there were 656 votes in favor, 25 against, and 4 abstaining. In the Council of the Union, there were 691 votes in favor and 6 votes against. The Presidium's decree on rallies and demonstrations was also disputed. There were 12 votes against and 1 abstaining in the Council of Nationalities, and 1 vote against in the Council of the Union. Citing the opinion of his voters, Pavel Panfilovich Goriunov, a worker from the Estonian SSR, argued that it was the competence of local and republican bodies to maintain public order. The republics as "sovereign states" were to have the final say in the use of military forces for that purpose. Goriunov also emphasized that each republic had its own "traditions" of rallies and demonstrations and objected to the decree's excessive details (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1988b, 274–5, 281).

This opposition arose in the context of the "Singing Revolution," a mass national movement in the republic. On October 29, 1988, the Popular Front of Estonia denounced the anticipated government reform because it undermined the constitutionally guaranteed sovereignty of the union republics and proposed

removing the draft from the USSR Supreme Soviet's agenda. On November 16, the Estonian Supreme Soviet declared the republic's sovereignty and inscribed the supremacy of republican laws into the Constitution of the Estonian SSR. However, on November 26, the respective amendments were annulled by the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium (Furtado and Chandler 1992, 68–73). During the vote on the government reform in the USSR Supreme Soviet chambers' commissions of legislative proposals, Estonian and Latvian deputies abstained.[19]

On November 29, Gorbachev presented the reform in the USSR Supreme Soviet. He reaffirmed that it would revive the soviets but would not introduce "parliamentarism." The congresses of people's deputies, also to be introduced in the republics, were, for him, a return to the "tradition of the congresses of soviets." While presenting the reformed USSR Supreme Soviet, Gorbachev stressed that it was to take over all stages of legislation. Summarizing the results of the "popular discussion," he noted the debate on professional deputies. Gorbachev proposed that only a part of them be made fulltime lawmakers, with the specifics to be determined by practice (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1988c, 11–14).

There was little debate in the plenary session. In the context of the conflict between the Estonian and USSR bodies, Skulme proposed the only amendment. It stipulated that the decisions regarding the constitutional status of the union republics or their crucial interests could be voted on by groups of deputies from the union republics and adopted only if each group supported them. Iurii Nikolaevich Khristoradnov, the Chairman of the Council of the Union, rejected the amendment on the grounds that it practically granted the republics a veto right. The vote of both chambers rejected the amendment with 1,353 votes against to 23 votes in favor. The government reform itself was adopted on December 1, 1988, with 657 votes in favor, 3 against, and 26 abstaining in the Council of Nationalities, and 687 votes in favor, 2 against, and 1 abstaining in the Council of the Union (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1988c, 170–1, 176–7).

The Central Committee's plan remained largely intact. According to the law on amendments to the USSR Constitution, people's deputies were elected based on "universal, equal, and direct elections with a secret ballot," but one-third of the people's deputies of the USSR and the union and autonomous republics was nominated by "civic organizations" with "all-union or republican bodies." The voting age was kept at 18, with 21 being the minimum age for candidates at the USSR level. In addition to the mentally ill, prisoners could not vote. The right to nominate candidates belonged to work collectives, "civic organizations," meetings of voters at their places of residence, and servicemen in military units. The number of candidates was not limited. All people's deputies were elected for five years and could not serve more than two terms. The USSR Congress of People's Deputies consisted of 750 deputies from territorial electoral districts having an equal number of voters, 750 from national-territorial districts (32 from each union republic, 11 from each autonomous republic, 5 from each autonomous region, and 1 from each autonomous district), and 750 from "civic organizations." Deputies "generally" did not leave their jobs but were exempt from them during sessions. They had to

report to their voters or "civic organizations" and could be recalled (Kukushkin and Chistiakov 1987, 344; Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1988c, 190–1, 194, 205–6).

The electoral law specified that the deputies from "civic organizations" included 100 from the CPSU; 100 from trade unions; 100 from cooperative organizations (collective farms, consumer societies and other cooperatives); 75 from the Komsomol; 75 from the Committee of Soviet Women; 75 from the All-Union Council of Veterans of War and Labor; 75 from the associations of academic organizations; 75 from creative unions (architects, designers, journalists, cinematographers, composers, writers, theater employees, and artists); and 75 from other all-union organizations (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1988c, 215–16).

According to the law on amendments, the USSR Congress of People's Deputies was the "supreme body of state power." It had the authority to address any issue within the competence of the USSR, was the sole body responsible for adopting or amending the Constitution, and could annul the acts of the USSR Supreme Soviet. It elected the USSR Supreme Soviet, the Chairman of the USSR Supreme Soviet, and the Committee of Constitutional Oversight; it approved the Prime Minister and several other top officials. It could also initiate a referendum (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1988c, 193–4).

The bicameral USSR Supreme Soviet was the "permanent legislative, regulatory, and control body of state power," accountable to the Congress. The two chambers, the Council of the Union and the Council of Nationalities, remained equal in size and competence. The Council of the Union was composed of deputies elected in the territorial districts and nominated by "civic organizations." The Council of Nationalities consisted of deputies elected in the national-territorial districts and nominated by "civic organizations" (11 from each union republic, 4 from each autonomous republic, 2 from each autonomous region, and 1 from each autonomous district). Every year, one-fifth of the entire Supreme Soviet was to be reelected by the Congress. The USSR Supreme Soviet appointed the Prime Minister and the Prosecutor General, and formed the Supreme Court and several other bodies. It held two regular sessions a year, each lasting three to four months (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1988c, 194–7).

Each chamber could address any issue, but the Council of the Union was primarily to focus on socio-economic development and state-building of the entire country; civil rights, freedoms, and obligations; foreign policy; defense; and state security. The Council of Nationalities was mainly to address the interests of nationalities. Draft laws were "generally" to be considered first in the standing committees and commissions (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1988c, 198, 201).

The USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium was accountable to the Supreme Soviet and comprised the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, 15 deputies from the union republics, the chairmen of the two chambers, the Chairman of the Committee of People's Control, and the chairmen of permanent commissions and committees. The Chairman of the Supreme Soviet was the highest official of the USSR and represented the country both domestically and in international relations. The Chairman was to be elected by a secret ballot by the USSR Congress of People's Deputies from among its members for five years and for no more than two terms. The

Chairman was accountable to the Congress and the Supreme Soviet and could be recalled by the Congress at any time. The Presidium had the authority to issue decrees and resolutions; the Chairman could issue orders. The Presidium retained the right to issue pardons (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1988c, 198–201).

Political and institutional developments

The Congress of People's Deputies and the reformed Supreme Soviet were supposed to demonstrate public support for Gorbachev and his reforms as well as to assume some of the previous functions of the central party apparatus. Further institutional adjustments, first the introduction of the presidency, and then the preparation of a new union treaty, were reactions to the worsening economic and nationalities crises.

Some of the popular fronts and other national organizations that emerged in Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Ukraine, and elsewhere before the election to the Congress of People's Deputies explicitly proclaimed the goal of national independence. The opponents of the national movements in the Baltic states united into "international" organizations, such as the International Movement of Estonia. Some of the non-national democratic associations were also called popular fronts. There were discussion clubs, such as the Moscow Tribune. The Democratic Union, formed in Moscow in May 1988 and led by the dissident Valeriia Il'inichna Novodvorskaia, became the first significant political party to oppose the CPSU on a union-wide scale (Levicheva and Neliubin 1990, 150; Tregub 1991, 13–17; Ansberg and Margolis 2009, 704; Sauvé 2022).

Some 172,800,000 people, or 89.8 percent of registered voters, participated in the election to the Congress on March 26, 1989. There were 5,074 registered candidates for the 2,250 seats. Contestation was only partial. The CPSU was the sole legal political party. Among the 1,500 deputies to be elected directly, 399 ran unopposed. Dissidents Ernst Semenovich Orlovskii and Andrei Dmitrievich Sakharov criticized the use of party-controlled district electoral committees and district electoral meetings to "filter" out undesirable candidates. The Central Election Commission received complaints about denial of registration, unequal conditions for campaigning, and attempts to pressure voters but stated that none of them undermined the results of the elections. The election accelerated mass politization. However, some voters remained uninvolved. In the Sverdlovsk Region, for instance, some voted the "old" way by dropping ballots into ballot boxes without crossing anyone out.[20]

Candidates based their campaigns on a variety of issues. In the Baltic republics, national mobilization proved especially successful. Sąjūdis ("Movement"), a Lithuanian mass organization, won most seats assigned to the Lithuanian SSR. Galina Vasil'evna Starovoitova, a Russian ethnographer and activist, won a contested election in Armenia thanks to a competent campaign and support from both the Karabakh movement and the broader "informal" movement (Editorial 1989d, 46; Veidemann 1989, 216; Olcott 1990, 35; Abrahamian and Shagoyan 2012, 15). The two procurators, T'elman Gdlyan[21] and Nikolai Veniaminovich Ivanov,

foregrounded the fight against corruption and organized crime. They became famous during the so-called "Cotton Scandal," an investigation of corruption in the Uzbek SSR, and were subsequently investigated for illegal conduct. Boris Nikolaevich El'tsin, a long-time CPSU functionary, campaigned in Moscow with a program spanning from deeper democratic reforms to social security and environmental issues. Marina Evgen'evna Sal'e, a geologist and political activist, included women's rights in her program but lost the election in Leningrad.[22] Direct election resulted in a significant defeat of the party establishment. Officials performed particularly poorly in the cities (Editorial 1989d, 45; Brovkin 1990, 440–1).

The party leadership, including Gorbachev and the conservative Egor Kuz'mich Ligachev, and oppositional intellectuals, including Sakharov, were nominated by "civic organizations." The requirement for official recognition meant that organizations like the All-Union Society of Philatelists received seats, while the popular fronts did not (Editorial 1989d, 46; Orlovskii 1989, 48). Some commentators saw the nomination as a means to incorporate the pro-perestroika intelligentsia into the new assembly (Chalidze 1989b, 25; Bakhtamov 1989b, 14). The nomination allowed Sakharov, the economist Gavriil Kharitonovich Popov, the editor-in-chief of *Moskovskie novosti* Egor Vladimirovich Iakovlev, and other prominent intellectuals to bypass the "filtering" process in the districts (Sobchak 1991, 25). Others pointed out that it also aided conservatives and that the overall share of progressive deputies was too small (Editorial 1989d, 46).

The Congress opened in the Kremlin on May 25, 1989. Among the 2,249 deputies elected by then, 1,099 were from the RSFSR, 262 from Ukraine, 108 from Uzbekistan, 99 from Kazakhstan, 94 from Belarus, 91 from Georgia, 72 from Azerbaijan, 58 from Lithuania, 57 from Tajikistan, 55 from Moldova, 53 from Armenia, 53 from Kyrgyzstan, 52 from Latvia, 48 from Turkmenistan, and 48 from Estonia. There were 352 women. Despite the underperformance of regional party leaders, 1,957 deputies (87 percent) were members or candidates for membership in the CPSU. There were 80 deputies from the armed forces; 1,702 deputies (75.7 percent) had higher or unfinished higher education; and there were 7 religious figures.[23]

There were no formal factions at the Congress, but the Baltic and Moscow groups of deputies became a small yet vocal opposition that criticized the pace and depth of perestroika. CPSU membership did not preclude opposition to the party leadership. The joint platform of over 60 Baltic deputies foregrounded national self-determination, envisioning the USSR's transformation into a "commonwealth of sovereign republics."[24] The loose Moscow group emerged on the basis of the Moscow Tribune and connected to the Congress to the "informals." The Congress was accompanied by mass rallies in Moscow.[25]

The First USSR Congress became a major forum of dissensus. Particular attention was devoted to nationalities issues, including the Tbilisi massacre of April 9, 1989, the brutal suppression of a pro-independence demonstration that resulted in up to 20 people being killed; the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict; the Sumgait pogrom against Armenians in Azerbaijan in February 1988; and the situation of Russian speakers in Latvia. Many deputies articulated grievances pertaining to their republic or nationality (Pikhoia 2000, 502–3; Gayan 2004, 428).

Despite the dissensus and vocal opposition, the majority of the Congress supported all of Gorbachev's initiatives. It elected the Supreme Soviet; Gorbachev became its Chairman and Luk'ianov First Deputy Chairman; Ryzhkov was approved as Prime Minister. The Congress approved Gorbachev's program. Its resolution mentioned increased rights for the republics and other national units but also underscored the importance of central legislation. The Congress approved the plan for a new constitution and formed a commission under Gorbachev. It also appealed to the peoples of the world, declaring the USSR's openness to cooperation and reaffirming Gorbachev's "new thinking" approach. Addressing some of the pressing political issues, the Congress formed three *ad hoc* commissions: on the events in Tbilisi, on Gdlyan's group of investigators, and on the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact (I S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1989b, 3:351, 357–404, 405–8, 420, 425–6, 430, 442–5).

The deputies of the Supreme Soviet, 271 in each chamber, were elected at the Congress without proper discussion. The non-election of El'tsin, who scored a major victory in the direct election to the Congress in Moscow, led to a scandal. Aleksei Ivanovich Kazannik, a jurist from Omsk, ceded his seat to El'tsin (I S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1989a, 1:264, 297, 345–6, 413, 424–5, 433). According to *Moskovskie novosti*, among the 542 deputies of the Supreme Soviet, 179 deputies (33 percent) represented the upper and middle leadership in party organizations, state agencies, the military, and academic institutions; 191 deputies (35.3 percent) represented the lower leadership in industry, agriculture, and academia; 99 deputies (18.3 percent) were workers, collective farmers, and other non-specialists; 68 deputies (12.5 percent) were highly qualified intellectuals; 5 deputies (0.9 percent) were retirees.[26] After the election of the Supreme Soviet, the historian Iurii Nikolaevich Afanas'ev of the Moscow group denounced it as "Stalinist–Brezhnevite," anticipating that it would not function as a professional parliament, and called the Congress's majority "aggressively obedient" (I S"ezd narodnykh deputatov RSFSR 1992, 1:223–4).

Evgenii Maksimovich Primakov, an economist and specialist in the Middle East, was elected Chairman of the Council of the Union. Rafiq Nishonov,[27] a diplomat and party functionary, became Chairman of the Council of Nationalities (Figure 8.1). Initially, the Supreme Soviet established fourteen committees, including those on international affairs, on defense and state security, and on economic reform. Four different commissions were formed in each chamber (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1989a, 16–19).

Speaking on June 9, 1989, the last day of the First Congress of People's Deputies, Sakharov criticized its results: it did not establish a new system of government and simply approved whatever was given to it by Gorbachev. Sakharov then proposed making the Congress a genuinely potent assembly by adopting the "Decree on Power." According to this decree, the Congress would abolish Article 6 of the Constitution and proclaim itself the sole legislative authority at the union level. The decree stipulated that union laws were to be approved by the legislatures of the union republics before coming into force, thereby reaffirming the Estonian and Lithuanian (May 18, 1989) declarations of sovereignty. Sakharov proposed



Figure 8.1 Second Session of the USSR Supreme Soviet. Moscow, September 25, 1989. Photo by V. B. Sobolev. Left to right: Chairman of the Council of Nationalities Rafiq Nishonov, First Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Soviet A. I. Luk'ianov, Chairman of the Supreme Soviet M. S. Gorbachev, Chairman of the Council of the Union E. M. Primakov. RGAKFD, 0-392099.

overcoming the imperial legacy by transitioning to a horizontal federative system, with all national units receiving equal political, legal, and economic rights. The decree was not put to the vote (I S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1989b, 3:325–8; Verkhovnyi Sovet Litovskoi SSR 1989, 40, 139–41).

After the First Congress, the Inter-Regional Group of Deputies (Figure 8.2) was formed based on the Moscow group as the *de facto* parliamentary opposition. Afanas'ev, El'tsin, the chemist Viktor Palm,[28] one of the founders of the Popular Front of Estonia, G. Kh. Popov, and Sakharov became its co-chairmen (Pikhoia 2000, 504). According to Afanas'ev, the group was united by negative solidarity, such as opposition to Article 6 and dissatisfaction with the results of the First Congress. Its members held different opinions on the issues of the union state, property, and land (Liubarskii 1990, 31–2).

The television broadcast of the First Congress further catalyzed mass politization (Pikhoia 2000, 503). According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, there were, on average, 194 rallies each month in 1988 and 400 each month in 1989 (as of December); from February to November 1989, some 1.4 million people participated in strikes at 1,500 enterprises (II S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1989a, 3:462). New popular fronts and other political organizations emerged. In September 1989, representatives of 82 organizations from across the USSR, along with members of the Inter-Regional Group, participated in the Conference



Figure 8.2 Members of the Inter-Regional Group of Deputies at the Second USSR Congress of People's Deputies. Moscow, December 1989. Fourth row from bottom: Iu. Iu. Boldyrev (first from right), N. V. Ivanov (third from right), T'elman Gdlyan (fourth from right), G. Kh. Popov (fifth from right, seated); third row from bottom: Iu. N. Afanas'ev (speaking), A. D. Sakharov (first from left, seated); second row from bottom: B. N. El'tsin (third from left, seated). GMPIR, F. III VS-20283.

of Democratic Organizations in Leningrad. Its resolution supported, *inter alia*, a transition to a market economy and the primacy of the union republics' legislation over the union's legislation. The USSR was to turn into a free confederation of sovereign states. Twenty organizations, predominately from the RSFSR but also from Uzbekistan, Georgia, and Armenia, agreed to form the Inter-Regional Association of Democratic Organizations (Editorial 1989a).

In 1989, interethnic conflicts erupted in Georgia and Moldova. Interethnic clashes also occurred in Kazakhstan. Latvia and Azerbaijan adopted declarations of sovereignty. In November, the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium invalidated "certain" legal acts of the Azerbaijan, Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian SSRs. Later the same month, however, the Supreme Soviet passed a law granting economic autonomy to the three Baltic republics. It also adopted a resolution on the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict, but the supreme soviets of Armenia and Azerbaijan rejected it.[29]

The Second USSR Congress of People's Deputies (December 12–24, 1989) adopted the rules of procedure for the Congress and the Supreme Soviet and granted the Supreme Soviet the right to withdraw confidence from the cabinet. It also formalized the establishment of the Committee of Constitutional Oversight, with the jurist Sergei Sergeevich Alekseev being elected its Chairman. The members of the Baltic Parliamentary Group, which has also consolidated as a faction,

rejected the establishment of the Committee of Constitutional Oversight, viewing it as a limitation on the sovereign rights of the republics. Further amendments to the Constitution made the creation of congresses of people's deputies and the direct representation of "civic organizations" in the union and autonomous republics optional (II S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1989a, 3:453, 1989b, 4:552–5, 562, 564, 589–605).

None of the republics introduced direct representation of "civic organizations." A Congress of People's Deputies was established only in the RSFSR. Before the elections to new bodies, declarations advocating independence were adopted in Estonia (by a republican assembly of people's deputies of all levels) and in Latvia (by the Supreme Soviet). In February 1990, during discussions about the introduction of a USSR presidency, several Baltic deputies declared that they were participating in the USSR Supreme Soviet for the purpose of preparing negotiations for the restoration of their republics' independence and refused to partake in forming any new state institutions of the USSR. The new Lithuanian Supreme Soviet, chaired by Vytautas Landsbergis,[30] one of the Sąjūdis leaders, formally reinstated the country's independence on March 11, 1990. On March 9, 1990, the Georgian Supreme Soviet recognized the 1921 invasion by Soviet Russia as the start of occupation and expressed the intent to reinstate independence (Editorial 1990a, 2; Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1990a, 146–7; Shakhrai et al. 2011, 1:393, 558).

The Third USSR Congress of People's Deputies (March 12–15, 1990) refused to recognize Lithuanian independence. Instead, it discussed the "renewal" of the 1922 Union Treaty. In the context of ongoing economic and nationalities developments, the Soviet leadership initiated the establishment of the presidency with broad competence. The Congress elected Gorbachev the first President for five years, although all subsequent ones were to be elected universally. Two collegial bodies were created under the President: the Presidential Council and the Federation Council. The Federation Council consisted of the heads of the union republics and allowed the participation of the heads of autonomous units and representatives of other nationalities. It managed relations between the union and the republics, including the oversight of the Union Treaty. The Presidium and the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet were retained, with Luk'ianov becoming the Chairman (III (vneocherednoi) S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1990a, 1:19, 39, 41, 45, 1990b, 3:195–202, 206, 211, 213–14).

Further adjustments included the introduction of a new executive body, the State Committee of the USSR on Nationalities Issues, in March 1990. In April, the USSR Supreme Soviet adopted a law on the economic autonomy of union and autonomous republics. Another law, also adopted in April, recognized union and autonomous republics as "federal subjects." Union republics could leave the federation following a referendum. Autonomous republics and other units (regions and districts) were to settle their relations with union republics through agreements (Shakhrai et al. 2011, 1:405, 428–9, 432–3). In September 1990, the Supreme Soviet expanded the President's competence until 1992.[31]

In the meantime, numerous parties emerged in the USSR and the republics in late 1989 and the first half of 1990, covering the spectrum from anarcho-syndicalism

to monarchism. The decision of the Third Congress to amend the notorious Article 6 of the Constitution and explicitly grant the right to form parties other than the CPSU contributed to the institutionalizing of Soviet politics (III (vneocherednoi) S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1990b, 3:193–4). Many new parties and movements adopted democratic programs, with some foregrounding particularistic national, religious, or occupational matters and others focusing on social and environmental problems. Discussion clubs from several cities formed the confederative Social Democratic Association of the Soviet Union. One of its leaders, the geographer Oleg Germanovich Rumiantsev, later co-founded the Social Democratic Party of Russia. Some of the new organizations were explicitly transnational. The Radical Association for Peace and Freedom was established as part of the Transnational Radical Party. Some parties sought to recreate the political organizations of the 1900s and 1910s, with two parties claiming direct or symbolic succession to the Constitutional Democratic (KD) Party of 1905 (Levicheva 1990, 35–6; Levicheva and Neliubin 1990, 145, 149–50, 156–7; Tregub 1991, 31–48). However, the new parties mainly involved the population in large urban centers. As noted in *Sel'skaia nov'* ("Rural News"), a popular subscription magazine, there was limited awareness among its readers about the leaders and programs of the new parties, as indicated by their letters (Editorial 1991, 22).

Within the CPSU, the Democratic Platform was formed at a conference of party clubs in January 1990. Its members initially aimed to create a faction but eventually left the CPSU to form the Democratic Russia movement. Some members of the CPSU united around neo-Stalinist and neo-Bolshevik slogans. The chemist Nina Aleksandrovna Andreeva, a conservative opponent of perestroika since 1988, co-founded the organization "Unity" (*Edinstvo*) in 1989.[32]

No party factions were formed within the USSR Congress of People's Deputies and the Supreme Soviet, even though there were members of new parties among the USSR people's deputies. Instead, the central Soviet assemblies had deputy groups based on social categories (such as gender, occupation, and age) and individual policy issues. Among the groups with over 200 members at the Fourth Congress (December 17–27, 1990), there were "Communists," "Union," "Agrarians," "Workers," "Autonomous Formations," the Inter-Regional Deputy Group, the Environmental Deputy Group, and "Life" (a group of women deputies). Smaller groups included "For Constructive Cooperation," "Young People's Deputies," "Fatherland" (a group of deputies from the military), "On the Issues of Developing Culture," "Promotion of Scientific and Technical Progress," "Academic," "Scientific-Industrial," "For Healthcare," and other groups. The "Union" group (561 members), co-chaired by Colonel Viktor Imantovich Alksnis, and the Inter-Regional Group (229 members) constituted the conservative and liberal opposition to Gorbachev, respectively. Neither of the two had a majority or plurality, with the "Communists" (730 members) being the largest group. There were CPSU members in other groups as well (Tregub 1991, 58).

The decisions of the Third Congress did not prevent further developments toward independence in the Baltic republics. On March 30, 1990, the new Estonian Supreme Soviet recognized the republic as occupied, and the USSR authority as illegal.

On May 4, 1990, the Latvian Supreme Soviet adopted a declaration on reinstating the country's independence. Both supreme soviets announced transitional periods. In the meantime, the USSR government attempted to pressure Lithuania into rescinding its declaration of independence by using the military to take over some of the institutions in the republic and imposing an economic blockade. During the summer, a compromise was reached, with the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet postponing the declaration's implementation. In the Caucasus, the new supreme soviets of Armenia (on August 23, 1990) and Georgia (November 14, 1990) announced the start of the transition to independence (Burg 1990, 322; Doronchenkov 1991, 162, 173, 193–4, 243; Shakhrai et al. 2011, 1:403, 405).

During a meeting of the Federation Council on June 12, 1990, the leaders of several union republics expressed their doubts about a federation and prioritized direct ties between the republics. Arnold Rüütel,[33] the Chairman of the Estonian Supreme Soviet, and Landsbergis, who was President of Lithuania at the time, reaffirmed their commitment to independence. Islom Karimov,[34] the President of Uzbekistan, and Ayaz Niyazi oğlu Mütəllibov,[35] the President of Azerbaijan, supported a confederation. Karimov rejected the notion of a "renewal" of the 1922 Union Treaty altogether since it was not signed by all republics and insisted on drafting a new treaty. Later the same month, the First RSFSR Congress of People's Deputies proposed that the foundations of a new union treaty were worked out by parliaments of the union republics (Shakhrai et al. 2011, 1:441–3, 446).

The notion of the "union of sovereign states" as the foundation for a new union treaty was debated at the Twenty-Eight CPSU Congress (July 2–13, 1990). Alksnis argued that the use of the term "sovereign" implied a shift from a federation to a confederation. Vadim Andreevich Medvedev, a Politburo member and Secretary of the Central Committee, contended that "sovereignty" of union republics was enshrined in the Constitution. The notion was included in the resolution on nationalities policy, but the transformation from a unitary state into a "genuine commonwealth of peoples" was expected to be a lengthy process. The autonomous units were supposed to be included in the new union as equal partners (Kommunisticheskaia partiia Sovetskogo Soiuza 1991a, 2:257, 384–5; Shakhrai et al. 2011, 1:449).

In June–December 1990, declarations of sovereignty were adopted by the parliaments of the RSFSR, Uzbekistan, Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. In October–November 1990, several bilateral treaties between union republics were signed. Several autonomous republics and autonomous regions also declared sovereignty or "elevated" their autonomy status. The South Ossetian Soviet Democratic Republic was proclaimed instead of the Autonomous Region and sought direct entry into the USSR. The Tatar ASSR was transformed into the Tatar SSR. The Yakut ASSR was also turned into the Yakut-Sakha SSR but explicitly remained a part of the RSFSR. Karelia, Buryatia, Kalmykia, Bashkiria, Chuvashia, and Mari El declared sovereignty. The Gorno-Altai Autonomous Region was transformed into the Gorno-Altai ASSR; the Karachay–Cherkess Autonomous Region was turned into the Karachay–Cherkess SSR. The Chechen–Ingush ASSR declared

sovereignty as the Chechen–Ingush Republic and conditioned its participation in the union treaty on the resolution of the Ossetian–Ingush border conflict. Meetings of people's deputies of different levels proclaimed the Gagauz Republic and the Transnistrian SSR as well as the Polish National-Territorial Region within Lithuania. In 1990, new interethnic clashes occurred in Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan (Tregub 1991, 25–9; Shakhrai et al. 2011, 1:414–15, 459–63, 465–7, 558–9).

In July–September 1990, representatives of union and autonomous republics, political parties, and movements participated in official consultations regarding the concept of the new union treaty. The representatives of most republics agreed that an all-union market and collective security were necessary foundations. On December 3, 1990, the USSR Supreme Soviet approved the basic concept of the new union treaty prepared under Gorbachev. During discussions at the Fourth USSR Congress later that month, the sovereignty of union republics and the new union treaty became major topics. Moldovan deputies suspended their participation in the Congress because it did not address the proclamations of the Gagauz and Transnistrian republics. Ukrainian deputies declared that the consideration of the new union treaty was the prerogative of republican parliaments, citing the treaty between Russia and Ukraine. The goal, therefore, was not a renewal at the center but rather the creation of a commonwealth of independent states. Kyrgyz President Askar Akaev[36] proposed developing two separate treaties, political and economic (IV S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1991a, 1:192–3, 380–1, 417–18; Shakhrai et al. 2011, 1:452–7).

With 419 votes in favor, 933 against, and 266 abstaining, the Fourth Congress refused to recognize the declarations of sovereignty of the union republics. After that, with 1,605 votes in favor, 54 against, and 86 abstaining, it approved the basic concept of the new union treaty (IV S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1991b, 2:385–7, 408–9). The USSR was to be preserved as a renewed federation. The concept emphasized the historic unity of the peoples and envisioned a democratic federative state. The principles articulated in the declarations of sovereignty of republics and autonomous units were to form its foundation. The renewed federation was to be based on the principles of individualized civil rights and collective rights of nationalities and national minorities (non-titular groups). A preparatory committee consisting of the highest officials of the USSR, the union republics, and the autonomous units was to develop the draft treaty. The Congress also resolved to hold a referendum on the matter of preserving the USSR as a renewed federation (IV S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1991c, 3:305–7, 311–12).

The Fourth Congress introduced further changes to the Constitution. The Presidential Council was abolished, and the vice presidency was introduced. The Cabinet of Ministers under the President replaced the Council of Ministers, although the position of Prime Minister was retained. The Supreme Soviet was to approve the Prime Minister and the Cabinet and could dissolve it (IV S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1991a, 1:563–5). The Congress elected Gennadii Ivanovich Ianaev, previously involved in youth and trade union organizations, as Vice President (IV S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1991c, 3:313–19, 389).

On January 10, 1991, shortly after the Fourth Congress, Gorbachev again demanded that the Lithuanian Supreme Soviet rescind its decisions (Shakhrai et al. 2011, 1:424). On January 11–13, 1991, Soviet military units clashed with supporters of independence in the republic, resulting in 14 people being killed in Vilnius. Gorbachev and other USSR officials attempted to distance themselves from responsibility for the use of violence (Dunlop 2003, 97). The governments of Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Armenia, Georgia, and Moldova refused to conduct the referendum on the USSR's future. In each of the nine remaining union republics, a majority of over 70 percent voted to preserve the USSR as "a renewed federation of equal sovereign republics" on March 17, 1991 (Brown 1997, 256). Instead of the USSR referendum, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Armenia, and Georgia held referendums on independence. Following the referendum results, the Georgian Supreme Soviet reinstated independence and the 1921 Georgian Constitution on April 9, 1991 (Slider 1991, 74; Shakhrai et al. 2011, 1:559).

Parallel to the work on the new union treaty, the USSR leadership drafted a new constitution. The draft included most of the new institutions. Similar to previous Soviet constitutions, it mentioned both the singular people and the multiple peoples of the USSR. The soviets were defined as representative bodies through which the people exercised its power. All republics were considered sovereign, and their relations were to be regulated by the anticipated union treaty. The draft stipulated a multiparty system and universal elections.[37]

The envisioned system of government included a separation of powers. The bicameral USSR Supreme Soviet was the legislature, although the most important matters were to pass through a popular discussion or a referendum. The Supreme Soviet's upper chamber, the Council of Republics, comprised an equal number of representatives from each republic that directly entered the union. The lower chamber, the Council of the Union, was elected universally. The term was set for five years, and deputies were to be fulltime legislators. Legislation on nationalities was to be discussed in the Council of Republics first. Drafts on social matters, foreign policy, defense, state security, and civil rights were to pass through the Council of the Union first. The Supreme Soviet was to hold two regular annual sessions, each lasting three to four months. The commissions, committees, the Presidium, and the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet were retained. The draft also preserved the presidency, the vice presidency, and the Cabinet with the Prime Minister, and introduced the Constitutional Court. The new body was supposed to ensure that union and republican legislation aligned with the union treaty and the USSR Constitution.[38]

The negotiations of the new union treaty, known as the "Novo-Ogarevo process," named after the government residence where they took place, involved the authorities of the USSR and nine union republics: the RSFSR, Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan (Shakhrai et al. 2011, 1:516–17). The draft treaty was finalized on June 17, 1991. The abbreviation "USSR" was to stand for the "Union of Soviet Sovereign Republics," a federative state. The draft reaffirmed the new design of the Supreme Soviet but specified that the Council of Republics consisted of delegations with the same number of seats as in the Council of Nationalities. Each delegation of direct

union members had one vote. The two chambers were to amend the constitution, admit new states, adopt the union budget, establish policy principles, and decide on matters of war and peace jointly. The competence of the Council of Republics was expanded to encompass the organization of union bodies and the ratification of international treaties. If the Council of Republics rejected a draft, the Council of the Union could still have it adopted with a two-thirds majority. The draft treaty had to be approved by the supreme bodies of the constituent states and signed by their delegations.[39]

The same day, in the USSR Supreme Soviet, Prime Minister Valentin Sergeevich Pavlov, Minister of Defense Dmitrii Timofeevich Iazov, Chairman of the KGB Vladimir Aleksandrovich Kriuchkov, and members of the "Union" group criticized Gorbachev for violating the interests of the USSR. The Supreme Soviet advocated for the inclusion of autonomies on an equal basis with the nine union republics and for direct universal elections to both of the new chambers. However, on July 12, it approved the draft treaty in principle. The final version of the draft, agreed upon in Novo-Ogarevo on July 23, kept the planned system largely unchanged. However, it included provisions stipulating that laws would only take effect after being approved by the Council of Republics, and that the Constitutional Court would be formed by the President and the two chambers. The sizes of the delegations in the Council of Republics were to be no smaller than those in the Council of Nationalities. In the union republics, there was substantial opposition to the draft, with budgetary concerns arising in the context of the deep economic crisis. The participation of Ukraine was uncertain. Nonetheless, the signing of the treaty by Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Belarus was expected on August 20, with other signatories expected to follow later.[40]

On August 18, 1991, a group of USSR officials, including Ianaev, Pavlov, Iazov, and Kriuchkov, declared a state of emergency to commence the following day and formed the State Committee on the State of Emergency to assume control of the country. Gorbachev, who was then on vacation in the Crimea, was confined to his residence and declared as being unwell. Opponents of the attempted coup rallied around the RSFSR President El'tsin and the RSFSR Supreme Soviet. A mass rally assembled around the Russian parliament on August 20. That night, during an assault on the RSFSR Supreme Soviet building, three of its defenders lost their lives. On August 21, the RSFSR authorities managed to quell the coup attempt. Luk'ianov was not a member of the Committee on the State of Emergency but maintained communication with its members. He had his immunity revoked by the USSR Supreme Soviet and was arrested.[41]

The August Coup accelerated the dissolution of the USSR. Latvia (on August 20) and Estonia (August 21) reestablished their independence. Declarations of independence were adopted in Ukraine (August 24), with a referendum to follow, Moldova (August 27), Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan (August 31), Tajikistan (September 9), Armenia (September 23), Azerbaijan (October 18), and Turkmenistan (October 27). In Belarus, the declaration of sovereignty became a constitutional law on August 25. The August Coup also marked the end of the CPSU. Throughout August–November 1991, the CPSU and its republican branches were banned or

dissolved. Gorbachev resigned as Secretary General on August 24, 1991 (Pikhoia 2000, 602, 606–7; Shakhrai et al. 2011, 1:560–1, 556, 567).

President of Kazakhstan Nursultan A'bis'uly Nazarbaev[42] anticipated a treaty between the republics without a cabinet and parliament and proposed a transitional system for the immediate future when speaking in the USSR Supreme Soviet after the coup attempt. The transitional system was to retain the current presidency and parliament and include an inter-republican economic council (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1991r, 64). At the Fifth USSR Congress of People's Deputies (September 2–5, 1991), Nazarbaev read the joint statement by Gorbachev and the leaders of ten republics, which declared the start of a transition to the Union of Sovereign States to be based on a new treaty and outlined a new central government (V (vneocherednoi) S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1991a, 3–4).

The new system, which was partially based on the previous draft treaty and approved by the Congress, saw the Council of Republics replacing the Council of Nationalities. The Council of Republics consisted of nominees from the supreme bodies of the union republics, selected from among the USSR and republican people's deputies. The RSFSR had 52 seats. Other union republics had 20 seats each, with an additional seat per each autonomous unit. Each union republic had one vote. The Council of the Union was comprised deputations from the union republics, selected from among the USSR people's deputies based on the existing quotas. The competence of the two chambers largely relied on the draft treaty, with the Council of Republics becoming the upper chamber. The supreme bodies of the union republics could suspend USSR laws if they contradicted their constitutions. Despite the reformed Supreme Soviet gaining constitutional authority, the Congress voted against dissolving itself.[43]

The USSR State Council, composed of the USSR President and the highest officials of the union republics, rather than the Supreme Soviet, became the new supreme body. The vice presidency was abolished. The union republics formed the Inter-Republican Economic Committee, accountable to the President, the State Council, and the Supreme Soviet. The first decision of the State Council was to recognize the independence of the Baltic States.[44] Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan joined the new Supreme Soviet that opened on October 21, 1991. The Council of Republics had 122 seats, while the Council of the Union had 121. Representatives of Moldova, Azerbaijan, and Ukraine participated as observers. A'ny'ar Turlybekuly A'limjanov,[45] a Kazakh writer, was elected as the Chairman of the Council of Republics, while the jurist Konstantin Dmitrievich Lubenchenko became the Chairman of the Council of the Union.[46] In October 1991, the leaders of Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, along with Gorbachev, signed the Treaty on the Economic Commonwealth. In November, the Inter-Republican Economic Committee was transformed into its executive body in November. The same month, the State Council finished drafting the new treaty, which was also to serve as the union's constitution.[47]

The draft defined the Union of Sovereign States as a single sovereign state internationally and as a "confederative democratic state" internally. A series of treaties,

including the already signed economic treaty, were to determine its competence. The bicameral Supreme Soviet was retained as the confederation's legislature. The Council of Republics would be formed based on the same principles as in the transitional system, while the Council of the Union would be universally elected. The Supreme Soviet was stripped of the constitutional authority, but otherwise, the competence of the two chambers largely remained the same. The union was to have a President and a Vice President, although the electoral system was for these offices was yet to be determined. Other bodies of the union included the State Council, a cabinet with a Prime Minister, the Supreme Court, the Supreme Court of Arbitration, and the Procurator's Office.[48]

During the debates in the Council of Republics in early December 1991, Kyrgyz and Russian representatives proposed a union of sovereign states of Europe and Asia instead of a confederative state. However, the draft treaty had already received preapproval from the USSR Supreme Soviet. In the context of the draft's discussions in the republican parliaments, Gorbachev urged them to consider, *inter alia*, the benefit of maintaining a shared economic space and the threat of interrepublican conflicts.[49]

By that time, the Russian leadership had decided to start its own marked reforms and had established control over several USSR institutions. Given the majority's support for independence in Ukraine's referendum, El'tsin deemed a union treaty without Ukraine unfeasible. On December 8, 1991, the leaders of Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine signed the Belovezha Accords, establishing the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). They contended that negotiations regarding the union treaty had reached an impasse. The Belovezha Accords acknowledged that the USSR ceased to exist as a subject of international law (Kotkin 2008, 108–10; Shakhrai et al. 2011, 1:573; Shakhrai 2016, 2:632–3).

In the USSR Supreme Soviet, Alksnis and other members of the "Union" group expressed their opposition to the CIS. However, no official protest from the Council of the Union ensued, as a quorum became unattainable after the recall of Belarusian and Russian deputations. On December 18, the Council of Republics recognized the Belovezha Accords as a guarantee to overcome political and economic crises. The remaining republican governments were scheduled to make a decision regarding the CIS at a summit in Alma-Ata (now Almaty). Ahead of the summit, Kazakhstan proclaimed independence on December 16.[50] In Alma-Ata, the leaders of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, and Russia jointly declared the abolition of the USSR on December 21, 1991.[51]

Speaking in the Council of Republics on December 24, A'limjanov asserted, however, that the USSR would only cease to exist once the CIS agreement was ratified by the parliaments of its founding members. In the meantime, the USSR Supreme Soviet was to prepare two documents: one concerning the abolition of the USSR and the other on legal succession. The following day, Gorbachev announced his resignation. On December 26, 1991, the Council of Republics declared the USSR abolished, though it did not adopt a separate act regarding legal succession. This declaration proposed establishing an interparliamentary body of

the CIS "in order to preserve a single legal, economic, humanitarian, and environmental space."[52]

Performance and failures

The USSR Congress of People's Deputies and the reformed Supreme Soviet were frequently considered inefficient. Major issues included the initial absence of procedural regulations and factions as well as the attempts to combine the functions of a parliament and a state socialist assembly. It was, however, the unclear division of competence between the central bodies and the "war of laws" between the union and republics that became the primary factors in the failure of the Soviet assemblies as legislatures.

The Supreme Soviet achieved its first results as a parliamentary body already in 1989. For the first time in Soviet history, it scrutinized candidates for government offices, including the cabinet, and rejected some of them. It also managed to develop the first economic plan and state budget through parliamentary means.[53] Over its first two sessions, the Supreme Soviet adopted laws on social policy, increasing the minimum pensions and the duration of maternal leave, as well as on rent and collective labor conflicts.[54] Closing its fifth session in July 1991, Luk'ianov provided an overview of its output. The reformed Supreme Soviet adopted 131 laws and over 620 resolutions and appeals, discussed some 300 issues, and ratified 64 international agreements (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1991n, 318). Defending the Supreme Soviet after the August Coup, Roi Aleksandrovich Medvedev, a member of the Supreme Soviet and its Committee on Legislation and Public Order, argued that among the most important laws it adopted were the Law on Press and Other Mass Media, which established the freedom of press and eliminated censorship, the Law on Civic Associations, which laid the foundation for the multiparty system, and the Law on the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations, which changed the relations between religion and the state (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1991r, 86).

However, the widespread expectation that the new bodies would quickly resolve the USSR's numerous problems was shattered. Already in October 1989, an opinion poll conducted in Russia, Belarus, Georgia, Lithuania, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan showed that only 31 percent of the respondents believed that deputies could solve the main problems of the USSR. People were also poorly informed about the practical work of deputies. One of the main points of criticism was that the Supreme Soviet failed to reform the economy, delaying even Ryzhkov's moderate measures. Another concern was that the laws adopted by the Supreme Soviet were not implemented. The quality of legislation was also subject to criticism.[55] As summarized by Burlatskii, the Supreme Soviet had dealt very little with the practical issues of popular concern, such as provisions, public order, national conflicts, and so on. The deputies were also overly focused on abstract concepts and general issues, which made the parliament resemble a Party Congress. Even the laws on property and land exhibited a conceptual rather than concrete character (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1991b, 77).

The Supreme Soviet was frequently called a "talking shop." The broadcasts of the Congresses and sessions of the Supreme Soviet contributed to their performance as political rallies. Some deputies were accused of leaving meetings after delivering speeches intended for voters rather than fellow deputies. To reduce the Supreme Soviet's resemblance to a rally, its Presidium proposed fewer plenaries and the focus on the non-televised work in the commissions and committees.[56]

The unclear rules of procedure and their violation led to many problems at the First Congress. Gorbachev chaired the first meeting, even though he was not the head of the Electoral Commission. He was elected Chairman of the Supreme Soviet before presenting his program. Some speakers went to the podium without proper order. To secure speaking time, deputies had to queue up (Figure 8.3). Some speakers were interrupted by applause and noise; the Presidium cut speakers off when their allotted time was supposedly up; chairs also made comments. Some argued that this resulted from a lack of "culture" and legal knowledge, while others pointed to malicious intent. The procedure allowed the minority to speak but not to present alternative projects. The "Decree on Power" and other concrete suggestions were never voted upon. The convoluted and obscure procedure allowed the party apparatus to control the Supreme Soviet's election. The nomination of candidates for the



Figure 8.3 Deputies queueing to the podium at the First USSR Congress of People's Deputies. Moscow, [May 26], 1989. Left to right, Presidium: M. S. Gorbachev, V. I. Vorotnikov, A. I. Luk'ianov, Rafiq Nishonov (sixth); queue: A. D. Sakharov (fourth). GTsMSIR, 43900/2.

Supreme Soviet was not transparent, and there were not enough booths to ensure a secret ballot. At the Third Congress, the decision on the presidency was made without proper deliberation.[57] Some drafts were submitted to the plenary without undergoing discussion in the committees and commissions.[58]

The absence of proper organization into factions resulted in an unsystematic articulation of grievances and suggestions. Proponents of factions considered them "normal" for a parliament, while their opponents asserted that the Supreme Soviet had not yet developed into one and required unity. The issue of factions was closely linked to the ambiguous status of the CPSU. Given that most deputies were Communists, the party could theoretically perform as a majority. However, with party members aligning themselves with multiple groups, the Supreme Soviet lacked a clear majority in support of the cabinet.[59] One deputy remarked that there was only an opposition (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1990l, 150).

The attempts to combine the features of idealized soviets with those of a legislature led to further issues. The duration of sessions increased, but some deputies maintained other jobs, prompting many to conclude that the USSR did not have a professional parliament. Some also argued that this led to problems with achieving a quorum. Some deputies voiced frustration regarding their inability to effect change. As of November 1989, only 37 percent of the USSR Supreme Soviet members wished to continue their work there. Many resigned in late 1990 (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1989d, 180–1, 1990b, 142, 1990f, 28, 180; Betaneli and et al. 1990, 44; III (vneocherednoi) S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1990b, 3:114; Editorial 1990c, 37; IV S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1991c, 3:327–47, 349). The lack of legal competence among the deputies was also a concern for some. Others contended that not every deputy needed to be a jurist to work in the parliament and that deputies could also acquire experience and specialized knowledge in, for instance, the nascent deputy clubs.[60]

Further issues concerned the political representation of social categories. In contrast to her pre-perestroika speeches, Zoia Pavlovna Pukhova, who headed the Committee of Soviet Women, argued that women still lacked equal opportunity in decision-making, despite being, on average, more educated than men. She proposed the introduction of formal gender quotas (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1989j, 222–3). Denouncing the exclusion of women from government while speaking at the Fifth Congress, Marina Nikolaevna Rakhmanova, a pediatrician, suggested creating "a separate women's chamber, a women's co-parliament" of five to seven professionals (V (vneocherednoi) S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1991b, 12–13).

Most of the debates on political representation focused on national and regional matters. The lack of differentiation between the Chamber of Nationalities and the Chamber of the Union persisted, and they continued joint sessions (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1989l, 26, 31–2, 1990c, 147). The Lithuanian writer Vincas Ramutis (Romas) Gudaitis[61] denounced such a fictitious division. Articulating the position of the Baltic deputies, he argued that in the Council of Nationalities, there should be voting by republic and consensus between republican deputations in the context of the USSR's transformation from a unitary state into a "commonwealth of independent states" (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1989l, 31–2). Primakov objected the

principle of consensus since this would turn the USSR into a confederation (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1989m, 179). After the introduction of voting by delegation in the Council of Republics in the fall of 1991, some deputies informally shared their concern that this might lead to a situation where Russia and Belarus would be in the minority against the Central Asian republics.[62]

The debates in the USSR assemblies were predominantly conducted in Russian, although other languages were occasionally used, and Nishonov affirmed that deputies were welcome to speak in their native language (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1989a, 45–6). The transformation of the USSR into a *de facto* confederation after the August Coup raised the issue of using other languages. In October 1991, the Council of Republics explicitly granted the representatives of union republics and autonomous units the right to speak in their native languages.[63]

Grievances and demands were frequently formulated in national terms. Whereas Baltic deputies supported economic autonomy and, eventually, independence, other deputies, especially those from Central Asia, argued that strengthening the center could help resolve specific problems. The divergence of opinions between Baltic and Central Asian deputies led to direct confrontations at the Second Congress. Roza Bazarowa,[64] the Chairwoman of the Turkmen Supreme Soviet Presidium, opposed the Baltic deputies during the discussion of the Committee of Constitutional Oversight, asserting that disjointed legislation in republics would lead to anarchy and collapse. Mikhail Lazarevich Bronshtein, an economist from Estonia, claimed that the Soviet economy could not compensate for the high birth rate in Uzbekistan. Ra'no Ubaydullaeva,[65] an economist from Uzbekistan, contended that the situation where a resource-rich republic was on the brink of poverty should not be blamed on the Uzbek people, as it emerged due to the planned economy during the era of stagnation (II S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1989d, 2:49–51, 275, 323–4, 1989b, 4:19). Some deputies complained that they did not have the opportunity to express collective grievances or that they were not being listened to (II S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1989e, 6:520; Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1989a, 63). Besides, the union republics and autonomous units did not represent all nationalities. Besides, Nishonov and others argued that representatives of non-titular nationalities in the Baltic republics wanted to remain in the USSR (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1990a, 40, 1990m, 20, 1991g, 222–3).

The Soviet assemblies adopted several symbolic acts pertaining to nationalities. The USSR Supreme Soviet recognized the forced resettlements under Iosif Vissarionovich Stalin as "illegal and criminal" on November 14, 1989 (Shakhrai et al. 2011, 1:382). Following the work of the *ad hoc* commissions, the Second Congress condemned the use of violence by officials in Tbilisi in April 1989 and denounced the secret agreements with Germany in 1939, although it refrained from recognizing the subsequent annexations as illegal (II S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1989b, 4:610–14).

Although the USSR Supreme Soviet devoted much attention to nationalities issues and, for instance, adopted laws on economic autonomy and secession, it failed to resolve interethnic conflicts. Elmira Mikayıl qızı Qafarova,[66] the Chairwoman of the Azerbaijani Supreme Soviet, acknowledged at the Fourth Congress

that she had hoped that Gorbachev would resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict, but he delegated it to the USSR Supreme Soviet. Failing to see a viable solution in that approach, Qafarova argued that the problem had to be resolved by the people of Azerbaijan (IV S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1991a, 1:460). The Supreme Soviet also fell short in resolving the Georgian–Ossetian conflict as well as the Transnistrian and Gagauz conflicts in Moldova (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1991l, 4, 1991p, 227, 229–30).

Religion was also addressed in the Soviet assemblies. Some of the interethnic conflicts had a religious dimension. The Nagorno-Karabakh deputy Henrik Poghosyan[67] pointed to the loss of Armenian Christian churches in the Nakhchivan ASSR of the Azerbaijan SSR as an example of religious institutions of one confession being mismanaged by the representatives of another. The potential dissolution of the USSR also had a religious dimension. Issues such as the future location of the Samarkand Kufic Quran (Uthman Quran) or the religious rights of minorities in the Baltic states were raised in the Supreme Soviet (II S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1989a, 3:559–61; Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1989c, 50–2, 1989j, 91, 1990b, 215, 271; Tregub 1991, 20–1). During the debates on the draft law on religion, Orthodox Christian and Muslim deputies and invited speakers supported a broader desecularization. Muhammad Sodiq Muhammad Yusuf[68] (Figure 8.4),



Figure 8.4 Deputies of the Third (Extraordinary) USSR Congress of People's Deputies Muhammad Sodiq Muhammad Yusuf (left), Chairman of the Spiritual Board of the Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, and Mamatg'ozi Sherg'aziyev, Chairman of the Collective Farm "Leningrad" of the Fergana Region of Uzbekistan, talking during a break between sessions. Moscow, March 13, 1990. RGAKFD, 0-355521.

the Chairman of the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, argued that his voters of different faiths demanded that religion be taught in schools (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1990g, 252, 254).

Deputy groups corresponded to occupational, class, and other collective interests, including those of the youth (II S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1989b, 4:406–7, 1989c, 5:131). Even though the class was at the center of Soviet ideology, the interests of the workers were addressed much less frequently than those of nationalities and regions. Rumiantsev noted that many workers were disappointed with the results of the First Congress and did not believe that talking could remedy the economic crisis. The failure of the Soviet legislature, therefore, contributed to the mining strikes of 1989. In October 1989, trade union activists criticized the Supreme Soviet for its inefficiency during a rally in Moscow. In March 1991, the Inter-Regional Group supported the striking miners in the Kuznetsk Basin. The miners demanded, *inter alia*, Gorbachev's resignation and the dissolution of the USSR Congress and the Supreme Soviet. The same month, the USSR Supreme Soviet banned all strikes. The miners continued to protest, while their support of El'tsin and advocacy for republican autonomy contributed to the crisis of the central institutions.[69]

Some deputies and commentators denounced the excessive focus on political representation and particularistic interests. Burlatskii maintained that the Supreme Soviet members were parliamentarians, and hence, representatives of any region and occupation needed to feel responsible for the whole country. Deputies and officials also insisted that the Congress and the Supreme Soviet had to facilitate a multinational or all-national consensus within the USSR. The larger Soviet community was addressed in the context of the referendum on the USSR's future. Questioning its necessity, Volodymyr Kyrylovych Cherniak,[70] a Ukrainian economist, called for rising above party and group interests and resolving all issues in a "normal, parliamentary, civilized, non-violent way" to save the USSR from collapse.[71]

The unclear relations between different government bodies contributed to the inefficiency of the new system. Some deputies argued that the Congress of People's Deputies and the introduction of the presidency undermined the Supreme Soviet as a professional parliament. Its relations with the cabinet also proved to be contentious. Some argued that parliament should not assume a cabinet's functions and deal with day-to-day matters like pricing. It also should not be held responsible for the cabinet's failures. Others, however, criticized the Ministry of Finance for making a decision on prices without the knowledge of the Supreme Soviet.[72] Anatolii Aleksandrovich Sobchak, a deputy from Leningrad, claimed that the Supreme Soviet could not control the spendings of the cabinet. When defending the introduction of the presidency in March 1990, S. S. Alekseev asserted that the government had become paralyzed due to the predominance of collegial bodies and the intrusion of the Supreme Soviet into executive and judicial matters (III (vneocherednoi) S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1990a, 1:30–3, 1990b, 3:123).

The indeterminate status of the CPSU contributed to the government crisis. The tasks that were previously handled within the Central Committee were to be transferred to the Supreme Soviet. Numerous members of the former's apparatus moved

to the latter's apparatus even before the First Congress took place.[73] Some argued that decisions made within the party continued to matter, which, for instance, led Gorbachev to abandon the "500 Days Program" of Grigorii Alekseevich Iavlinskii and other economists. Disagreements arose regarding whether Gorbachev should remain a part of the party leadership.[74] Shortly before the August Coup, the independent press argued that party structures still had power in regional governments, the Army, the KGB, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs.[75]

There was no agreement among the CPSU leaders on whether the party should remain of the "vanguard" type or turn into a parliamentary party. Jānis Vagris,[76] who led the Communist Party of Latvia, claimed that since the multiparty system was a reality in Latvia, the party should learn the foundations of parliamentarism and be ready for compromisers. Others argued that it had to avoid parliamentary battles and compromises (Kommunisticheskaia partiia Sovetskogo Soiuza 1990a, 66, 129–30, 1990b, 7, 51, 101, 105). Gorbachev was evasive: on the one hand, the party had to defend its vanguard status through elections; on the other, it was not responsible for decisions it did not make. Boris Veniaminovich Gidaspov contended that the Leningrad regional party organization, which he headed, was ready to take responsibility in the region together with the soviets, and that the party could not be limited to "parliamentary activities" (Kommunisticheskaia partiia Sovetskogo Soiuza 1991b, 1:91, 318–19). A poll among some 85 percent of deputies at the Twenty-Eight CPSU Congress showed that 67 percent wanted the CPSU to maintain its vanguard character.[77] After the Congress, the Central Committee Plenum debated a new CPSU program, with many lamenting the party's removal from political life. Party organizations across the USSR criticized Gorbachev (Pikhoia 2000, 575–6).

The lack of a proper division of competence between soviets of different levels contributed to what S. S. Alekseev described as "tens of thousands of parliaments" striving for omnipotence. He argued that while the soviet system was part of the country's heritage, the USSR needed a division between state and local self-government bodies, with the supreme soviets of the USSR and the republics remaining the government (IV S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1991a, 1:231). It was, however, the "war of laws" between central and republican bodies that proved to be especially detrimental to the Soviet system. The conflicts between the USSR and the RSFSR governments over banking, television, and state property in general contributed to a legislative crisis in the fall of 1990.[78] In a resolution adopted on November 23, the USSR Supreme Soviet decried the lack of coordination between the USSR and republican supreme soviets, as well as other government bodies, and the ever-increasing adoption of conflicting legal acts. It acknowledged that laws and presidential decrees were either not being implemented or were not yielding the intended results. The USSR Supreme Soviet proposed dividing the competence between the union and the republics through bilateral and multilateral agreements before the new union treaty was developed. It also advocated for the establishment of permanent interparliamentary relations between the USSR and the union republics (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1991c, 95–7).

The non-recognistion of the declarations of sovereignty at the Fourth Congress further escalated tensions (IV S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1991d, 4:376–8).

The USSR institutions continued to lose credibility, with the "more capable part" of the USSR deputies moving to republican bodies.[79] Due to its inaction during the August Coup, the USSR Supreme Soviet lost what little credibility remained, while the RSFSR Supreme Soviet gained significant popularity ("Vosem' Dnei Avgusta: Khronika Sobytii" 1991, 7, 13, 15; Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1991q, 3–4). The tensions did not subside with the establishment of the transitional system. In late November 1991, the RSFSR parliament opposed the USSR Supreme Soviet's budget for the last three months of the year.[80]

Keeping some of the pre-reform functions, such as maintain direct contact with voters, led to further challenges for the Soviet assemblies. According to Luk'ianov, by the end of its fifth session, the Supreme Soviet had received over 1.5 million letters and telegrams from citizens and collectives. Some 100,000 people came to the reception office in person. Most appeals pertained to social security in the context of the transition to a market economy. One deputy proposed dedicating a specific day for interacting with voters, but Gorbachev rejected this idea due to the workload in the Supreme Soviet and its committees and commissions. There were suggestions to assign those who were not part of committees and commissions to receive citizens, to abolish the anachronistic imperative mandate, and to disregard appeals unrelated to all-union matters. The majority resolved, however, that communication with voters should continue (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1989b, 205, 1989e, 16, 1989i, 8, 11, 14, 1990b, 154, 1990h, 20, 27–8, 1991n, 318, 320).

The brief period of Soviet parliamentarism did not feature an articulate lobby system. When asked about lobby groups, deputies mentioned several, including the agrarian and cooperator lobby; the lobby of the military-industrial complex in the committees; trade unions; the party apparatus, environmental activists; and enterprise directors (Kroshin 1990, 4). A commentator from *Moskovskie novosti* argued that lobbyism, including that of the military-industrial complex, existed within the party and the broader bureaucratic system prior to the reforms. In the new conditions, the adoption of the state budget was especially important, with the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the KGB all lobbying for increased funding. The KGB succeeded in swiftly having its law adopted by the Supreme Soviet. The agrarian lobby opposed private property and emerged victorious. A registered proto-lobbyist organization, the Foundation for Economic Reform of Russia under Iurii Emmanuilovich Andreev, a Supreme Soviet deputy, engaged in lobbyism in bureaucratic institutions and not in the parliament.[81]

The internal structure of the Supreme Soviet, with its numerous commissions and committees, perpetuated the bureaucratic logic of the Soviet regime (de Stefano 2020). Luk'ianov admitted that coordinating the many commissions and committees was challenging, resulting in their inadequate operation (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1991a, 140). As he later reported, the commissions and committees held over 1,800 meetings and discussed some 3,000 issues by the end of the fifth session (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1991n, 318). Dzasohty Sergejy fyrt Alyksandr,[82] a diplomat and CPSU functionary, who chaired the Committee for International Affairs, noted the increased workload as the Supreme Soviet began to play a role in state affairs. His committee discussed new USSR ambassadors, heard reports from the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, scrutinized legislation prior to plenaries, and engaged in international consultations on topics such as nuclear disarmament (Dzasokhov 2004, 29–30, 99, 130–1, 153–4, 161–3).

Indeed, the international functions of the Supreme Soviet gained a new meaning in the context of the "new thinking." After the government reform, the Supreme Soviet continued to issue appeals on matters of global peace and disarmament, including one on October 9, 1990, in connection with the ratification of the Soviet–American Threshold Test Ban Treaty. The Supreme Soviet's call for the immediate withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait on February 19, 1991, became an indicator that the Cold War was ending (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1990o, 95–6, 1991c, 35–6, 1991d, 135–6, 1991o, 8, 1991p, 47–8).

Gorbachev maintained that interparliamentary contacts needed to move away from the "formalism and excursion-like character of the exchanges" (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1989g, 37, 39). The relations with the US Congress were especially close, involving multiple exchanges (Figure 8.5). The Library of Congress and the Congressional Research Service implemented several programs of technical assistance for the parliaments of the USSR and Eastern Europe to facilitate the development of more effective legislatures (Kozlov 1991, 2, 4–5, 10).

The ending Cold War raised challenging topics. Foreign delegations inquired about the future of Soviet nuclear arms in the Committee on Defense. The Japanese Diet delegation raised the issue of the Kuril Islands dispute. The USSR Supreme Soviet delegation participated in the work of the Council of Europe Parliamentary



Figure 8.5 Delegation of the USSR Supreme Soviet to the US Congress, 1990. Left to right, front row: Umtul Orozova, James Danforth Quayle, F. M. Burlatskii (head of the delegation), A. M. Ridiger (Metropolitan Alexy), Timofei Moşneaga, D. A. Granin, A. M. Iakovlev; second row: Dennis DeConcini, G. A. Arbatov. RGAKFD, F. III-43172.

Assembly, becoming part of the plans to establish a new European parliamentary forum. The USSR participated in the establishment of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE). Interparliamentary exchanges made practical sense given the dire economic situation of the USSR. The Supreme Soviet delegation to the European Parliament, for instance, was supposed to help the USSR secure economic assistance and eventually join the European integration in some spheres.[83]

The increased importance of interparliamentary exchanges and the dwindling financial resources sparked debates. Between the First and Second USSR Congresses, more than 20 delegations and groups of deputies traveled abroad on official missions. Nishonov, however, argued that there was no proper order in place, with some deputies traveling during the session of the Supreme Soviet, which he considered abnormal. The Second Congress introduced regulations for the exchanges. The Supreme Soviet Presidium was to adopt annual cooperation plans based on the draft prepared by the Committee for International Affairs. The Supreme Soviet or its Presidium were to select the members of the official parliamentary delegations, and these delegations were to report on their visits (II S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1989b, 4:546, 1989d, 2:466–7). The regulations did not resolve all of the issues. Some wondered why individual deputies were often included in parliamentary delegations (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1990h, 33–4). While the Presidium resolved to increase the number of trips for committees and commissions to learn from foreign experience in 1991, the lack of currency resources led to scaling back the plans (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1991i, 163).

Reception and debates on parliamentarism

Although the reforms were intended to improve vernacular ("socialist") institutions, the Soviet assemblies were discussed as developing or deficient versions of the supposed liberal democratic template due to the universalist view of parliamentarism held by many deputies and commentators. Others, however, did not support the Western-centric evaluations of Soviet institutions. Some rejected parliamentarism altogether. Ultimately, it was not conceptual but rather institutional developments that pushed parliaments into the background. Although parliaments remained, presidential systems proliferated across the union republics.

In 1985–1986, the officially sanctioned Soviet discourse continued to stress the supremacy of socialist representative bodies over "bourgeois parliaments."[84] In 1987, some authors continued in the same vein.[85] Others began to argue, following the CPSU Central Committee Plenum in January 1987, that the Soviet system needed improvements, including alternative candidates. Some jurists acknowledged the benefits of bourgeois parliamentarism, such as the separation of powers and the system of checks and balances, the work in the committees, proper procedures for expressing different opinions, and constitutional oversight. At the same time, they amplified the official notion that the reform sought not to return to parliamentarism, but rather to fully implement Lenin's idea of combining its best features with those of direct democracy.[86] Some even suggested that the separation

of powers began under Lenin.[87] The jurist Boris Qurashvili,[88] who worked in the KGB, equated the VTsIK to a parliament, asserting that the socialist system utilized everything valuable from humanity's experience. Implying the notion of convergence between different political systems, he anticipated that Soviet parliamentarism would contribute to both soviets and parliamentarism (Kurashvili 1988, 28–9).

Indeed, praising the soviets in 1917, Lenin mentioned that they allowed "to combine the benefits of parliamentarism with the benefits of direct democracy." He specified, however, that this meant combining "the legislative function and the execution of laws," thereby explicitly rejecting the separation of powers. In the same text, Lenin regarded the soviets as much more advanced than "bourgeois parliamentarism" (Lenin 1969, 304–5).

The praise of Western institutions within the context of Soviet ideology led to confusion. A reader of *Argumenty i fakty* wondered why the soviets, presented as superior to "bourgeois" parliaments and municipal bodies, suddenly turned out to be inefficient.[89] There was explicit opposition to the reform in the Soviet press. On March 13, 1988, *Sovetskaia Rossiia* ("Soviet Russia") published a letter by Andreeva in which she denounced "extra-socialist pluralism," rejected the calls for power-sharing based on a "parliamentary regime," and defended the primacy of the party (Sakwa 1999, 432). Another reader of *Argumenty i fakty* questioned the anticipated release of the Supreme Soviet deputies from work for three to four months, arguing that this could separate them from their working collectives, cause them to lose their skills, and create a new group of bureaucracy.[90]

The participants of the "informal" debates were also critical. The Ukrainian Helsinki Union, for instance, declared in July 1988 that, while it supported the reform as democratic, it would continue campaigning for the complete abolition of antidemocratic and centralist norms. It argued that republican parliaments would handle all day-to-day legislation, while the federal legislature could be a unicameral body with equal representation of the union republics (Tkachuk 2009, 19).

Émigré authors expressed cautious optimism about the reforms in the USSR in 1987–1988. Vadim Vladimirovich Belotserkovskii deemed democratization possible. He proposed starting it with the CPSU Central Committee by creating a "scientific-technical" and "engineer-worker" base in it. Further steps would involve introducing economic self-government, releasing political prisoners, reforming the KGB, detaching the party from the state and democratizing it, freeing trade unions from state and party control, and eventually introducing a multiparty system. Belotserkovskii also envisioned freedom of the press, the alignment of the legal system with international law, and increased autonomy for the republics, which were expected to become independent in the future (Belotserkovskii 1987, 34, 37–40, 43–4). The Ukrainian dissident and émigré Volodymyr Dmytrovych Malynkovych[91] also considered the immediate introduction of a multiparty system unrealistic despite viewing multiparty parliamentary democracy as the best form of democracy. He proposed beginning with contested elections to the soviets and ensuring their independence from the party (Malinkovich 1987, 5–8).

The 1989 election and the convocation of the new Soviet assemblies led to further debates. Sobchak, Starovoitova, and others within and outside the new bodies

denounced the direct representation of "civic organizations," especially the CPSU. Within the new Supreme Soviet, the majority favored its abolition (II S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1989d, 2:453; Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1989k, 17–18, 21, 25, 27–8, 37). Some, however, did not entirely reject such political representation. Orlovskii (1989, 46–8) suggested that it could be implemented in a separate chamber. Valentina Ivanovna Matvienko, nominated to the Congress from the Committee of Soviet Women, agreed that direct representation of "civic organizations" was undemocratic but insisted on quotas for women (II S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1989a, 3:401).

The First Congress of People's Deputies garnered a mixed reception. Jokes circulated about the procedural problems and the adoption of the party's premade decisions (Mel'nichenko 2014, 313, 491). Participants of a political rally in Moscow expressed dissatisfaction over El'tsin not being elected to the Supreme Soviet and denounced the Congress as being one "of *nomenklatura*" (Figure 8.6). A poll conducted by the All-Union Center for the Study of Public Opinion in June 1989 revealed that only some 47 percent of respondents agreed that it laid the foundation for positive developments. Some 53 percent approved of the Supreme Soviet's composition.[92] Valeri Chalidze,[93] a human rights activist and émigré author, defended the Congress, arguing that the radical minority had a chance to speak and expressing hope that an organized opposition would form in the Soviet parliament.



Figure 8.6 Political rally. Moscow, May 28, 1989. Placards, left to right: "But is it a life when one is in chains? But is it a choice if one is constrained? V. Vysotskii." "El'tsin was elected by the people!" "Vote of no confidence to the Congress of *nomenklatura*!" "We demand an end to repressions against Greek Catholics in Ukraine!" GTsMSIR, 44616/42.

He dismissed the argument that the Supreme Soviet had to consist exclusively of intelligentsia and specialists (Chalidze 1989a, 209–10, 212). The journalist Iurii Vasil'evich Feofanov argued that the Congress, along with the inclusion of the populace into its activities through live broadcasts, letters, and rallies, was a key moment in Soviet nation-making, with the Soviet person transforming into a Soviet citizen.[94]

The economist Ed A. Hewett described the First Congress as the source of a "rudimentary, but quite real, degree of public accountability," which was most evident in economic affairs (Hewett 1989, 47–9). *Die Zeit* recognized that both the Congress and the Supreme Soviet were, in principle, independent from the CPSU Central Committee.[95] *Der Spiegel* celebrated the "more or less freely elected" Supreme Soviet as the "first parliament in the history of the Soviet Union" and interpreted it as a popular counterweight to the anti-reform party *nomenklatura*.[96] Richard C. Longworth of the *Chicago Tribune* argued that the Supreme Soviet was no longer a "rubber stamp" but noted the absence of organized opposition, calling the Inter-Regional Group a glimmer of one.[97] The US historian Richard Pipes, however, contended that the parliamentary groups at the Congress functioned as parties (Paips 1990, 86).

Commentators denounced the overall instability of the constitutional system, pointing to the ease of amending the Constitution (Chalidze 1989b, 25; Bakhtamov 1990, 30; Danilenko 1991, 7). The multitude of government bodies and the indeterminate nature of the system were also widely criticized. Deputies and commentators questioned the simultaneous existence of the Congress and the Supreme Soviet. The Congresses were costly, and most deputies had no opportunity to speak. Some opposed the rotation of the Supreme Soviet as well as the office of the Chairman.[98] Rafael' Borisovich Shapiro, an émigré journalist, was also critical of the new institutions but argued that while the General Secretary could be easily deposed, only the Congress could depose the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, thus protecting the reformer Gorbachev from the conservatives within the party leadership (Bakhtamov 1989b, 12, 14, 16–17).

Some argued that the introduction of the presidency diminished the roles of the Supreme Soviet and the cabinet, and that it established an authoritarian system.[99] N. I. Richmond, a US political scientist, criticized the hasty establishment of the presidency. He argued that without parliamentary supremacy or meaningful checks on the presidency, the Supreme Soviet became "an empty shell of a national legislature." Nonetheless, he remained optimistic about turning it into a powerful legislature by switching to a direct election system, promoting a less fractured party system, and strengthening the Supreme Soviet vis-a-vis the executive branch (Richmond 1991, 202, 211, 214).

The official notion of a strong president and a strong parliament was called into question. Deputies doubted the need for the Federation Council when the Council of Nationalities already existed. Others proposed making the Federation Council the upper chamber, possibly retaining the Council of Nationalities. The coexistence of the Council of Ministers and the Presidential Council also raised questions, as did the retention of the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet and the

Presidium after the introduction of the presidency (III (vneocherednoi) S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1990a, 1:76, 88, 111, 1990b, 3:112, 272; Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1990r, 72, 110).

Despite the reformers' intention not to establish a parliament, the new Soviet assemblies were widely perceived as such. However, debates arose regarding which of the two bodies was the parliament. Some deputies interpreted the Supreme Soviet as the "Soviet parliament." Burlatskii contended that the Congress of People's Deputies was the parliament, while the Supreme Soviet was its "executive working part" (I S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1989a, 1:124, 146, 153, 262, 298). Writing in *Literaturnaia gazeta*, Burlatskii, however, argued that Soviet parliamentarism manifested itself in both the Supreme Soviet and the Congress, each having parliamentary functions.[100] The jurist Avgust Alekseevich Mishin asserted that the Supreme Soviet was not a parliament but rather a committee of the Congress due to its lack of legislative sovereignty within the system and its indirect election.[101]

In August 1989, Gorbachev still insisted that the reform was based on Lenin's idea of combining two systems. Nevertheless, he stated that the Supreme Soviet was developing into a potent "Soviet parliament" (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1989h, 51–2). Luk'ianov later attempted to defend his original vision.

> I think that when the Supreme Soviet is called a parliament, it is not very accurate. We have the highest authority of the soviet type. And if we want to remain a parliament or the highest body of power of the soviet type, then there must be workers, collective farmers, heads of enterprises in it. […] Until now, our soviets have been strong precisely because they represented the grassroots, toiling production collectives, with this, I absolutely agree. Those who now propose to liquidate the soviet system are playing with fire.
>
> (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1991a, 146)

However, he conceded that in practice, there was a "soviet-parliamentary hybrid," arguing that the choice between a "normal" municipal and parliamentary system and the soviets had to be made (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1991a, 150).

Among the "informals," the slogan of transitioning to a parliamentary democracy prevailed. The Leningrad Popular Front, for instance, urged all democratic forces to unite for faster and deeper perestroika on the way to a "genuinely democratic parliamentary state" (Narodnyi front Leningrada 1989, 40). It organized political rallies under the slogans of a multiparty system (Preskovskii 1989, 44–5). Some of the new political parties demanded an immediate transition. The Democratic Union boycotted Soviet elections, seeking to unite the independent opposition around the slogan of a constituent assembly (Levicheva and Neliubin 1990, 150–1; Ansberg and Margolis 2009, 704). The Radical Association for Peace and Freedom deemed the reform of the Soviet system impossible and called for establishing a transitional government to organize a free parliamentary election, legalize all parties, and dissolve the CPSU (Levicheva and Neliubin 1990, 156–7).

Most of the new political parties and associations, however, advocated for parliamentary methods of struggle, with some listing parliamentarism among their

core principles. Parliamentarism was also viewed as an important element of the political sovereignty of republics.[102] In several union and autonomous republics, the so-called "civic parliaments" were introduced as "informal" forums operating parallel to the official assemblies. The National Congress in Georgia, one such body, was lauded as a school for parliamentary activities. The Estonian Supreme Soviet, elected in March 1990, recognized the Congress of Estonia, which was elected by the citizens of pre-occupation Estonia and the descendants (Gudava 1990, 22–3; Vasil'eva 1990, 27; Editorial 1990b, 40).

For the proponents of a universalist approach to state institutions, the Western experience was the norm and the Soviet regime an aberration. Zinovii Mikhailovich Chernilovskii and other jurists called parliamentarism a product of the European civilization and a universal human value. Chernilovskii provided a normative definition of parliament, interpreting it as a forum for the public collision of opinions, group interests, and suggestions and their reconciliation through law. Describing parliamentarism, he stressed the separation of powers and the accountability of the cabinet as its necessary elements. Similar to the late imperial Russian scholars, he cited Georg Jellinek and Léon Duguit. While Chernilovskii mentioned the advancements of "bourgeois parliamentarism" over the preceding 30–40 years, implying that its earlier criticism in the USSR was justified, other authors spoke of centuries of democratic experience in the West, starting with Classical Greece.[103]

The universalist approach involved the idea of learning from foreign models, such as the parliaments of the USA, Canada, the UK, France, Austria, Switzerland, Sweden, Finland, Portugal, Japan, and the European Parliament (Soros 1991, 6). Within the Supreme Soviet, the idea of learning was mentioned even before the reform (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1988a, 274–5). Afterward, Burlatskii argued that the Soviet parliament was taking its first steps and, therefore, needed to consider foreign experience. He advocated a simple import of the political system of the "contemporary civilization": a popularly elected parliament, a popularly elected president, an independent judiciary, and a declaration of human rights (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1989a, 145; 1990a, 159–60). Deputies drew attention to foreign experiences related to parliamentary procedure and ethics, consultants for deputies, committees, libraries and information services, and so on.[104] Rumiantsev suggested relying on the experiences in democratization in other socialist countries, especially Hungary (Rumiantsev 1988, 53–4; Sokolov 1989, 13). A delegation of the Hungarian State Assembly, which visited the USSR Supreme Soviet in June 1991, was celebrated as an opportunity for mutual learning (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1991k, 239). Soviet commentators referred to the developments in the PRC. For some, the Tiananmen Square massacre served as a cautionary tale.[105] The even more violent collapse of Yugoslavia was used by some deputies to defend the signing of the new union treaty (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1991n, 166, 268).

The European Economic Community and the European Parliament were seen by many as a potential template for the future union in place of the USSR.[106] Sobchak anticipated that the CIS would have something akin to the European Parliament.[107] Similar plans were put forward in connection with the rapid changes

in other socialist states. In 1988, Iulii Aleksandrovich Kvitsinskii, the Soviet Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Germany, proposed forming a parliament of the Comecon to discuss socialist integration and issue recommendations for the members of the Comecon and the Warsaw Treaty Organization, and the agencies of these organizations (Kommunisticheskaia partiia Sovetskogo Soiuza 1988c, 2:92).

There were, however, calls to borrow selectively (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1989m, 204; Stepanov 1990, 16). As one participant of the Central Committee Plenum in March 1990 put it, socialism did not simply borrow foreign ideas but found its own solutions. Presidential power and parliamentarism hence needed to rely on vernacular forms and Soviet traditions (Kommunisticheskaia partiia Sovetskogo Soiuza 1990b, 111).

Several deputies repudiated the constant appeals to "civilized countries" and their parliaments, as this undermined the notion of Soviet society's belonging to the civilization (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1989d, 229). Vasilii Ivanovich Belov, a writer, denounced the references of the "American template" of democracy and the "syndrome of borrowing, imitation, admiration for everything foreign" (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1989g, 257–8). Ligachev criticized the restoration of capitalism and the shift to bourgeois parliamentarism in several socialist states (Kommunisticheskaia partiia Sovetskogo Soiuza 1990c, 71). Rejecting parliamentarism, Andreeva welcomed the March 17, 1991, referendum as a counterbalance to the "parliamentary and super-parliamentary games" in the interests of the nascent "criminal-bourgeois class" (Andreeva 1991, 5).

The references to the past were also numerous. The historian Kornelii Fedorovich Shatsillo interpreted the imperial State Duma as a "parliamentary experiment" ahead of the First Congress. He noted the positive aspects of its experience, such as its public sessions, oppositional voices, and its contribution to the development of legal consciousness, even after the Coup of June 1907.[108] Rumiantsev and other authors of the draft RSFSR constitution argued that it drew upon the ideas and experiences of Russian constitutionalism of the early twentieth century. The draft named one of the parliamentary chambers the State Duma.[109] Burlatskii mentioned that there were parliamentary bodies in Finland and Poland (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1990d, 85). The jurist Anatolii Ivanovich Kovler cited the assemblies of the indigenous peoples of Siberia and their recognistion in 1822 (Kovler 1991, 584). Following Luk'ianov and other authors of the reform, commentators portrayed the early Congresses of Soviets in a favorable light.[110] Ivan Iakovlevich Vrachev, a participant of the First USSR Congress of Soviets in 1922 and formerly a member of the intra-party opposition, claimed in an interview that during their early years, the All-Russian Congresses and the VTsIK were democratic. He also expressed happiness that he had lived to see the Congress of People's Deputies.[111]

The references to the past were not necessarily positive. Some compared the new Soviet assemblies to the chaotic and rally-like First and Second Duma. The use of the Soviet assemblies as a rostrum by the "informals" prompted a comparison with the Social Democrats (SDs) in the Duma.[112] Sobchak denounced

the Soviet experience altogether. In his view, the problems with the soviets were not in their apathy or subjugation but rather inherent in the system itself.

> The soviets are a pseudo-parliamentary or, to put it in a milder way, sub-parliamentary, form of legislative power. The weakness of the soviets, their professional dilettantism, the absence of a democratic culture and a mechanism of real legislation, all this was a real find for the party of a "new type," all this made it possible, under the guise of "people's power," to usurp legislative, executive, and judicial power. That is why the Communist Party, with such ease, managed to replace the organs of state administration, turning itself into a parallel state.
>
> (Sobchak 1991, 163)

Longworth was dismissive of the Soviet and Russian past. Gorbachev's rejection of formal opposition suggested to him the presence of "great cultural and historical barriers to introducing a semblance of Western-style democracy to Russia, which has never known it."[113]

The geographers Nikolai Vladimirovich Petrov and Leonid Viktorovich Smirniagin put forth a historically deterministic argument about three political subcultures in the USSR. They argued that the Western subculture developed in the Baltic republics, parts of Ukraine and Belarus as well as Leningrad, Moscow, and, to some extent, all other large cities. This subculture relied on the traditions of Western parliamentary democracy and involved trust in its institutions. The authors ascribed the Asian subculture to Central Asia, including most of Kazakhstan, the South Caucasus, and many of the autonomies within the RFSRS. They argued that there were no roots for parliamentary democracy, disregarding thereby the imperial, regional, and national assemblies of the 1900s–1920s. In their view, the Russian subculture was intermediate between the other two: the ideas of parliamentarism were not alien to it, but there was alienation from the government (N. V. Petrov and Smirniagin 1990, 9–12).

Soviet and émigré intellectuals and politicians offered multiple visions of a future state system. Sakharov submitted his draft constitution of the Union of Soviet Republics of Europe and Asia, a "voluntary union of sovereign republics," to Gorbachev in November 1989, shortly before his death. Sakharov's project included the separation of powers, with the Congress of People's Deputies of the Union remaining the sole legislature. The Congress was to consist of two chambers: the Chamber of Republics, representing the whole population, and the Chamber of Nationalities. Both chambers were to be universally elected for five years. The project also included a universally elected presidency and vice presidency (Sakharov 1996, 596–8).

Theorizing about the future state named the "Russian Union" in 1990, Aleksandr Isaevich Solzhenitsyn claimed that the people were unready for "a complex democratic life." Drawing on the late imperial projects and advocating a "democracy of small spaces," he proposed a four-level system of *zemstvo* self-government, with direct elections only at the lowest level. He acknowledged that the existing

chambers of the Supreme Soviet were "not bad at all" and could be incorporated into the bicameral All-Zemstvo Assembly. Apart from legislation, the All-Zemstvo Assembly would nominate presidential candidates for a popular vote. Solzhenitsyn considered the possibility of a consultative State or Sobor Duma in a distant future. This Duma would be convened from social strata and occupational groups, which he called estates (Solzhenitsyn 1990, 37–45), which made his project similar to the earlier corporatist designs.

Some designs rejected a republican form of government. The Orthodox Constitutional Democratic Party of Russia, formed in November 1989, sought to convene a *zemskii sobor* and approve a new Romanov Tsar. However, it aimed to first come to power through parliamentary means.[114] Some conservatives openly called for dictatorship. A reader of *Argumenty i fakty* maintained that the Supreme Soviet had to be dissolved, with a military dictatorship installed instead. He argued that common people were tired of the parliamentarians' talks, the rise of crime, empty shelves, and increasing prices; they did not want to return to the capitalist system, which would invalidate all of the people's sacrifices. He concluded that the USSR needed a Stalin.[115] In early 1991, Alksnis proposed the dissolution of all parties, including the CPSU, and the establishment of the Committee of Civic Salvation to forcibly introduce a market system. Democratic reforms were to follow later. Alksnis also insisted that the USSR needed to keep its great power status.[116]

State designs featuring a parliament, however, held absolute dominance. Although there was a shift to presidential governments in 1990–1991 in most of the union republics, the notion of the separation of powers remained important (Rumiantsev 1990, 44, 46–7; Saidov 1991, 9; Tregub 1991, 82).

Conclusion

The political reform of perestroika was rooted in Soviet mythology and idealized the times of Lenin. The stated goal of democratizing the Soviet system, rather than establishing a Western-style democracy, was rejected in the "informal" circles. However, their opposition did not impact the overall framework of the reform. The unclear division of competence within the central government and between the USSR and the union republics, frequent amendments to the Constitution and the creation of new government bodies as well as the continued existence of the CPSU as a quasi-governmental body contributed to the erosion of the new government system.

Their inability to resolve the economic, nationalities, and other crises, combined with high expectations, resulted in the rapid decline of popularity of the USSR Congress of People's Deputies and the Supreme Soviet. The task of transforming the Supreme Soviet into a functional legislature while preserving some of its pre-reform institutional features also presented significant challenges. Attempts to uphold the "non-professional" status of soviets led to issues with absenteeism and deputy competence. Maintaining a consistent connection between deputies and voters also gave rise to problems. The strain on commissions and committees grew

as well. Interparliamentary relations gained importance, but dwindling financial resources led to disputes over delegations.

In the conceptual debates within and outside Soviet assemblies, the universalist approach prevailed. Despite the fact that introducing a parliament was not the reform's objective, the Congress and the Supreme Soviet were widely interpreted as such and compared to foreign parliaments. This further increased the pressure on the new Soviet assemblies, which were viewed as deficient versions of the Western norm. The alternatives to the Soviet systems mainly included a parliament, with a new global parliamentary moment emerging in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Although the late Soviet crises contributed to the emergence of presidential regimes in most republics even before the dissolution of the USSR, parliaments, at least in their nominal form, endured in all post-Soviet states.

Notes

1 Initially, the term perestroika ("reconstruction") pertained only to the economy, but soon it became used for the whole set of reforms (Kommunisticheskaia partiia Sovetskogo Soiuza 1985, 8, 11–12).
2 "Sovereignty" of union republics was part of the Soviet Constitution, but it had no formal definition in Soviet law. At this stage, "sovereignty" was not equal to full independence (Kukushkin and Chistiakov 1987, 339).
3 *Nezavisimaia gazeta* (Moscow), September 26, 1991: 1; (Editorial 1989b; Levicheva and Neliubin 1990, 156; Sobchak 1991, 6; Tkachuk 2009, 131; Trencsényi et al. 2018, 2, Part 2:148–9).
4 *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, August 27, 1991: 2.
5 *Moskovskie novosti* (Moscow), November 19, 1989: 4.
6 *Moskovskie novosti*, special issue, June 1989: 10.
7 Russian: Andrei Andreevich Gromyko.
8 National Security Archive (Politburo Transcript, June 29, 1985), accessed June 17, 2022, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/rus/Perestroika/Politburo.html; National Security Archive (General Department of the CPSU Central Committee, "Some data on the activity of the Politburo and the Secretariat of the CPSU Central Committee in 1985," December 30, 1985), accessed June 17, 2022, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/rus/Perestroika/Glasnost.html.
9 National Security Archive (A. N. Iakovlev, "The Imperative of Political Development," December 25, 1985, 8–9), accessed June 17, 2022, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/rus/Yakovlev.html.
10 Ibid., 15–16.
11 Ibid., 15.
12 Russian: Dzhemma Ottovna Skulme.
13 National Security Archive (Transcript of the conversation between Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee A. N. Iakovlev and representatives of the Council on Foreign Relations, New York, February 3, 1987), accessed June 17, 2022, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/rus/Yakovlev.html.
14 Russian: Geidar Alievich Aliev.
15 National Security Archive (Politburo Transcript, October 15, 1987), accessed June 17, 2022, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/rus/Perestroika/Politburo.html.
16 *Literaturnaia gazeta* (Moscow), June 15, 1988: 2. Burlatskii claimed to have expressed similar ideas when he participated in the discussions of the constitution in the 1960s (Burlatskii 1990, 177; Strekalov 2018, 41).
17 *Izvestiia* (Moscow), October 1, 1988: 1; *Pravda* (Moscow), October 2, 1988: 1; (Sakwa 1999, 439–40).

18 *Novoe russkoe slovo* (New York), May 27, 1988: 1.
19 *Moskovskie novosti*, November 27, 1988: 14.
20 *Novoe russkoe slovo*, January 24, 1989: 1; (Orlovskii 1989, 47; I S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1989a, 1:41–2; Iashin 1990, 10: Vybory-90: Vorposy zadaiut izbirateli:13–14, 19). Foreign and domestic press reported on falsifications in Armenia and the unequal conditions for candidates, including the use of administrative pressure. *Moskovskie novosti*, May 14, 1989: 9; (Editorial 1989d, 45).
21 Russian: Tel'man Khorenovich Gdlian.
22 GMPIR, F. II-59300 (Election leaflet of the candidate in the election of people's deputies of the USSR B. N. El'tsin, 1989); GMPIR, F. II VS-5801/147 (Leaflets and documents of the campaign for the election of people's deputies of the USSR, Leaflet of N. V. Ivanov, 1989); GMPIR, F. II VS-5801/270 (Leaflets and documents of the campaign for the election of people's deputies of the USSR, Leaflet of M. E. Sal'e, 1989); (Gleason 1991; Kiernan and Aistrup 1991, 1051, 1061).
23 See I S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR (1989a, 1:43–6). The number of registered Christian (with an overwhelming majority of Russian Orthodox) and Muslim associations increased tremendously over the year since Gorbachev met with Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus' Pimen on the occasion of the 1000th anniversary of the "Baptism of Rus'" in April 1988 (Tregub 1991, 17–18).
24 *Novoe russkoe slovo*, May 15, 1989: 1; (I S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1989b, 3:62).
25 *Novoe russkoe slovo*, April 25, 1989: 2; *Moskovskie novosti*, May 28, 1989: 2; June 4, 1989: 9; special issue, June 1989: 1.
26 *Moskovskie novosti*, June 11, 1989: 8.
27 Russian: Rafik Nishanovich Nishanov.
28 Russian: Viktor Alekseevich Pal'm.
29 *Moskovskie novosti*, December 10, 1989: 2; (Tregub 1991, 18–21; Shakhrai et al. 2011, 1:394, 397, 558).
30 Russian: Vitautas Vitautasovich Landsbergis.
31 *Argumenty i fakty* (Moscow), September 29–October 5, 1990: 1.
32 *Argumenty i fakty*, September 1–7, 1990: 2; (Mikhailov et al. 1990, 4).
33 Russian: Arnol'd Fedorovich Riuitel'.
34 Russian: Islam Abduganievich Karimov.
35 Russian: Aiaz Niiazi ogly (Niiazovich) Mutalibov.
36 Russian: Askar Akaevich Akaev.
37 GARF, f. R-9654, op. 7, d. 856, l. 175–6, 181, 186, 188 (Draft of the USSR Constitution, March 18, 1991).
38 GARF, f. R-9654, op. 7, d. 856, l. 198–208, 210, 213 (Draft of the USSR Constitution, March 18, 1991).
39 *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, June 22, 1991: 2.
40 *Moskovskie novosti*, August 18, 1991: 8–9; June 20, 1991: 1–2; June 22, 1991: 1; June 27, 1991: 1–2; July 13, 1991: 1; August 13, 1991: 1; August 15, 1991: 1; *Novoe russkoe slovo*, June 28, 1991: 1; (Pikhoia 2000, 572–6; Shakhrai et al. 2011, 1:523–9).
41 *Izvestiia*, August 30, 1991: 1; September 3, 1991: 8; *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, August 27, 1991: 1–2; (Pikhoia 2000, 601; Dunlop 2003, 110; Shakhrai et al. 2011, 1:537; "Vosem' dnei avgusta: Khronika sobytii" 1991, 7, 13, 15).
42 Russian: Nursultan Abishevich Nazarbaev.
43 *Izvestiia*, September 7, 1991: 2; (V (vneocherednoi) S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1991c, 9–12).
44 *Izvestiia*, September 5, 1991: 2; September 6, 1991: 4; September 7, 1991: 1–2; September 20, 1991: 2.
45 Russian: Anuarbek Turlybekovich Alimzhanov.

46 *Izvestiia*, October 22, 1991: 1; October 31, 1991: 2; November 30, 1991: 2; (Shakhrai 2016, 2:628).
47 *Izvestiia*, October 21, 1991: 1; November 27, 1991: 2; *Rossiiskaia gazeta* (Moscow), November 15, 1991: 1; November 21, 1991: 1.
48 *Izvestiia*, November 26, 1991: 3.
49 *Izvestiia*, December 4, 1991: 1–2; December 5, 1991: 2.
50 *Izvestiia*, December 13, 1991: 1; December 14, 1991: 2; December 18, 1991: 1; December 20, 1991: 2.
51 Egor Gaidar Archive (Alma-Ata Declaration, December 21, 1991), accessed March 4, 2023, http://gaidar-arc.ru/databasedocuments/theme/details/2880.
52 *Izvestiia*, December 25, 1991: 2; *Novoe russkoe slovo*, December 27, 1991: 2; (Shakhrai et al. 2011, 1:601–2).
53 *Novoe russkoe slovo*, July 6, 1989: 1; *Argumenty i fakty*, July 15–21, 1989: 1; *Moskovskie novosti*, July 23, 1989: 8; (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1989k, 255).
54 *Moskovskie novosti*, December 10, 1989: 10–11.
55 *Argumenty i fakty*, October 21–27, 1989: 1, 3; *Novoe russkoe slovo*, June 1, 1990: 2; (II S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1989c, 5:446; Liubarskii 1990, 32, 35; Savel'zon 1990, 60; III (vneocherednoi) S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1990b, 3:303; IV S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1991d, 4:155, 158, 369–70, 397).
56 *Izvestiia*, May 24, 1989: 2; *Moskovskie novosti*, October 8, 1989: 12; December 10, 1989: 3; *Pravda*, December 1, 1989: 4; (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1989f, 165, 223, 1989m, 179, 1990e, 142; IV S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1991d, 4:107).
57 *Moskovskie novosti*, June 4, 1989: 8; June 11, 1989: 7, 9; (Bakhtamov 1989a, 20, 22–3; Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1989b, 14; Editorial 1989c, 4, 9, 10; Savel'zon 1990, 56–8).
58 *Moskovskie novosti*, March 17, 1991: 6.
59 *Moskovskie novosti*, August 6, 1989: 9–10; (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1989j, 185, 197, 1990j, 297–8, 1990n, 265; III (vneocherednoi) S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1990b, 3:234; Savel'zon 1990, 54).
60 *Argumenty i fakty*, July 15–21, 1989: 2; (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1989d, 231, 1990i, 201, 203).
61 Russian: Romas Vitautovich Gudaitis.
62 *Izvestiia*, October 23, 1991: 1.
63 *Izvestiia*, September 7, 1991: 2; October 23, 1991: 1.
64 Russian: Roza Atamuradovna Bazarova.
65 Russian: Rano Akhatovna Ubaidullaeva.
66 Russian: El'mira Mikail kyzy Kafarova.
67 Russian: Genrikh Andreevich Pogosian.
68 Russian: Mukhammad-Sodik Mukhammad-Iusuf.
69 *Moskovskie novosti*, October 15, 1989: 13; *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, March 28, 1991: 2; (Rumiantsev 1989, 13; Roze 1991, 22; Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1991f, 203, 1991h, 106, 1991j, 204, 1991m, 40; Clarke, Fairbrother, and Borisov 1998, 55–6).
70 Russian: Vladimir Kirillovich Cherniak.
71 *Moskovskie novosti*, June 11, 1989: 7; (II S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1989a, 3:551; Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1989b, 19, 1989j, 244, 1990r, 108, 1991e, 291).
72 *Argumenty i fakty*, no. 46, November 1990: 3; *Moskovskie novosti*, October 29, 1989: 9; (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1989m, 117, 1990a, 143–4; III (vneocherednoi) S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1990b, 3:269–70, 303).
73 *Moskovskie novosti*, June 11, 1989: 8; (Pikhoia 2000, 497).
74 *Moskovskie novosti*, March 17, 1991: 3; (I S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1989a, 1:60, 62, 70, 320).
75 *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, June 27, 1991: 2.
76 Russian: Ianis Ianovich Vagris.

77 *Argumenty i fakty*, July 21–27, 1990: 3.
78 *Moskovskie novosti*, October 29, 1989: 9; December 31, 1989: 4; *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, June 27, 1991: 2; (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1990a, 143–4, 1990l, 202, 1990p, 197, 1990q, 6, 62; Shakhrai et al. 2011, 1:471–80).
79 *Kommersant" Vlast'*, no. 6, February 4, 1991, accessed March 5, 2023, https://web.archive.org/web/20160609183408/https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/265624.
80 *Izvestiia*, November 30, 1991: 1–2.
81 *Moskovskie novosti*, July 28, 1991: 7.
82 Russian: Aleksandr Sergeevich Dzasokhov
83 *Biulleten' parlamentskoi gruppy SSSR*, no. 70, July 1991: 9–11; *Izvestiia*, March 19, 1991: 4; (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1991n, 180).
84 *Argumenty i fakty*, August 5–11, 1986: 3; (Barabashev and Sheremet 1985, 33).
85 *Moskovskie novosti*, January 11, 1987: 11; August 23, 1987: 6.
86 *Argumenty i fakty*, February 14–20, 1987: 5; (Stepanov 1987, 10; Barabashev, Vasil'ev, and Sheremet 1988, 9–10).
87 *Moskovskie novosti*, April 24, 1988: 11.
88 Russian: Boris Pavlovich Kurashvili.
89 *Argumenty i fakty*, June 25–July 1, 1988: 1.
90 *Argumenty i fakty*, November 12–18, 1988: 3.
91 Russian: Vladimir Dmitrievich Malinkovich.
92 *Argumenty i fakty*, July 1–7, 1989: 1.
93 Russian: Valerii Nikolaevich Chalidze.
94 *Moskovskie novosti*, June 11, 1989: 3.
95 *Die Zeit*, July 28, 1989, accessed January 30, 2023, https://www.zeit.de/1989/31/das-alte-imperium-erlebt-den-juengsten-tag/komplettansicht.
96 *Der Spiegel*, no. 44, October 29, 1989, accessed January 31, 2023, https://www.spiegel.de/politik/eiserne-hand-a-476cb531-0002-0001-0000-000013499947.
97 *Chicago Tribune*, August 5, 1989: 1.
98 *Izvestiia*, February 5, 1990: 2; (III (vneocherednoi) S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1990a, 1:66–7).
99 *Argumenty i fakty*, September 29–October 5, 1990: 2; no. 51, December 1990: 4; no. 10, March 1991: 2; *Leninskaia pravda* (Petrozavodsk), October 6, 1990: 2; *Novoe Russkoe Slovo*, February 14, 1990: 5.
100 *Literaturnaia gazeta*, June 14, 1989: 2.
101 *Izvestiia*, February 5, 1990: 2.
102 *Literaturnaia gazeta*, August 23, 1989: 3; (Levicheva 1990, 43; Levicheva and Neliubin 1990, 145, 148, 153).
103 *Moskovskie novosti*, November 12, 1989: 10; (Chernilovskii 1989, 52, 1990, 45, 55–7; Shakhnazarov 1990, 38–9).
104 *Argumenty i fakty*, June 24–30, 1989: 6; September 23–29, 1989: 2, 4; (II S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1989a, 3:77, 1989e, 6:430; Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1989a, 15, 1989b, 196, 1989g, 49).
105 *Moskovskie novosti*, July 9, 1989: 6; *Soglasie* (Vilnius), August 28, 1989: 7.
106 *Argumenty i fakty*, August 18–24, 1990: 4; (Verkhovnyi Sovet SSSR 1990k, 59; V (vneocherednoi) S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR 1991b, 16).
107 *Izvestiia*, December 14, 1991: 2.
108 *Moskovskie novosti*, May 28, 1989: 16; (Chernilovskii 1990, 55–6).
109 GARF, f. 10026, op. 1, d. 124, l. 71, 75 (Explanatory note to the draft Constitution of the Russian Federation, October 9, 1991).
110 *Moskovskie novosti*, July 2, 1989: 8–9; *Pravda*, December 1, 1989: 4.
111 *Argumenty i fakty*, July 15–21, 1989: 2–3.
112 *Moskovskie novosti*, October 8, 1989: 12; *Novoe russkoe slovo*, December 29, 1989: 5; (R. Petrov 1991, 4).

113 *Chicago Tribune*, August 5, 1989: 2.
114 *Argumenty i fakty*, April 21–27, 1990: 8.
115 *Argumenty i fakty*, no. 52, December 1990: 3.
116 *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, February 26, 1991: 5.

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Conclusion

The establishment of the State Duma in 1905 and its convocation in 1906 marked a significant milestone in the intellectual and political developments that had been ongoing in Russia for nearly a century, after the idea of a Russian parliament, referred to as the State Duma, was first proposed in 1809. As Chapter 1 demonstrated, the discussions of parliament and parliamentarism were crucial during the Revolution of 1905–1907, with the "representation of the people" being a widely shared goal. During its first two convocations, the State Duma did not become a potent legislature, but it did not become a demonstration of loyalty to the throne either. The First and Second Duma acted as revolutionary forums, politicizing categories of difference and also seeking to assemble an inclusionary Russian civic nation in a bottom-up manner. Although the goal of building a political community was not fully achieved, it became a tangible possibility and a future political goal. Serving as political rallies, the first two Dumas also amplified oppositional discourse, contributed to the development of mass politics, and helped to consolidate the goal of an imperial revolution. However, antiparliamentary sentiments were also strong, and opponents of parliamentarism saw the Duma's performance as proof that the Russian Empire did not require a parliament due to its exceptional character or that parliament was a thing of the past and the global society needed new forms of self-organization.

As shown in Chapter 2, the new imperial institution, consisting of the State Duma and the State Council, stabilized under the name of "legislative chambers." Despite their official name, they were seen by many as a vernacular manifestation of parliament. The Third and Fourth Duma were not always recognized as a "representation of the people," and the disillusionment of peasants with the Duma's inability to resolve the land question created further alienation. Nevertheless, the practice of the regularly operating legislature made it part of Russian political life. The Third and Fourth Duma also played a crucial role in bringing non-Russian and non-elite deputies into the government in the broader sense. The Duma was still important for politicizing difference and amplifying oppositional discourses, including autonomism. During the First World War, the Progressive Bloc consolidated particularistic projects, emphasizing the inclusionary vision of a political community. Liberal legal scholars saw signs of Russia's slow transition to

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parliamentarism. While socialists harshly criticized the State Duma, some of them saw parliamentarism as progress, particularly in Asia. Like before, there were also many critical voices that focused not just on the deficiencies of the State Duma but on the inadequacy of the parliamentary system as a whole.

The Revolution of 1917 reignited hopes for an ideal parliament. Chapter 3 showed that despite all its deficiencies, the State Duma played a central role in the Revolution. The Provisional Government was formed mainly from State Duma members, and it laid the foundation for the broader revolutionary elite. The Revolution was largely parliamentary, with assemblies emerging across the former empire. The All-Russian Constituent Assembly was supposed to resolve the broader imperial crisis. In the context of the war and subsequent hardships, the fragmentation within the Russian public led to the formation of exclusionary communities and the failure of the Constituent Assembly to reassemble the Russian imperial space. The antiparliamentary discourse in its anarchist version, appropriated and modified by the Bolsheviks, contributed to the overthrow of the Provisional Government, the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, and the end of the parliamentary period of the Revolution.

The antiparliamentary period of the Russian Revolution, discussed in Chapter 4, began with the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly and the convocation of the Third All-Russian Congress of Soviets in January 1918. The Bolshevik leadership attempted to create a modern representative system that was not parliamentarian. Despite the adoption of a constitution, Soviet Russia was run through a highly bureaucratized system and extraconstitutional agencies controlled by the party's Central Committee, becoming one of the first single-party states in the world. The functions of the Congress of Soviets and the VTsIK, which were supposed to be the supreme bodies, were relegated to the symbolic realm. The Bolsheviks' discourse on parliaments and the Soviet assemblies was self-contradictory. They dismissed parliaments as instruments of "bourgeois" rule but continued to use "parliament" as a metaphor for Soviet assemblies. The regimes alternative to the Soviet state continued to seek legitimacy in parliamentarism, relying on or creating parliamentary and quasi-parliamentary assemblies. The idea of reassembling the whole of Russia through the Constituent Assembly remained potent during the Civil War. Besides, many new ethno-national and regional state formations continued to support parliamentarism for their futures.

The Bolsheviks consolidated their alternative to parliament with the formation of the Soviet Union in late 1922 and the adoption of its Constitution in 1924. As demonstrated in Chapter 5, the USSR Congress of Soviets, the TsIK, and the TsIK Presidium were the supreme bodies of state power only nominally. The provisions of the Constitution were not strictly followed, and the practices of the single-party regime rather than legal theory were the main background for the operation of the Soviet bodies. The function of descriptive representation gained prominence, emphasizing the Bolshevik take on building an inclusionary political community in a top-down manner. The Soviet system continued to play an important role in the global crisis of parliamentarism, which saw the rise of authoritarian and dictatorial regimes around the world, both institutionally and intellectually. There was,

however, never a complete departure from parliamentarism, as the Congress of Soviets and the TsIK were occasionally referred to as "workers' parliament." Besides, the Comintern promoted the use of parliaments by foreign communist parties. Domestic opponents of the Bolsheviks supported the idea of freely elected soviets and establishing proper parliamentary institutions. In the Russian emigration, the crisis of parliamentarism was a major topic, and some even suggested keeping the soviets in view of the popularity of corporatist designs. Although some saw the Soviet government as an alternative to Western parliamentarism, the façade character of Soviet institutions was no secret for domestic or foreign audiences.

As shown in Chapter 6, in 1935, the Soviet leadership made yet another concession to the universalist take on modernity by announcing plans to introduce a "parliament" in the USSR. The new Soviet Constitution and the introduction of the Supreme Soviet, however, did not change the operation of the single-party and personal dictatorship. The Supreme Soviet was *de facto* appointed by the party and had no agency in decision-making. Its main functions were symbolic and propagandistic. The elections and the sessions were supposed to demonstrate the total loyalty of the population. Its members, however, had some practical functions in policy fine-tuning and acted as intermediaries between the state and the people. The Supreme Soviet also became a model for the parliaments that were used during the Soviet annexations of 1939–1940 and for the legislatures of Soviet foreign dependencies after the Second World War. The practice of the Soviet regime led to some discontent and small-scale protest actions across the USSR, but no public criticism of the state was possible in the context of censorship and Great Terror. Internationally, Soviet institutions were praised by communists and some on the broader left. The 1936 Constitution itself was met with cautious optimism even by some non-socialist observers. In the meantime, émigré authors continued to denounce the Soviet regime, and their participation in English-language academia contributed to the proliferation of a critical take on Soviet institutions.

The Supreme Soviet remained a nominal legislature. As demonstrated in Chapter 7, its main functions were the performance of loyalty to the party, descriptive representation, integration of the singular Soviet people, and amplification of official discourse. It also became permanently involved in foreign policy since 1955. The official discourse on parliaments and the Supreme Soviet was ambiguous and shifted over time, but a complete rejection of parliamentarism was not possible due to the Supreme Soviet's normalization as a parliament through international exchanges. The Supreme Soviet was widely criticized domestically and internationally, being called a "rubber stamp." Many dissident and émigré intellectuals supported democratization, although there were those who supported non-parliamentary regimes, especially among Russian nationalists.

The perestroika political reform, analyzed in Chapter 8, aimed to democratize the Soviet system while rejecting Western-style democracy. The unclear division of competence, constant amendments to the constitution, and the undetermined status of the CPSU led to erosion of the new government system, making the USSR Congress of People's Deputies and the Supreme Soviet quickly lose popularity. Challenges in transforming the Supreme Soviet into a functional legislature included

issues with absenteeism, deputy competence, imperative mandate, and contention over parliamentary exchanges. The failure of central Soviet assemblies to resolve the economic and nationalities crises contributed, first, to the popularity of parliaments of union republics and, then, to the predominance of presidential systems across the USSR. The popularity of the universalist approach to political institutions in conceptual debates within and outside Soviet assemblies put additional pressure on the Soviet assemblies. At the same time, it contributed to the inclusion of parliaments into the state systems of all post-Soviet states, even though some of them ended up being eclipsed by authoritarian presidencies.

Looking at specific institutions, there were clear watershed moments in the history of parliamentary and quasi-parliamentary bodies in the Russian Empire, Revolutionary Russia, and the Soviet Union between the introduction of the legislative State Duma (1905) and the last meeting of the USSR Supreme Soviet (1991). They were the dissolution of the Second State Duma (1907), the formation of the Provisional Government (1917), the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly (1918), the introduction of the Supreme Soviet (1936), and the convocation of the Congress of People's Deputies (1989). In practical terms, however, there were no such clear turning points. Multiple legacies and residues of the preceding parliamentary bodies manifested in the operation of their successors. The same can be said about conceptual developments. The discourse within and around the parliamentary bodies also demonstrated many recurring motives and tropes.

There were three major continuities pertaining to the whole period between 1905 and 1991. The establishment and operation of parliamentary bodies were accompanied by constant tensions between the globally circulating Western normative concepts and ideologies and their vernacular counterparts. The juxtapositions of Russian and Soviet institutions to their European and North American counterparts persisted for the whole period. Another continuity was in the predominance of political representation of social categories (nationality, gender, occupation, class, religion, region, age, and so on) over representative government based on individualized civil rights, although the scope of recognized or permitted categories changed. Political representation was at times conceptualized in corporatist terms, but its origin lay in the imperial rights regime (Burbank 2006) and the attempts to translate the composite imperial space to a representative assembly. Finally, the elites that created most of the central parliamentary bodies did not envision them as legislative institutions. Their main objective of the assemblies was to rally the population, defined through social categories, around the political leadership and demonstrate that it was loyal.

Max Weber (1906) called the system introduced in the Russian Empire "sham constitutionalism" already in 1906. From the standpoint of liberal normativity, none of the central institutions of 1905–1991 can be called parliament because they lacked legislative sovereignty due to constitutional or extraconstitutional arrangements. The makers of the imperial system, however, did not introduce even a nominal constitution and presented the regime as non-constitutional. They also never called the State Duma and the State Council parliament in official documents. It was mainly the liberal deputies and commentators that treated the Duma

as parliament and, juxtaposing it to the supposed Western template, spoke of its deficiencies. In the case of the Bolshevik regime, the constitution was immediately reinterpreted from a legal document into a political one. All Soviet constitutions were political programs. Following Vladimir Il'ich Lenin's logic, the Soviet system could not be judged against its "bourgeois" counterpart because it surpassed it. The constant juxtapositions were supposed to show the ostensible superiority of the Soviet representative system for ideological purposes (Burbank 1995).

The project of building a completely alternative modern statehood backslid early on with the use of the "bourgeois" concept of constitution. Another retreat started in 1935 when the plan to introduce a Soviet parliament was announced. Although the Supreme Soviet was never called parliament in legal documents, the official propaganda actively supported its equivalence to the Western model and tried to prove its superiority in the criteria that were developed by Western thinkers, such as universal suffrage or parliamentary supremacy. The fact that the Supreme Soviet was *de facto* appointed by the party undermined its propaganda potential from the start, and already under Iosif Vissarionovich Stalin it almost stopped being called parliament. Instead, an attempt was made to return to Lenin's claim that Soviet representative bodies were essentially different from "bourgeois parliaments."

This changed again after the Supreme Soviet became part of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in 1955 and was normalized as a parliament through international relations. For around 15 years, it returned to the official discourse as "parliament," but since the 1970s, another attempt to go back to Lenin's plan to build completely different institutions was made. The normalization through the IPU and bilateral parliamentary exchanges, however, made it difficult to redefine the Supreme Soviet as an essentially different institution: it continued to be compared to Western parliaments by domestic and foreign observers and treated as their completely defunct copy. During perestroika, yet another attempt to return to Lenin was made. Although this time, the makers of the new institutions recognized the deficiencies of the Soviet system, they still attempted to claim its merit in the anticipated convergence between soviets and parliamentarism. This led to similar results as those in the late Russian Empire: the reformed Supreme Soviet was not treated as an alternative to parliament by deputies and commentators alike. Instead, it was seen as a developing or defunct version of the Western norm.

All central parliamentary bodies either were imperial parliaments or tried to emulate one. The State Duma, the reformed State Council, and the provisional assemblies of the Revolution had group representation in their design. So did the Congresses of Soviets. Despite their declared class exclusivity, they also had elements of occupational and gender representation (through the unofficial quota) and even legacies of the social estate system due to the presence of Cossacks. Besides, the USSR TsIK was bicameral, featuring institutionalized representation of national categories in the Council of Nationalities. Starting in the 1920s, however, the Congresses of Soviets and the TsIK emulated an imperial parliament through prescribed descriptive representation, with the shares of different social

categories in the assemblies being decided by the party. This did not change with the introduction of the Supreme Soviet, which also inherited the Council of Nationalities. The parliaments of perestroika retained representation of nationalities but also introduced direct representation of occupational, gender, age, and other categories.

The quasi-parliamentary bodies created during the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the Russian Civil War outside the former imperial and the new Soviet centers had some features of imperial parliament. Such bodies as the Ukrainian Central Rada, the Transcaucasian Sejm, the Turkestani Provisional People's Council, and many others were formed through nomination by civic organizations, and these civic organizations were often based on national, occupational, religious, and other social categories. With the development of independent statehood on the territory of the former Russian Empire and the introduction of directly elected parliaments, however, the category of nationality came to predominate. This was taken into account by the Bolshevik leaders who emulated national legislatures in the nominal Soviet federation. Nationality was not the only category of difference used in the USSR, but it became the main one. With the rise of the national movements in the late 1980s, republican supreme soviets started to turn from nominal into actual institutions of representing respective national groups: the first declarations of sovereignty were adopted by those supreme soviets that were *de facto* appointed by the party. The excessive focus on nationality and its institutionalization, albeit nominal in relation to government, contributed to the dissolution of the USSR into nation-states (Suny 1993).

The creators of central parliamentary and quasi-parliamentary bodies often sought to demonstrate the loyalty to rather than legitimacy of their regimes. The makers of the Duma introduced peasant representation anticipating to see a loyal conservative majority. The multistage Soviet elections before 1936 ensured that disloyal deputies were filtered out on the way to the USSR Congress of Soviets and the TsIK. With the introduction of the Supreme Soviet, the near unanimous voting both in the elections and in the Supreme Soviet became a ritual of loyalty. Finally, the authors of the perestroika reforms sought to decouple the reformist political leadership under Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev from the potentially disloyal party organs and connect it to a loyal popular assembly. Legitimacy in this context was secondary and was predominantly established through descriptive representation. For most of the Soviet period, demonstration of legitimacy was mainly intended for foreign audiences and starting in the 1950s, the Supreme Soviet often failed in this task. Legitimacy was, however, important for the State Duma and the perestroika parliaments, both of which were seen as illegitimate due to the absence of universal elections.

With the exception of the early soviets and their congresses, the task of building an inclusionary imperial community was either ascribed to the parliamentary bodies by their members or envisioned by their creators. In the late Russian Empire, the anticipated composite Russian civic nation was supposed to provide an alternative to dynastic sovereignty. During the Revolution of 1917 and the Russian Civil War, the attempts to create a civic community were supposed to resolve the crises

caused by the First World War and the collapse of state institutions. From the 1930s to the 1980s, the Communist leadership also sought to create an inclusionary community, the Soviet people. This was, however, not a civic community but one built on loyalty to the party and its leaders.

The significance of Russian and Soviet parliaments manifested not only in relation to concepts. The Supreme Soviet, with its prearranged membership, unanimous voting, rare sessions, and complete exclusion from legislation, became an important model for Soviet dependencies and, after the splits with Yugoslavia, Albania, and the PRC, for the independent state socialist regimes. In this respect, the USSR made a significant contribution to the global circulation of nominal parliamentarism. Indeed, it was not its only source: in the 1920s and 1930s, many regimes introduced or retained nominal parliaments in the context of single-party or military dictatorships. However, the state socialist model proved especially significant due to its relatively long history and direct export to numerous contexts in Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The informal Soviet empire and its collapse resulted in multiple entanglements in the parliamentary histories and shared legacies across the world.

The photographs of the Russian and Soviet parliaments also demonstrated certain continuities. From the onset, diversity and inclusion were a major trope. Deputies could be seen with attributes of different national and religious (in the case of the Duma, the revolutionary assemblies, and the perestroika parliaments) belonging. Class or social estate diversity (in the case of the Duma and early Soviet institutions) was also important until perestroika. Since the introduction of the Supreme Soviet, class and occupation of individual deputies became an important part of visual propaganda's iconography. Political views were also reflected on photographs. During the early Duma period and during the Revolution of 1917, deputies were occasionally portrayed with newspapers of different political parties and organizations. Until the perestroika reform, the images of unanimous voting in the Supreme Soviet were supposed to demonstrate that the Communist Party had universal backing in the country.

Furthermore, there were continuities in the discussed alternatives to both the existing Russian and Soviet and the Western normative institutions. In the debates within the country and among émigrés, there were always those who shared a universalist view on parliaments and parliamentarism. The most significant groups in this regard were the liberals and moderate socialists as well as some moderate nationalists of the late Russian Empire and Revolutionary Russia. There were many legal scholars, intellectuals, and activists who supported gradual or immediate introduction of a universally elected parliament and an accountable cabinet among the deputies of the Dumas and revolutionary assemblies. Many of them ended up in emigration, where they continued to insist on the uniform patterns of global political development and supported parliamentary democracy for a post-Bolshevik Russia. Some of the liberal and moderate socialist émigrés remained active until well after the Second World War. After the war, liberal universalism once again became a dominant discourse globally, and many of those who left the USSR during the war, including Nazi collaborators, advocated democracy in the

liberal sense. Since the 1960s, the regime's opponents of the legalist or human-rights orientation, some of whom then ended up abroad, preferred parliamentary democracy as an alternative to the Soviet system. During perestroika, the notion of parliament being part of a "civilized society" became mainstream both among deputies and in the "informal" circles.

The alternatives to parliamentarism in the liberal sense proliferated among the more radical circles. In the Russian Empire, many on the right, who were often backed by the ruling elites, supported the official notion that the Duma was not a parliament. More radical rightists demanded its abolition, with some proposing a consensus assembly in the form of a *zemskii sobor*. Like their liberal and socialist counterparts, many intellectuals and activists with right-wing views ended up abroad. During the 1920s and 1930s, the opponents of liberal democracy among the émigrés did not necessarily reject representative institutions and offered corporatist designs. Furthermore, some sought to keep the soviets, seeing them as corporatist bodies. Corporatism and rejection of Western institutions were sustained by émigrés after the Second World War. Some dissidents of the 1960s breathed a new life into the anti-Western discourse, but among them, there was no total rejection of representative institutions.

Among the radical left, anarchists were the most vocal opponents of parliamentarism in the early twentieth century. In the émigré discourse, Lev Davidovich Trotskii was the main opponent of both Stalinist and liberal democratic institutions among the radical left. After the Second World War, there was no immediate revival of public criticism of Western parliamentary democracy among the opponents of Soviet regime. This changed, however, with the emergence of Marxist *samizdat* in the 1960s. The alternatives they offered included a Soviet system that functioned in practice as prescribed by law or a return to the system of congresses of soviets. A legally functioning Soviet system was also acceptable for the early legalist movement among the dissidents. Finally, a new generation of left-wing intellectuals that sought to find a better alternative to both the Soviet regime and liberal democracy was inspired by the developments in Eastern European socialist countries. The Solidarity movement nurtured the project of self-government that included elements of corporatism.

Parliaments played a central role in the postimperial transformations within the USSR and in some of the Soviet dependencies, especially in Europe but also in Mongolia. The challenges in building new institutions contributed, *inter alia*, to a weak rule of law. In Central and Eastern Europe, including the Baltic states, the integration into the European Union and other transnational institutions was an important incentive to break with some of the authoritarian practices, although there was "democratic backsliding" in some cases. In parts of the former USSR, for instance, in Russia, Azerbaijan, and Uzbekistan, authoritarian tendencies prevailed, with hierarchic party systems becoming a common trend (Bader 2011; Roberts 2015; Behrends 2017, 570, 572–4; Cianetti, Dawson, and Hanley 2018). In Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, the "Color Revolutions" contributed to departures from authoritarianism (Mitchell 2012, 1–3, 36–8, 53, 63).

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