Image of the Future in Russian Communism

Narratives of the Collective Representations in the 1920s in the USSR

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Abstract

Representations of the future are part of any worldview. In opposition to the Christian notion of the Apocalypse, the Enlightenment paradigm suggested the idea of a bright future. In the beginning of the 20th century, many people all over the world were under the impression that freedom and justice existed in the world and that imperfection could be overcome through social and technical progress. Faith in Progress was one of the most effective consolations for humans affected by fears of modernization. This global upsurge of utopian hopes and faith in progress was embodied in the anticipation of a socialist miracle. In socialist myth the value of the future was strongly emphasized. My paper studies the parameters of the Communist concept of the bright future in opposition to the liberal ideologies – collective (rather than individual) salvation, the narrative of sacrifices, and short-term orientation. This paper will use new archival documents to study popular visions of the socialist future, including abundance, brotherhood, love and equity.

Keywords: Representations, Communism, Russia, Future, Popular visions

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Representations of the future are part of any worldview. In opposition to the Christian notion of the Apocalypse, the Enlightenment paradigm suggested the optimistic idea of a bright future. The beginning of the 20th century saw a global upsurge of utopian hopes and faith in progress, which was embodied in the anticipation of a socialist miracle. In socialism the value of the future was strongly emphasized. My paper studies the parameters of the Communist concept of the bright future in opposition to the liberal ideologies – collective (rather than individual) salvation, the narrative of sacrifices, and short-term orientation, and how they resonated to the popular imagination. I use new archival documents to study popular visions of the socialist future.

These popular visions from below provide new dimensions to the elitist and official “futurism” revealed in contemporary science fiction and artistic futurist/constructivist projects, as well as in social experimentation and scientific experiments. Traditional Russian peasants’ beliefs in a promised land and earthly paradise1 were reinforced by promises of socialists and technological achievements in the twentieth century. For the purpose of reconstructing the utopian post-revolutionary dreams I am influenced by the pioneering studies of Rene Fuelop-Miller and, more recently, by Richard Stites.2

This paper is a product of my research into how Soviet people perceived themselves, their society and the world, how they internalized the reality in the 1920s and 30s.3 It goes without saying that messages of power and popular imagination are interpenetrable. Only article size justifies my focus on the representations of only one agent of power interrelations – popular imagination, while skipping the propaganda messages or Bolshevik meta-narrative. My conclusions are based on the party and police reports on public moods, private correspondence reviewed by police and letters to authorities, as well as dairies and memoirs. Along with complaints, letters to authorities included practical suggestions and discussions of various political topics, including, for example, the nature of socialism. All these documents provide the historian


3 Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada supported this project and the trip to the international conference New Directions in the Humanities, University of Prato, Italy.
with a source of first-hand information for analyzing public views. They are especially valuable because they broaden the possibilities for studying collective mentality. The sources show that beliefs and representations were in flux. However, familiarity with the complete mass of this documentation provides an impression of some of the dominant trends, patterns of perception and collective representations of the 1920s. Among various different trends, scholar meets very powerful narratives, which have not yet been described in historiography. I will concentrate here on these new topics, as they enrich our understanding of state of public mind of that period. Because of the serial character of the sources and the limits of the article, I do not cite every available material from the documents because they are often repetitive. Instead I will support my theses by focusing on the most representative quotations from this serial material.

The objective of this article is to reveal some important characteristics of the image of socialism in public mind in the Soviet Union. We can find them in suggestions and recommendations to the authorities articulated by the peasants in their letters; in the critical comments or behind the utterances of disillusionment in the results of the Revolution. The people’s reaction to the pompous celebration of the tenth anniversary of the revolution in 1927 has revealed a public mindset that can only be described as a crisis of faith of the generation that carried out the revolution – a crisis of faith in the revolution’s promises and in socialist bright future in general.

L.N. Bondarenko, a field correspondent from the village of Yuzhnyi in Kharkov region, wrote in a letter to Krestianskaia Gazeta in 1928 “Our building of socialism is similar to the construction of the Great Wall in China, which took a lot of energy, but made little sense. This comparison is not my own – it was created and is used by the people… The ten-years’ worth of experience demonstrates that it is impossible to build socialism”. He proposed three probable explanations for the defeat of socialism: “Either socialist theory is speculative and inapt to real life, or those people, who are preaching about building socialism, are unable to put their ideas into action, or the number of saboteurs… has multiplied…”

Neither Marx and Engels, nor Lenin offered guidance on what socialism would be like. When Bolsheviks promised the people a “bright future for the whole of humankind – socialism”, they never made their promises concrete. The image of socialism remained completely abstract – public ownership of property; a classless society with political and social equality, in which there would be no place for exploitation, animosity between classes or nationalistic enmity. It was implied that abundance would automatically occur. The vague thesis adopted in the Party’s first 1902 program was automatically shuffled into the other programs’ drafts, those of 1919 and 1961.

In the absence of a lucid official answer, simple folk wrote letters to authorities. For example, after studying the VKPb program and textbooks, the Red Army soldier G. Podolskii asked Stalin himself (with no answer) for explanations: “What is socialism? … The party masses need to know the basic work prospects for the entire party”. The peasants, too, actively discussed the matter of socialism and wrote to the newspapers numerous letters with typical questioning, “The most important question, the question that touches our very lives, is the one about socialism, … but no one in the villages explained it clearly and convincingly, and the general population doesn’t have even a vague idea about it…”. These questions show that socialism remained a mirage for people. Later in the 1950s, soviet people were still puzzled about the issue of what is socialism as Claus Mehrt wrote in his memoirs: they usually referred to Great Soviet encyclopedia or to Marx principle of distribution of wealth in socialism from Ghota Program “[Get] from each according to his ability, to [give] each according to his needs.”

The public’s spontaneous discussion about the socialist future during the 1920s often went in different directions than the official propaganda. The
study of the visions of future generated among the people helps understand the extend to which official ideologies were integrated into the world views of public and find the common roots in Communist concept and Christian beliefs.

The most common repetitive metaphor for the socialist future among public was Paradise (sometimes, “the promised land”). In 1927, a worker gripped, “Whom should the worker trust: the pope or the communist? The first promised us a “heavenly kingdom”, the latter – paradise on earth; but at the end there is neither one, nor the other”[10]. Another peasant wrote « I see Communism as the beginning of some kind of earthly paradise...But not in a way that our priests promise – some future heavenly kingdom that does not exist at all “[11]

The image of Paradise differed no doubt from one culture to another, but certain common features constantly recur: immortality, abundance, happiness and freedom. [12] Socialist Paradise in Russian public representations was envisioned as abundance, brotherhood, love and equity. Even fantastic idea of immortality was attached sometimes to the idea of socialist paradise. The protagonist of Platonov ‘s novel “Happy Moscow” Sambikin was working on the mystery of immortality in a special institute for search of immortality and longevity. Another protagonist Muldbauer dreamed that the country of immortality is located in stratosphere. [13] The Institute of Experimental Medicine was indeed organized in the 1930s in Moscow to study among others a problem of longevity and Stalin showed his personal interest in it.

The idea of socialism as a society of justice for everyone was regarded at the lower levels of societal hierarchy primarily in terms of equity. This was a major element in people’s reflections on socialism. The plebeian egalitarianism, revealed in the first post-revolutionary years and expressed in popular slogans such as “Steal what has been stolen” or “Take away and divide”, [14] was legitimised by Bolshevik’s ideology and moulded into a wholesome system of beliefs generated from below about what a just world order should be. This promoted the people’s idea of socialism as a society of equality for everyone. “Communism is an equal or almost equal way of life for all citizens of the Republic... Equal usage of all of life’s riches...”[15]

By and large, equity was understood in a utilitarian way, covering necessities such as food, clothing and housing. Social equality, including the right to work and the right to receive education and medical assistance, was placed second in public representations. Political rights followed next. Demands for social and political equality were most clearly articulated during the 1924-1928 peasants’ movement for the creation of their own representative body – the Peasant Union (Krestianskii Soiuz).

Equity was imaginative construct from the beginning, and it became evident to the public very soon. Peasants perceived themselves discriminated in comparison with the workers, workers – referring to employees, the Russians – referring to the Jews, common people – referring to communist elite. From 1918 to the 1920s, a discontent about the privileges and additional rations for the communists gained a dominant place in the public’s discussions about the authorities[16] and became one of the reasons for the 1921 Krondstadt uprising. In a letter from Petrograd which experienced a severe famine in 1921, a woman writes: “But communists still live very well, they are given food [ration] every month...”[17] At the same time, a soldier describes: “Also, I am being invited to sign on with the communists, they are given 30 pounds of bread, soup and kasha twice a day, but I keep refusing. It’s better to starve than to be a communist” [18]. The deep-rooted and enduring egalitarian moods remained widespread also in later years of the 1920s. Anonymous letter on behalf of 58 Donbas workers questioned:

Where is the equality? Where is the brotherhood? Where are the authorities who are interested in what people want? How can we reach socialism in this way? Never!”


In 1926, in his letter to the newspaper Krasnoe Priazovie, the peasant Ivan Khomich demanded:

Where is the equality? Where is the brotherhood? Take away the taxes from peasants! Take away the salary from workers! Get rid of money in Russia!... Workers should work for food and clothing, and whatever is left – give it to the government. I am a peasant and I give all the extra grain to the government, I give potatoes, eggs, and butter; just give me boots, a hat, a jacket, a shirt and a
pair of pants. That is socialism. This is what I think: why does a worker need his salary? Work eight hours and get your clothing and your food, and the rest – give it all to the government.20

In 1926 about 1 million workers were unemployed in Soviet Russia. Egalitarianism was embodied in the 1927 demands by the unemployed to redistribute the existing working places in a just way: “to lay off those, in whose families 2 or 3 people are already employed”. By 1927, the established hierarchy of privileges (for communists as compared to the non-party people; for workers as compared to the peasantry, etc) destroyed the illusions of equity, but remained for decades a cause for irritation. “It is said that with socialism, everyone will be equal, but in reality, everything is the same as it used to be, some live well, others don’t”. “The USSR is the country of privileges - much more than Russia was. Communists have a lot of advantages.”21 (1925). In their protests and complaints against the privileges of the highest ranks, the simple people kept on appealing to the promises of equality as an attribute of socialism.

New human interrelations were supposed to be established in socialism. The notion of brotherhood was very popular and represented in the new form of addressing – “Comrade”.

“Socialism will come into being when all people will be conscious enough to grasp the truth of brotherhood, love and rule of law. We are so far from that.”

…Будем идти к полному социализму постолку, поскольку народные массы будут воспринимать воспитание к познанию истины, вместе с тем изживать унаследованный из прошлого эгоизм(себялюбие)...

[При таком разделе крестьян нельзя и говорить о социализме. Не надо разделять крестьян на классы.] (1927)23

Another attribute of socialism in public mind was abundance or well-being. Promises of future prosperity existed in official discourse, they were transmitted during all Soviet celebrations of the 1920s and 1930s.24 The jubilee government Manifesto, in November 1927, declared that increasing of the public well-being is a main goal of the Soviet state.25 According to contemporary witnesses, happiness (Blago) was understood in a utilitarian way. In contrast to Christianity, the source of inner happiness was seen not in the spiritual or the artistic, but in material security and well-being. In the letter from prisoners in the Solovki camp to the Soviet government, Orthodox priests wrote: “Communists in contrast do not recognize any purpose in human life except that of earthly well-being”.26 The ethics of asceticism were shared by only few zealots either in Christianity or in Communism. However, the notion of prosperity was formulated in frames of traditional peasant ethics of subsistence economy. Additionally, the catastrophic experience of the revolution and civil war allowed even the end of famine to be perceived as well-being. Public comments showed a very low level of ambition. The hungry understood well-being as satiety, as the satisfaction of the most basic of needs. In the factory named after Kalinin in Leningrad a worker said to the lecturing propagandist Tukhachevskii, “Workers fought not for being barefoot and hungry, but for being clothed and fed”27.

Consequently, satiety was one of the most vital attributes of socialism in popular perceptions. The plenitude of food was a centre point of all traditional conceptions of perfect worlds.28 Without a doubt, the issue of food (mostly of bread) was central to all Soviet documents, originating from the bottom of society in the 1920-1930s. People regularly lacked

20 RGASPI, f.17, op.85, d.16, l.244;
21 Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiskoi Federatsii (GARF), f.374, op.27, d.1211, l.139; Golos Naroda, p. 233; TSGAIPD SPb, f.16, op. 6, d.6947, l.24
22 RGASPI, f. 17, op.85, d.508, l.148. (1926).
25 Pravda, 1927, October 16.
26 R. Fulop-Miller, The Mind and Face of Bolshevism. An Examination of Cultural Life in Soviet Russia, New York, Knopf, 1929, p. 87. See also the letter of Orthodox priests from Solovki camp to the Soviet government, 1926.
27 Another attribute of socialism in popular mind was...
enough to eat in Soviet Russia. “It’s obvious fact that socialism is just talk: the only thing anyone around here talks about is eating…”

The dream of satiety was not realized by Soviet power by 1927 celebration. In the spring of 1927, the panic caused by the government’s announcements about an upcoming war worsened the food situation in Russia. Peasants stopped selling grain. In October and later in December, supplies to the industrial areas continued to decline. Empty stomachs were the main cause of disappointment and frustration with socialism. “The hungry times have come again. And it wasn’t long ago that promises were made that all would be well, that there would not be a crisis, that we would reach socialism tomorrow. What a disaster. If it’s true that socialism is control and distribution, then we must be in socialism already. We get everything by ration cards. A socialism like this can go to hell.”

People expected socialism to bring at least “some improvement”. This was the everyday criterion for assessing socialism. “We fought for the soviet power and expected that our life will be improved. But, until this day, we see nothing of a kind.” The official declarations that, with Soviet power, life was continuously improving, were vigorously rejected by people in their discussions. The evidence of clash of official message, reality and public interpretations we find in the review of private correspondence, prepared by the GPU (secret police) in December of 1925. Alongside with the section on “political moods” – both positive and negative – there was a section called “life improvement”. Despite the name, all of 26 messages sent from cities and towns across the USSR and placed into this section spoke about life getting worse, not better: “Unemployment – 12 messages, increasing prices and low salaries and wages – 11 messages; lack of food and various products, speculation – 13 messages.”

People compared their current level of life with that of pre-war years, which was still fresh in their minds. At the end of NEP, public well-being was barely half that of 1913. In the 1926 the North-Caucuses Bureau of the Communist Party admitted the failure to reach the pre-war level in the secret instruction to the party members contesting the jealousy of peasants to workers: “After nine years of proletarian dictatorship, workers earn much less than salaries paid by bourgeoisie before the war [IWW]. A lot of unemployed receive no help… Worker’s wages are much less than wages in the developed capitalist countries, where bourgeoisie is in power.”

The peasants often supported their criticism with the meticulous calculations of the cost of living, comparing socialism with the monarchy using exact numbers and prices. In 1926, Ivan Khomich from Priazovskie compiled the following price table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Former Oppression under “Bloody” Nicolas II</th>
<th>Cheap Soviet Power</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grain (money received from the state per poold)</td>
<td>1 rouble 40 kopecks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pound of sugar (cost)</td>
<td>16 kopecks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arshin* of fabric</td>
<td>1 rouble 50 kopecks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pood** of salt</td>
<td>40 kopecks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pound of raisins</td>
<td>12 kopecks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A pair of boots</td>
<td>8-9 roubles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacket</td>
<td>4 roubles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A hat</td>
<td>1 rouble 20 kopecks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peaked cap</td>
<td>1 rouble 20 kopecks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>18 roubles 98 kopecks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Notes: * arshin ≈ 0.71 meters; ** poold ≈ 36 lb ≈ 16.38 kg]

Under the first column, Ivan summarized, “Under oppression everything was cheaper”. Under the Soviet column, his conclusion was, “Communists need luxury”, meaning that Communists get profits from high prices.

When measuring their own wealth, it was only natural for people to compare “now” with “before”. The authority’s consistent proclamations about the benefits of Soviet power further provoked such comparison. If official discourse contrasted the hardships of life before the revolution with the...
achievements of socialist construction, popular discourse employed the binary opposition of “before” and “now” in a different way. Only a real improvement in the quality of life could legitimize the new power in the eyes of the public. Workers spoke:

Krasin [propagandist] came to Orehovo. People asked him when we shall live as we lived before the war. He answered that if there would not be a new war, we’ll reach that level in ten years. By now we have to be patient and wait. They keep saying everything will be better, but in reality, everything is getting worse. Before, even without the tractors there was enough grain. Now, we have kolkhozy and sovkhozy and they give us nothing.

Under the tsar, life was better; we had a chance to earn something. And now the Bolsheviks don’t give peasants the opportunity to earn anything, but impose taxes higher than the tsar’s. 38

These 1927 topics of the popular rejection of Soviet official truth and the revealed representations about socialism in mass consciousness allow us to navigate the terrain of the Soviet system of beliefs and one of its core myths - the idea of a “bright future”.

Commonly, the idea of better future structures the worldview and helps the individual and society to endure the hardships of the mundane. 39 In traditional consciousness, the concept of the future was usually expressed in terms of Salvation and Paradise. A certain longing for Paradise can be found in every universe-maintaining paradigm: from primitive mysticism to Christianity. Revolutionary myth was no exception.

Marxism as a revolutionary theory maintained the Christian framework that history moves toward salvation (or emancipation, in the Marxist case). 40 In the final part of my essay I will mention only those parameters of the concept of Salvation in Soviet myth, which, according to my sources, successfully found resonance in the mass consciousness.

- Salvation was promised on earth, not in Heaven; in this life, not in the afterlife. Consequently, mass expectations were short-term and exhausted in a decade period, as we can see from the popular reactions to the October anniversary.

- According to Marxist theory, revolution should be followed by the establishment of a classless society and the subsequent disappearance of all historical tensions. In the mindset of Russian people, the idea of such ideal state was visualized as Paradise.

- Salvation was imagined as collective, not personal. “If war doesn’t happen, life will be joyful for all of us… I firmly believe that we are moving towards the great radiant future”, wrote M.A. Svanidze in her diary in 1935. 41

The Soviet concept of the “new man” did not support the Christian notion of individual afterlife. In the Marxist paradigm, the emphasis shifted from individual to collective Salvation. Thus, Marxism solved the paradox of Christianity where the Final Judgement and Salvation happen in two variants: one – immediately after individual’s death, another - at the end of time for all people. Collective Salvation of Marxism competed with the possibility of individual Salvation of a Christian. The transitional state of the public mind was reflected in a Red Army soldier’s letter to his family: “The poor folks hold on to their religion, expecting Salvation to come from faith. (Author implied Christians true-believers and their individual salvation after death.) But I am more than certain that we can find Salvation in science, mechanics and strong collectivisation. (The author mentioned basic means of arriving at a “bright future” or collective Salvation)” 42

Marxist-Leninist theory incorporated the life of each individual into the context of the worldwide historical drama of the fight for socialism. The Soviet people could be saved only together, but not each on his or her own. People felt comfortable with the concept of collective Salvation as it did not contradict the Christian story of Apocalypse. It also closely tied back with the peasant commune mentality in view of the fact that the concept of the individual’s unique worth had not been sharply defined in Russia.

Within the same eschatological frames, revolution, depicted by Marxist rhetoric as the final struggle between Good and Evil, was interpreted by the people in apocalyptic terms. 43 The revival of expectations and fears of the Apocalypse in the public’s mind in the 1920s and 1930s was a paradoxical parallel to the Marxist eschatology and, specifically, to its concept of socialist salvation.

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38 TsGAIPD SPb, f.16, op.6, d. 6938, l. 201, (1925) ; f.24, op.5, d.1323, l.49, 1929; f.24, op.5, d.500, l.17, (1928)


41 Iosif Stalin v Obiatiah Semji. Iz Lichnogo Arhiva. Sbornik Dokumentov, Rodina, 1993, p. 175

42 TsGAIPD SPb, f.24, op.16, d.321, l. 77, 1930

Culmination of history was interpreted from the different perspectives.

- In Bolshevism the value of the future was strongly emphasized. In D. Raleigh's formulation, the Bolsheviks were obsessed with the future. As far as future was believed to have a special value, the value of present was diminished.

Marxism viewed the present as a stage in the universal progression toward a communist society and the past as the insignificant pre-history of salvation. The Bolsheviks' myth's future-orientation and its religious quality, as ideology of secular salvation, was conveyed by one of the most popular metaphors of Pravda - 'path'. Such vision had very strong background in the popular worldview:

“Life is difficult. We are living only by the hope for the future”...

[Жизнь проходит не завидно, живем только будущим] (1925)...

“These days, the future consumes the present. We are living in the future. It is bad. It is the most harmful way of living”.

“What we're going through here is somehow not like real life: it's as though we're constantly waiting for something...”

- A major component of the myth of a bright future was the narrative of sacrifice. The populists’ (Narodniki) ideology of sacrifice made in the name of people, later adopted by the Bolsheviks, rested on the deeply rooted Orthodox tradition of salvation through sacrifice and purification through suffering. That is why the official Bolshevik scenario, according to

which a path to a bright future and salvation ran through many unavoidable sacrifices, reverberated so well in the public's mind. Worldwide happiness would come as the righteous reward for suffering and patience. The vitality of this expectations evidenced in such pessimistic sayings from 1927: “The sacrifices of the generation are worthless”, or as peasant spoke out: "We gave our all to the fight against the bourgeoisie, we gave our sons, our cattle, our tools, our bread, everything we had, bringing ourselves to ruin." Even the prisoners of the Stalin's camps found consolation in the idea of sacrifice in the name of a bright future. A depiction of this psychological phenomenon was given by Arthur Koestler in his book Darkness at Noon. The ethic of sacrifice provided the basis for the mass courage in the Great Patriotic War. A willingness to make sacrifices in the name of the official project stayed firm in the minds of Soviet people up until the beginning of the 90s, when one third of those surveyed believed that, in a difficult moment for the country, its citizens must help out, even if, in order to do this, they have to make sacrifices.

The outburst of the disillusionment of 1927 demonstrates how deep the roots of the revolutionary illusions were. These illusions were deeply imbedded in the popular mythology. The references to the narratives of popular mythology, in turn, help us understand the way of reasoning and, ultimately, the behaviour of Soviet people.

To put the Russian story into the global context, we should mention that the anticipation of the socialist miracle was part of the global upsurge of utopian hopes and faith in progress in the beginning of the century. Around the turn of the century, many people all over the world wanted to believe that freedom and justice can be achieved on earth, and that social evils could be overcome through social and technical progress. Nadezhda Mandelshtam described such expectations, "the thirst for an undivided system and for a single idea, which would lay in the foundation of universal insight and of the whole doing, was tormenting the people at the end of last and the beginning of this century."

Faith in Progress as a civil religion was one of the most effective consolations for humans affected by fears of modernization.

At the beginning of the twentieth century social utopias affected the collective consciousness of

45 In his 1933 diary, a worker A. Man'kov pondered about future-orientation of official myth: “There is a new tendency – to speak about distant future as if it exists now; to speak about near future, as about the past. This tendency of mixing the orientation of official myth: “There is a new tendency – to speak about distant future as if it exists now; to speak about near future, as about the past. This tendency of mixing the moments of future and past as the insignificant pre-history of universal progression toward a communist society, resting on the deeply rooted Orthodox tradition of salvation through sacrifice and purification through suffering. That is why the official Bolshevik scenario, according to

46 I. Halfin, From Darkness to Light, p. 5.
48 TsGAIPD SP. f 16, op. 6, d. 6938, l. 140; N. Mandelshtam, Perekopisa s B. Kuznim, in: B. Kuzin, Vospominannija, Proizvedenija, Perepiska. St-Petersburg, Inapress, 1999, p. 717; Intimacy and Terror, Soviet Diaries of the 1930s, p. 161
49 Golos Naroda, p. 87, 1924.
50 Y. Levada, Sovetski Prostoi Chelovek. Opyt Sotsialnogo Portreta na Rybezhe 90kh, Moscow, 1993
52 N. Mandelshtam, Vospominannija, pp. 307, 297

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humans much stronger than previously. Interest in the future gave birth to both the science fiction novel and social utopian literature. R. Stites writes about Soviet Russia, “the revolution was the launching pad for utopian science fiction. Between 100 and 200 native works of science fiction appeared; in the peak year 1927, almost fifty came out. Beyond this about 200 foreign translations appeared including Jules Verne and H.G.Wells. In the context of world science fiction, which was deeply pessimistic, the Soviets stand out in their towering optimism about the shape of things to come.”

Mass literature was not only shaping the collective representations, but, according to E. Dobrenko, mass literature in itself was “the product of readers’ intentions”. What did the readers expect from the literature? “Take a little peek into the future, make us happy. When the good speakers come to describe the coming socialism, our spirits inadvertently rise”, advised a working-class reader in the 1920s.

The generation of Russians, who made the revolution, in 1927 experienced a crisis of faith in socialism. This disillusionment is part of the background for the change in Bolshevik policy, that followed at the end of the 1920s. As history has shown, this crisis was followed by waves of new hopes and new disappointments. The entry of a new generation, which hadn't known a different regime and which grew up with Soviet propaganda, into the active social and political life, as well as the 1935 suspension of ration cards and the promises of the 1936 Constitution – only that made a reincarnation of new hopes and faith in socialism possible.

Popular opinions, expressed before and during the celebration of the 10th Anniversary of the October Revolution, reveal expectations, illusions and moreover, the meta-narratives of popular mythology. From the expressions of disillusionment, we can read the features of popular image of socialist ‘bright future’. They demonstrate that socialism was mostly a system of beliefs for the Russian public. Faith in socialism derived its vital force from eschatological imagery, which served as a common basis for both Marxist and Christian myths.

About the Author
I received my Kandidat in history from Saint Petersburg State University in 1993 and had lectured on Soviet history at the European University in Saint Petersburg, Russia. I am the author of two monographs on leader's cult in Soviet Russia and numerous articles in Russian, English, German, Spanish, Hungarian, Finnish.