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Russian Conservative Historians of the French Revolution in a Contemporary Context

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It is now apparent that the end of the Cold War era has resulted in a powerful geopolitical shift to the right. Yet this movement to the right, seemingly a straightforward worldwide shift, takes on different forms when it is viewed in the context of culture. The effect is particularly striking when the views of the American and European Rights are compared.

As a matter of fact, the notion that there may be differences within their culture is mostly ignored when Western social scientists reflect upon their contemporary culture. Although some Western social scientists would see that they are divided on the 'left' and 'right' side of the political spectrum, most would reject even this notion for it implies partiality and partisanship. This is especially the case with those American historians who, in most cases, emphasize that their criticism of the work of others has nothing to do with the political/philosophical implication of the work being reviewed but with objective scientific criteria. It is tacitly assumed that partisanship as the salient characteristic of one's work can only be found in the past. And while some social scientists might agree that their conflicts with peers are the result of political/philosophical disagreements, they usually discard the notion of deep-seated differences inside modern Western civilization (with America and West Europe as the core of the West). It is implicitly assumed that the "West" provides a sort of unified set of basic philosophical and political paradigms that all countries of the West have followed.

Certainly there are similar traits: Western political and intellectual tradition is a powerful force. Yet this tradition does not exclude deep-seated differences between American and European cultures, differences which have manifested themselves in,
among other things, the interpretation of conservatism and its relationship to postmodernism.

As any other intellectual trend, postmodernism is complicated and contradictory; yet the meaning of 'postmodern' implies the existence of a unifying philosophical principle that challenges everything 'modern', including the traditions of Western society, as it was shaped by the French and American Revolutions, as a symbol of modernism. One of the central ideas, if not the central idea, of postmodernism is the notion of relativism. The theory behind relativism challenges the basic premises of the modern legacy of the Enlightenment. First, in the realm of social science and political thought it challenges the notion of democracy as it has taken form in the West; and secondly it raises questions about the traditional explanations of the historical process, that is to say the idea of progress as it was usually understood in the nineteenth century.

Postmodernism became quite popular in the post World War II era on both sides of the Atlantic. Riding the crest of leftism, it spread as a backlash to the conservative thought of the first years of the post W.W.II era. Yet, in America and Europe, despite their similarities, the economic, political, and cultural integration of postmodernism was distinctly different, especially in a political and intellectual context. To begin with, the United States' intellectual and political milieu were never truly postmodernist and the notion of relativism, even during the height of postmodernist influence, never became truly internalized. For example, regardless of their political affiliation, American social scientists have never challenged the notion of democracy.

There are often acrimonious attacks by American conservative historians (Richard Pipes could serve here as a good example) against the Left and reciprocating barbs against the Right on their side. Yet, despite their seeming differences, both the Left and Right regard democratic institutions as the unquestionably superior form of government and the ultimate goal for all humans. The difference here is only in the interpretation of the regime. For instance, in the case of the American Right, the Soviet regime was
considered reprehensible because it was dictatorial and thwarted the peoples' desire to create a Western style democracy. For the Left, the Soviet regime was positive for it had created a system that, while being externally different from that of Western democracy, was actually the same for it manifested democratic principles. Some leftists even asserted that the Soviet regime was more democratic because it actively involved the masses' participation in the running of the state (political mobilization) and promoted social mobility.

The situation is quite different in Europe. There, postmodernism indeed has led to the revitalization of relativistic culture, especially in France. Moreover, the European brand of postmodernism is strong enough to challenge not only Marxism, which to a large degree is more of a phenomenon of modern than postmodern culture, but the very core of eighteenth century political paradigms, e.g. the positive image of the populace and the populace's will.

As in America, postmodernism first emerged in Europe in the context of Leftist culture; however, in European culture it is genuinely relativistic. For example, the popular postmodernist intellectual hero Michel Foucault's views were encapsulated both in the philosophy of the Left and the Right, while in America he was mostly admired by the Left. In Europe the postmodernist trend is equally at home in both conservative and leftist thought, and this has made the transition from left to right in European culture not just a change in focus, but rather a change in the entire core of political and philosophical paradigms. This is certainly the case with the historiography of the French Revolution.

In America, it was Soviet history that was an ideological battleground for historians of various political persuasions. This can be explained, at least partially, by the geopolitical confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States, the cold war, which pushed the history of the Soviet Union, to varying degrees, into the forefront of American political discourse. Hence the importance of the Bolshevik Revolution in the ideological polemic. Once again the situation is different in Europe. To be
sure, the Bolshevik Revolution was an important part of ideological discourse, but at the same time the images of the Bolshevik Revolution had a historical competitor—the images of the French Revolution. In Europe, the Soviet regime, either directly or indirectly, provided a great boost for the study of the French Revolution, and to some degree the images of both revolutions were merged in intellectual discourse. And it was the images of the French Revolution that were chosen by European conservatives as support for their attack on the Left.

The "revisionist historians" of the French Revolution fired the opening volley in the attack, but their revisionism was far different than that of American historians of the Bolshevik Revolution, who were mostly on the Left. Revisionism in the study of the French Revolution is of course a complicated phenomenon. Its representatives are people of different generations and personal backgrounds—Francois Furet is French, Richard Cobb an Englishman, Simon Schama teaches in the USA. Despite these differences, these historians have a great deal in common, and it is not only their European background (though he teaches in the USA, Schama trained at Cambridge, UK). Their approach to the French Revolution, to history in general, makes it possible to link them together. In the work of all of these historians, there is a clear attempt to dismantle the Leftist paradigm of the Revolution and of history in general. And they are all are under the influence of postmodernism to some degree. In a difference from American postmodernism, their postmodernism is deep and real and is implicitly connected with conservative ideologies rather than leftist ideologies.

Their attack has followed several directions, all with intrinsically "postmodernistic" relativistic streaks. First of all the revisionists apply postmodernist relativism in the deconstruction of the historical process, in the sense that historical phenomena are not regarded as the inevitable outcome of social conflicts. In this context the French Revolution is not just the result of the conflict between the bourgeoisie and a feudal aristocracy and monarchy that was unwilling or unable to undertake reforms. The revolu-
tion is seen as the product of a series of accidents as well as the result of the popularity of the philosophy of the Enlightenment with its strong tendency to see the future in a utopian light. This was one of the major reasons for describing revolutionary development not in the terms of "1789"—liberté, égalité, fraternité—but in the description of the events that happened in the radical phases of the terror and the dictatorship. However, the revisionists did not deconstruct the historical process completely and saw links between some stages of the revolution. They have emphasized that in many cases one stage of the revolution necessarily followed another, as was the case with the terror. According to the revisionists, the terror became inevitable after a certain stage in the radicalization of the revolution. Yet the very spirit of their vision of history has led in some instances to a complete breaking of the historical process into fragments of causally unrelated episodes whose linear connection in time is in no way related to a deep noumenal, causal connection. In this situation, the historian is not in the process of reconstructing the reality of the past but creating the past. This style of historical narrative is not only close to belles lettres (the point of Heinrich Rickert, who, as it is well-known, discarded the idea that history is a science) but is actually belles lettres. Indeed, Schama's *Citizens* is nothing but a free flow of loosely organized narrative with no footnotes and is closer to a novel than a historical work, at least in the context of American social science. The typical American historian would hardly apply such a method to the study of a culture or political and social reality.

There is another important difference between American and European historians—their approach to the people. In American texts, the masses are almost always defined in positive terms, and they have an easily defined goal, for example, the desire to improve their well-being. The situation is different in the case of the European "revisionists." In *Citizens*, the populace is seen as mostly an ugly, brutish mob. Terror in such a case is seen as not only the result of the influence of certain ideological schemes, but as the institutionalization of the people's whims and irrational
fears—the implication being that individuals' rights were better protected under the French Monarchy who should never have allowed the reforms which opened the door to the revolution. This approach also implies that democracy, at least as Americans view it, is limited to a very few countries and not universally applicable.

In their approach to the French Revolution, the revisionists undoubtedly have Western predecessors, and they acknowledge, either directly or indirectly, their contribution in shaping their vision of the French Revolution. The predecessors include Edmund Burke and, of course, Hippolyte Taine and Charles Alexis Tocqueville to name a few. Among these predecessors of the revisionists, though they may or may not be aware of their contribution, are the Russian historians of the late Imperial period. A study of the views of these Russian historians demonstrates that the conservative intellectuals of East Europe have an underlying linkage with the intellectuals of West Europe—an intellectual affinity that is closer than the intellectual ties between America and West Europe. In their works they elaborated upon ideas that are quite close to the hearts of conservative West European historians, both past and present. Indeed, late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Russian conservative ideas were seeds that later bloomed in West European relativistic conservative postmodernism. First of all, Russian conservative historians, like the revisionists, had a rather contemptuous vision of the masses, seeing them as irrational, gullible, and often beastly. Because of this vision of the people, they hardly saw democracy as an appropriate form of government nor as universally applicable. Secondly, Russian conservative historians were also "postmodernist," in the sense that they saw no reason for revolutionary changes; they reduced the longings for revolution to either the personal whims of the revolutionaries or their cupidity, or their stupidity and brutality. Thirdly, in another similarity to modern conservative historians of the French Revolution, Russian conservatives paid considerable attention to the role of ideology. In both cases, ideas are not viewed as the reflection of social/political reality, e.g. the
plight of the masses, but as the whimsical construction of intellectuals. According to conservative Russia historians, the ideas in many cases were designed to bring prominence to their creators. In other cases, the radicals' ideas were viewed as messianic fantasies with nothing in common with reality.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Russia was a country in transition. The reforms of Alexander II had emancipated the peasantry, and there were other changes going on in the political make up of the country aimed at making Russia closer to the West. The reforms were not enough, however, and after the murder of Alexander by terrorists (whose activity was one of the essential features of late nineteenth century Russia), his son, Alexander III, reversed the reform movement. Ideologically, Russian was also in flux. On the one hand, it was a time when the Slavophiles, who were actually Russian nationalists, had a strong influence. The Slavophiles believed that Russia was the only true Christian nation and the Orthodoxy the only true Christianity. Still other Slavophiles believed that the racial characteristics of the Slavs implied morality, Christian meekness, and hatred of all violence. In all cases, they believed that the French Revolution was basically an immoral, brutish, and pagan Western enterprise and, therefore, foreign to Russia's destiny. While the views of the Slavophiles comforted the Russian monarchy, their views were hardly universally accepted in Russia.

A growing number of conservative Russian intellectuals, known as the Westernizers (Occidentophilists), held different views about the political situation. The Westernizers assumed that Russia was no different from the West, and the French Revolution, in one form or another, could be repeated on Russian soil. These conservative intellectuals connected the events in eighteenth-century France with events that were happening in Russia at the time, but they attempted to discredit the French Revolution for they did not want a repeat of it in Russia. In this essay, I will focus on two Russian conservative historians of the French Revolution: Nikolai Liubimov and Vladimir Ger'e. The study of these two historians of the French Revolution demon-
strates the fact that modern European scholars of the revolution numbered among their predecessors East European as well as West European scholars.

Both of these historians, especially Ger'e, were prominent representatives of the 'Russian school of the French Revolution'. And although they were both conservatives, the work of each had its own specific. Liubimov saw the French Revolution as caused by the stupidity and moral rottenness of the elite and by French liberals who had unlocked the violence. Ger'e was somewhat different, in that his major focus was on the radicals rather than the liberals. Although he hardly glamorized the radicals, he did not see them as merely filled with a base desire to further their careers. Instead, Ger'e believed that their moral flaw resulted from their ideological indoctrination. Their ideology implied an idealized image of the populace and a quasi-religious belief that the creation of an ideal society was possible.

Nikolai Liubimov started his intellectual career as a young man of twenty-two during the reign of Nicholas I. Because of his fear of revolutionary activity and his distrust of intellectuals, Nicholas had created a police state. As a matter of fact, he would have liked to do away with all universities, and he was especially suspicious of the humanities and social sciences as potentially subversive subjects. Moscow University, where Liubimov taught most of his life, was called by authorities a "wasp's nest"; the nasty creatures were of course radicals or at least potentially radical students and professors. The very fact that Liubimov had secured a professorship there and was able to keep it for his entire life proves that he exercised strictly conservative views throughout his career. The liberal reforms of Alexander II did not please him; in fact, he saw them as causing the rise of the liberal opposition and the students' movement. He quarreled with several of his colleagues and with the higher echelon of the educational establishment about the nature of the reforms, and many people wished he would leave the university. But Liubimov's enemies ended up frustrated because his die-hard conservatism once again became an asset, especially after the murder of Alexander II, an
event which seemed to confirm Liubimov's prognosis regarding the consequences of liberalizing policy. This was apparently the reason why Liubimov was able to secure the new emperor's blessing and a promotion to Minister of Education.

Liubimov was a physicist by training, but his increasing involvement in the turbulent political activity pushed him in a new direction. And here it was the French Revolution that attracted his attention and his contributions to its study far exceeded his scientific work. The major fruit of his labor was a book provocatively titled Against the Current. The "current" was Russian liberalism, which, according to Liubimov, dominated Russian public opinion. Published in serial form in the Russian magazine, Russian Messenger (Russkii Vestnik), which was edited by Liubimov and Mikhail N. Katov, a liberal turned conservative, the manuscript dealt with the French monarchy on the eve and the first periods of the revolution. Later, it was published as a separate manuscript and became a best seller. This was not surprising because the book's publication coincided with the assassination of Alexander II and provided a direct connection of the present with a historical drama from the past, even without the direct analogies made by Liubimov. The book was read avidly by such luminaries as Feodor Dostoevsky and the highest representatives of the bureaucracy. It is quite possible that even some members of the imperial autocracy read it, but probably not the emperor himself as his major preoccupation was alcohol. Besides his major opus, Liubimov also penned many articles and reviews (actually articles for which certain books were the point of departure) and most of them were published in Russian Messenger.

Liubimov's major concern was the French monarchy. He apparently assumed that once the autocracy had lost absolute power, the revolution could not have been stopped. According to Liubimov, from this point on all consequent stages were inevitable: "1789" should lead to "1793," etc. The problem, then, was to find out why "1789" had happened in the first place. Liubimov completely denied all previous explanations for the fall of the ancien regime. Of course, this meant he ignored econom-
ic matters, such as the deprivation that might have had the populace ready for revolt. Nor did he find the rise of the middle class a reason, nor the conflicts between the monarchy and other groups within the population; as a matter of fact, he barely mentioned them. Instead, he elaborated on how the loosening of the reins had led to the collapse of the regime. Liubimov did not regard a drive for freedom as the implicit desire of all humanity, or at least of all Frenchmen at the end of the ancien régime. Implicitly, he assumed that the statements of those who saw the French monarch as a tyrant whose subjects were overwhelmed by a desire to end his rule as far-fetched. He saw political freedom as a useless commodity for the great majority of the French. There was only one exception to the rule—freedom of artistic and scholarly pursuits. This was, for Liubimov, a valuable right, and it was cherished not only by intellectuals and artists but by the entire French nation. Moreover, the revolution was not needed to achieve this freedom, for it already existed under the ancien régime. The regime needed no reform and had collapsed not because of some internal contradiction, but because of the stupidity and cynicism of the elite, who ill understood the ideas of humanism in the philosophy of the Enlightenment.

An interesting point in Liubimov's approach to the French ancien régime was his complete separation of the elite from the monarchy. The idea that the French monarchy represented the aristocracy, the Feudal elite, was widespread in the historiography of the French Revolution, but Liubimov rejected the notion that the aristocracy understood that its survival depended upon the survival of the monarchy. The aristocracy ended up being the first victims of the terror—and this was Liubimov's main point—because they failed to realize this would be the end result of concessions on the part of the monarchy. The aristocracy were convinced that the political, social, and economic order would never collapse. The aristocracy, seeing the strong monarchy as their rival, had mistakenly pressed for concessions on the part of the French king. It was the aristocracy, not the populace and middle class, that had pressed for the Congress of Notables in 1787. And
it was this Congress that led to the beginning of the French Revolution.\textsuperscript{8}

For Liubimov, the analogy here was clear. He compared the French Congress with the institution that Loris-Melikov, perhaps the most influential Armenian in the history of late Imperial Russia, had put forth in the last years of Alexander II. Loris-Melikov argued that the body, which would be composed of the Russian elite, would in no way challenge the authority of the Czar. Such an institution would, however, appease the liberal opposition, driving it away from its radical elements. Liubimov argued that the creation of such a body, despite its creators' intentions, would destabilize the regime—the point being that the body would inevitably be placed in opposition to the autocracy.

The French monarchy not only had the power to abolish the Congress of Notables in its fledgling stages but also all political opposition, whether liberal or radical, and should have done so. Liubimov insisted that the monarchy had no real weakness, faced no real pressure to reform: The information about the unreliability of the army and popular uprisings was either highly exaggerated or did not even exist. What had prevented the government from being decisive was the new ideological trends of the time. Liubimov paid little attention to the political paradigms of the Enlightenment, nor did he even bother to rail against the utopian paradigms of this philosophy, for the reason that he did not see those seeking to overthrow the monarchy as imbued with any real convictions. He regarded them as self-serving cynics. His disregard for the Utopian paradigms of the Enlightenment can also be explained by the fact that Liubimov dismissed them as something espoused by radicals. In Liubimov's view, it had not been the radicals but the upper echelon of the French bureaucracy who had been responsible for the disaster.

Elaborating upon the philosophy of the Enlightenment and how it was interpreted by the upper echelon of the French bureaucracy, Liubimov stated that the philosophy was read in two ways. The first interpretation implied the idealization of the people, a belief in their collective wisdom. This interpretation also implied
that the government had to follow, or at least be attentive to, public opinion, if not the ballot box. The second reading was the assumption of the relativism of everything and absolute cynicism. This reading resulted in a trend, during which it became fashionable to present one's private urges and selfish interests as absolutely necessary for the public good. Unfortunately, this philosophy influenced those close to the king and apparently the monarch himself. In his desire not to appear as an overzealous reactionary, Louis XVI did not crush his opposition, but actually catered to them because he was under the pretext that the public good was actually increased by an increase in their power and privileges. Thus, it was ideology, not internal or external problems, that had doomed the monarchy. The very beginning of the revolution, then, was rather accidental, for the monarch could have surrounded himself with different advisors who would have fended off the influence of liberal ideas.

According to Liubimov, whereas the beginning of the revolution was incidental, the following steps in the revolution's development were inevitable. From the beginning of the revolution, a confrontational approach to the powers that be and the liberation of a considerable number of people from moral and political restraints (in Liubimov's view both of these factors were interconnected) had guaranteed the revolutionary process would eventually enter what could be called a "free fall" toward radicalization, or to be precise if one follows Liubimov's reasoning, a brutalization of the revolutionary process. According to Liubimov, the changes taking place during different stages of the revolution had nothing to do with changes in class alliance, as in the Marxist point of view, as there was no pressure from below at all.

What he described in modern terms could be called "political culture," i.e. the way of political and personal interaction. The modern "revisionists" described the "political culture" of the revolution as permeated by violence and a sort of abhorrence of real political compromise. In the case of Liubimov, "political culture" (he of course did not use the term) was not described in sociological but in moral terms. Although naiveté and wishful thinking
were part of the picture, they were not dominant. According to Liubimov, the beginning of the fall of the monarchy had brought to France a spirit of violence and utter cynicism. Each new stage of the revolution brought to the forefront more and more cynical and brutal people; "radicalization" was nothing but the "brutalization" and "stupidization" of the revolution. The Congress of Notables was actually the beginning of the "free fall." Liubimov's critical approach to this institution was implicitly guided by his dislike of the Loris-Melikov project. Perhaps because of his concerns about Russian political reality, Liubimov had a tendency in his narrative to see the Congress of Notables as an almost revolutionary institution, one destined to unleash the chains of violence.

While he was apprehensive about the Congress, Liubimov thought that not everything was lost in 1787 and that the monarchy might have survived had it made no concessions. At the same time, Liubimov definitely believed that the Estate General summoned in 1789 had indeed finally opened Pandora's Box. As in previous instances, Liubimov did not see any deep social reason for the French monarchy to be engaged in such a deadly venture. The enterprise was exclusively the result of the plot of a group of the elite who, in a manner similar to the forcing of the Congress of Notables, had pushed the French monarchy to summon the Estate General. Both events were brought about by cynical people with no interest in the well being of the country. Yet there were substantial differences between these two groups of the elite. Those who had pushed the king to summon the Congress of Notables were people who, despite their lack of concern about the interests of the state, were at least concerned with corporate interests. They wanted to secure power not only for themselves but also for their entire social group. But those who pushed the monarchy toward summoning the Estate General were of an even lower moral caliber, especially Mirabeau.

Liubimov recognized that Mirabeau was a person with considerable talents. He was capable of reason and was not nearly as naive as those engaged in the summoning of the Congress of Notables. He was, however, an out and out cynic. Mirabeau was
not concerned with the state nor with the corporate interest of his social group. Worse, besides his absolute cynicism, Mirabeau was a libertine whose only considerations were sex, money, and public acclaim. No one, according to Liubimov, should be surprised at Mirabeau's character, considering the fact that his family possessed the same amoral traits. In more general terms, the lecherous immorality of Mirabeau and his family was typical of a considerable number of the French elite who represented the actual spirit of the Enlightenment.

After 1789, Liubimov implied, the monarchy was doomed and a radicalized (read brutalized) revolution was inevitable.

Although the monarchy was doomed after 1789, the activities of the political elite speeded up the process of radicalization. Here Liubimov turned his attention to the Girondists. He found them lacking moral standards, as he had the previous revolutionary elite; yet he recognized that both groups had their own specificity. What made the Girondists different was their political naivet. The Girondists, more than any other group, were "ideologists," in the sense that they read the philosophy of the Enlightenment not as a license for immorality, but found in it political paradigms upon which they wanted to build a new society. In short, the Girondists, in contrast to the previous leaders of France, were not driven exclusively by their self-interest--they had ideological motivation. The point of their ideological paradigms was the idea of a republican government and, implicitly, the idealization of the populace. Because Rousseau's teachings see the population as the source of power, they provided inspiration for the Girondists' beliefs.

Liubimov did not see the French populace as being blood-thirsty, as present day revisionists have. He rejected the notion that the people of Paris were involved in the September Massacre; this was the work of revolutionaries who had used paid scum. At the same time, Liubimov stated, the populace could not govern on its own; the general appeal to democracy contained in the philosophy of the Enlightenment was invalid--the masses were ignorant, gullible, and stupid and had no sense of their best long-term
interest. The Girondists' republicanism had only sped the destruction of the monarchy and the rise of the Jacobins, whom Liubimov portrayed as vicious brutes, who had radicalized (read brutalized) society. The ending to the Revolution, then, was logical and predictable. Neither the Thermidoreans nor Napoleon were able to provide a remedy, and the French Revolution ended up laying the foundation for the problems which pestered Western society up to the present.

While Liubimov represented those Russian conservatives who objected to the Russian reforms and those who regarded most of the Russian bureaucracy as a subversive element, Ger'e represented a different breed of conservative intellectual. His views were more moderate, and he tended to direct most of his criticism at Russian radicals rather than the liberals. And this is certainly reflected in his views of the French Revolution.

Younger than Liubimov, Ger'e was still a student when Liubimov began his intellectual career. Later, Ger'e acknowledged that he had been a radical in his earlier years, both in his views and his behavior. He had been a student of Timofei N. Granovskii, a venerable liberal intellectual who had launched the serious study of West European history in Russia. But the French Revolution was outside of Granovskii's research and teaching interests because the topic was too sensitive for Nicholas' Russia. It was Ger'e who fulfilled his teacher's dream and began researching and teaching the French Revolution when the reforms of Alexander II allowed him to do so. At the time of Alexander's reforms, Ger'e was still a liberal, although he was not inspired enough by the Jacobins to wish for a repeat of their actions on Russian soil. Yet, he saw the French Revolution as a great event and lambasted Taine for his criticism of the Revolution in toto.

But as events progressed in Russia the reforms failed to appease society as Alexander had hoped. Instead, the slackening of police control and the general political and social shake up in the country led to the rise of the Russian revolutionary movement usually known as populism. There were several attempts to assassinate czarist bureaucrats, and the emperor himself was the target...
of several unsuccessful attempts. On March 1, 1881, he was finally assassinated. These events strongly affected Ger'e's views on the Russian present and the French past, and he became a conservative. The 1905 and 1917 Revolutions, which Ger'e witnessed, solidified his conservative views. The popularity of revolutionary ideology among his students, with whom Ger'e never had a good relationship, provided him with additional feedback for thinking about how the French scenario could possibly be reincarnated in Russia. And here he was in definite disagreement with Liubimov.

For Liubimov, the French monarchy had been destroyed within, by an elite which itself had been part of the establishment. The revolutionary cycle had begun if not at the time of the Congress of Notables, at least in 1789. At that moment, the country had entered 'free fall'. Liubimov attributed the collapse of the regime mostly to ideology inspired by the Enlightenment. For him this ideology had no positive meaning and could actually be reduced to a preaching for lecherous cynicism and self-centeredness, either on a group or personal level. Even when he admitted that ideology (i.e., a set of beliefs about certain political systems), had played a role in the Girondists' activity, he implied that ideology apparently had no influence on the course of events for the fate of the revolution was sealed long before.

Ger'e, while sharing many elements of Liubimov's philosophy, was different in many respects. Ger'e, too, was hardly an advocate of sharing of power between the French monarchy and the people's representatives. In his view, any real compromise between the two elements would have been impossible. However, Ger'e assumed that the monarchy could have struck an accord with the moderate representatives of the liberal opposition, and he did not see the French bureaucratic and aristocratic establishment as the source of the major troubles of the monarchy. He even implied that the Congress of Notables was summoned without any harm for the monarchy. The monarchy had not been destroyed by cynical bureaucratic moles within, but by the radicals--the Jacobins. It was implicit that Ger'e assumed that the lib-
eral Girondists were never really in control, even in 1792; the real struggle was actually going on inside radical circles. Like Liubimov, Ger'e did not believe that the radicals truly represented any social interests on a broad scale, that they were spokesmen for other social groups in the Marxist meaning of the word. Ger'e, in his capacity as a conservative scholar, hardly elaborated on the social and economic problems of the French lower classes. The driving force behind the radicals was ideology; yet Ger'e saw the ideological motivation of the radicals in a different manner than Liubimov had. He had a sort of social explanation for the Jacobin phenomenon.

Ger'e agreed with Liubimov, in the sense that he, too, found a strain of cynicism in quite a few of the Jacobins. Yet this was not a cynicism of a greedy, well-to-do elite. The unscrupulousness of the Jacobins was owing to the real problems any society faced. In order to explain the mentality of the Jacobins, Ger'e turned to Taine, whom he quoted liberally to provide material for his own ideological constructions. According to Ger'e, each society experiences problems in dealing with its educated youth. His point here was that there were simply too many ambitious young people and too few top positions. When the leaders of a society tell youngsters that hard work and talent will inevitably lead to success, in many respects they misrepresent the entire picture. Indeed, any leader could be compared to a Napoleon who had asserted that each soldier in his army had a marshal's button in his knapsack. As life had shown to those who managed to survive the endless battles of the French empire, the majority of soldiers would find nothing in their knapsacks. Though there might be rewards for some, only the very few would ever attain the highest offices and thus they were more likely to become radicals. Indeed, according to Ger'e: Ambitious and dissatisfied youth were "more or less Jacobins."

In Ger'e's view, the problem of dissatisfaction among educated and ambitious youth was not something unusual. In stable societies, where there was a strong system of control, the majority would find positions that satisfied their needs, and the rebel-
lous would be subdued by society. This was not the case, however, in politically unstable societies where ambition could foster brutality and cynicism, if too many upstarts tried to secure a place in the sun. By 1793, the Jacobins' meteoric rise to power, their need to solidify this power, had corrupted them and produced tyrannical brutes.

While Ger'e agreed that cynicism and unbridled ambition were major reasons for the Jacobins' rise and the Reign of Terror, he differed from Liubimov, in that he saw other important reasons for the events, besides general brutalization and moral debasement. Ger'e's vision of the philosophy of the Enlightenment was essentially different from Liubimov's. The gist of the Enlightenment, as Ger'e saw it, was not that its philosophy was implicitly related to moral debasement and a particularly strong pull toward unbridled profligacy, but the philosophy's vision of an ideal society. This aspect of the Enlightenment made it close to a religious doctrine, and in this context it could be better placed in the middle ages rather than in modern time.

The nature of Ger'e's intellectual life can easily explain this approach to the Enlightenment. In contrast to Liubimov, who was mostly engaged in never-ending battles with members of the Russian political and educational elite whom he saw as cynical and treacherous, Ger'e's main target was his mostly radical students. Many of them were inclined to oppositionist ideas because of the hardships of life and the bleak prospects for the future, although material considerations were hardly the only thing that drove them to the side of the terrorists. A terrorist could hardly benefit from his activities. The authorities apprehended most of them and sent them either to hard labor or to the gallows. Ger'e acknowledged that the radicals' behavior could not always be explained away as the actions of ambitious and embittered daredevils; to Ger'e, quite a few Russian radicals were "true believers." And Ger'e discovered similar traits in the French revolutionaries, whose terroristic drive could be explained in the context of their ideological paradigms, actually quasireligious dogma. Here Ger'e chose to deal with two philosophers and their philo-
sophical paradigms—Rousseau and Mably. Both of these philosophers had social doctrines quite similar to the political philosophies Russian radicals preached. The thrust of Rousseau's doctrine, at least as it was read by Ger'e, was its idealization of the people and thus of democracy. The point of Mably's doctrine was the belief that an enlightened revolutionary despot could create an ideal society. Ger'e attacked these philosophers both in his public lectures and his published works.

The majority of Russian Populists idealized the populace, yet their philosophy was rooted in Slavophile doctrine. This doctrine was essentially the product of conservative thought and stated that the Russian people were Christian in their very nature, and for this reason were bound to sacrifice for their fellow citizens. This is the source of Russian collectivism. While the Russian people were true Christians and thus collectivized, Westerners were pagan and therefore individualistic and brutish. These conservative intellectuals' ideas were in no way revolutionary or a threat to the monarchy. The Slavophiles stated, first of all, that all Russians possessed these benign characteristics, not only the masses. Secondly, this was an entirely Russian, or to be more precise Slavic, phenomenon.

The radical Populists adjusted this doctrine for their needs. They stated that the benign characteristics belonged only to the peasants not the elite. In addition, the Populists believed that a socialist, post Revolutionary Russia would stretch its hand out to the West and help create a happy socialist society there. This implied that Western people could be like Russians and become collectivists, and further that good moral properties were the property of all people and people could create a harmonious society. Because of the spread of these ideas among his students, Ger'e attacked Rousseau, in whose philosophy Ger'e found similarities to the philosophy of the radicals.²⁴

According to Ger'e, Rousseau had actually divided the people of every nation into two basic categories. First were the elite, actually all educated people; second were the masses, people without education. In Rousseau's vision, Ger'e asserted, the elite
could never build a society based on mutual help; in fact, no society could exist where only the attitude of the elite permeated it completely, for a society's survival depends upon its citizens' willingness to sacrifice for the good of the state. The French philosopher had rejected the notion that the interests of society must coincide with the interests of each member of the society. The implication here, according to Ger'e, was that those who act for the benefit of society must act by instinct and not by reason. Reason would impel a person to act in his own self-interest not in the interests of society. And "instinct" and "heart" were qualities of the ignored populace, not of the elite who lived according to "reason." The underlying message of this philosophical paradigm was simple enough: Once the fetters of the egotistical elite were loosened, the populace would be free to create a society of virtuous individuals who lived according to "instinct."

Although Rousseau's philosophy fit the philosophical doctrine of the Populists better than anything else, he was not the only thinker whose ideas were in tune with the ideas of the Russian radicals of that period. Mably was another such thinker, and he too was a subject of Ger'e's research and teaching. According to Ger'e, Mably differed from Rousseau in that he believed a harmonious society could be created, but not by the masses, but rather by enlightened philosophers whose moral caliber was of much higher standards than the contemporary elite. Mably's fanciful thinking, the desire to create a utopia, had a strong influence on Russian radicals' vision of the events of the French Revolution. The terroristic drive in the French Revolution was carried out by the true believers of these utopian visions, the only difference being that some did it in the name of the populace, others in the name of the new breed of the elite. All such attempts, Ger'e argued, are doomed to failure. The result had brought nothing to France nor to humanity, except millions of dead, and the slaughter would be repeated in Russia if Russian radicals came to power.

In conclusion, one could say that despite its cultural similarities, Western civilization is by no means a homogenous phenom-
There are strong differences between American and West European thinking. In America, regardless of their political disagreements, representatives of the American cultural elite have never been truly relativistic, despite all their play with fashionable relativistic theories, mostly imported from Europe. Among other things, American social scientists rarely "deconstruct" political and social reality, never truly challenge the two sacred cows of American political culture—the essential goodness of the people and the American vision that democracy is the proper future for all of humanity. Thus, because Americans have preserved the major political and philosophical premises of the Enlightenment, recent changes have not led to conservatism, but "restorationism," i.e. a return to the old ways, the ways of the Founding Fathers, at least as they are fancied. Since the philosophical fabric remains intact, the changes have not made much difference in the country's intellectual and political discourse. The situation is rather different in Europe where relativistic ideas are more entrenched. There, the move to the right has changed intellectual and political discourse. Above all, it has led to criticism of the notion about the essential goodness of the people and thus implicitly of democracy itself.

This result can be seen in the European revisionist historians' vision of the French Revolution. While their vision can hardly be expected to strike a receptive vein among American scholars, it is quite in tune with what was preached by West and East European (Russian) conservative intellectuals, both in the past and present. This emphasizes that West European and Russian conservatism have more in common than West European and American conservatism. And what can be seen in the past will be revealed as the present as the cleavage developing between American and West European conservatism becomes more pronounced. The end of the Cold War provides impetus for a questioning of the notion of a unified "Atlantic" civilization. The political implication of this, if any, remains to be seen.
NOTES


3. This was one of the major reasons why Schama extolled Mirabeau, whom he sees as dying with heroic stocisim (Ibid., p. 542).

4. This age is calculated on the basis of the phrase: "By 1877 Professor Liubimov had spent twenty-five years as a teacher, which secured for him a full pension." K. P. *Pobedonosstev i ego korespondentyi*, 2 vols. (Petrograd: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1923), I:252.


8. Ibid., p. 125.

9. Ibid., p. 37.


11. Ibid., p. 825.

12. Ibid., p. 13.


22. Ibid.
23. V. Ger'e, "Demokraticheskii tsevarizm," *Vestnik Evropy*, July 1895, p. 61.
24. V. Ger'e, "Poniatie o narode u Russo," *Russkaia Mysl',* No. 5 (1882).
25. V. Geer'e, "Frantsuzskii etik sotsialist XVIII veka," *Russkaia Mysl',* October 1883.