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GIOVANNI CODEVILLA*

MILITARY LANGUAGE IN THE CONSTITUTIONAL LAWS OF SOVIET RUSSIA

Corrected version

The author examines the impact of military language in the Constitutions of the Soviet Union, and shows how this particular terminology, which derives directly from the military structure of the party, even extends to the language of politics and the world of production. The Soviet Union has carried out a process of militarizing society with one aim in mind: to transform the conscience of man and society. This process is directly reflected in the language, and the use of military terminology, in both the technical and metaphorical senses, reinforces Bolshevism's propagandistic content and expresses at the same time the aggressive nature of this worldview. Military language, understood as a tool for mobilizing the masses, ultimately becomes a tool for enslaving the population.

Key Words: ideological language, linguistic manipulation, metaphor, political communication, rhetoric

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I

From its very outset, the Bolshevik party revealed two basic features: a claim of being the unique owner of truth; and a firm intention of transforming the conscience of man and society through the destruction of social systems based on inequality and exploitation.

Bolshevism therefore proposed and imposed a real war that sought the annihilation of evil and the triumph of good. Its political and legal documents are extremely adamant regarding the necessity of such a war, which begins with a dictatorship of the proletariat, and make frequent use of military terminology.

The constant reminder for the “strict observance of order” (*dlja sobljudenija strožajščego porjadka*) that one finds in the Land Decree, is reformulated in a number of similar ways, for example, *revolutionary order*, or absolute order (*polnyj porjadok*), which is justified on the basis of the threat of aggression (*agressija, napadenie*) resulting from the encirclement by capitalism (*okruženie*, a concept that is repeated obsessively for decades in the press and in political literature).

This encirclement imposed upon all members the duty of remaining vigilant (*bditel'nost'*) in the face of the enemy, and created a war-like climate that had a tremendous impact upon social life: one example of this is the principle of collective responsibility in criminal law, a notion that was affirmed by Bolshevism from the very beginning, and later developed by Vyšinskij.

The military lexicon strengthens the propagandistic content and *agitacija* typical of soviet social and political language, and is well suited to Bolshevism's military structure. This has its starting point, in fact, in the aggressive nature of Leninist ideology, with its determination to destroy the society of its time. The primitive, spare, standardized and repetitive language is a consequence of such aggressiveness; it couldn't be otherwise, since cultural closure can only generate a system of verbal communication that is just as equally restricted.

Sometimes this language, which was a tool for mobilizing the masses, was used in its technical sense, as in the case of class struggle, which as noted above was an actual war, or in the case of the elimination of class enemies; and other times, it was used in a metaphorical sense, as in the case of the military lexicon frequently found in the world of labor and production.

II

In the first Bolshevik Constitution (July 1918) the soviet lawmakers repeatedly use military terminology, both in the proper and metaphorical senses.

Among the Constitution's objectives, listed in article 3, we find: the suppression (*uničtoženie*) of man's exploitation of man in whatever form it takes; the total abolishment (*ustranenie*) of class divisions in society; and the ruthless suppression of exploiters (*bespoščadnoe podavlenie*: Lenin was quite fond of these expressions). There is no doubt that the words have militaristic content: *uničtožit' vragov*, *uničtoženie protivnika*¹, or *podavit' vosstanie*, *podavit' artillerijskim ognem batareju protivnika*, *podavit' mjateža*² and so forth. The word suppression is repeated in article 9, which clearly states that the fundamental goal of the Constitution is the "establishment of the dictatorship of urban, agricultural proletariat and of the poorest peasants (...) with the aim of a total suppression (*polnogo podavlenija*) of the bourgeoisie". The word *uničtoženie* also appears in article 3/e (according to the Cyrillic alphabet), which establishes the general obligation to work "with the aim of destroying the parasitic strata of society."

The term victory (*pobeda*) appears twice in the 1918 Constitution (art. 3)³, which states that the fundamental goal of the Russian Republic is to "firmly advance in this direction until the complete victory (*polnoj pobedy*) of the revolt of the international proletariat against the yoke of capital" [is achieved]. It also declares that the law canceling the debts of the previous government is to be considered a "first strike" against international financial capital (the term is *udar*: a typically military term that will give rise to many neologisms, following the Bolshevik practice of creating new words (*slovotvorčestvo*), as we will see later on).

Article 3, subsection d, points out that the nationalization of banks is one of the conditions for "the liberation (*osvoboždenija*) of the working

¹ To destroy the enemies, destroy the adversary.

² To suppress a revolt, to suppress with artillery fire enemy battery, to suppress a rebellion.

³ Even in the subsequent Fundamental Laws one frequently comes across the term *victory* or its adjectival form in reference to communism. See, Message from the Presidium of the CIK of the USSR, June 13, 1923 (three times); Preamble to the 1977 Constitution (three times); article 6 of the 1977 Constitution; or the mention of revolutionary conquests (art. 19, Const. 1918, and especially in the 1977 Constitution: three times in the Preamble and articles 31 and 46).

masses from the yoke of capital”, which is by definition the enemy *par excellence*.

Finally, the same article 3 (point ž) orders the arming of workers (*vooruženie trudjaščichsja*)⁴ and the establishment of the Socialist Red Army, thus creating an openly militarized society that coherently calls for the complete disarmament (*polnoe razoruženie*) of the property-owning classes.

It is obvious that the new regime wanted to carry out a process of militarizing society and at the same time politicizing the Army⁵, through the help of the well-known ČK⁶.

The term fight or struggle (*bor'ba*) is used only once in the 1918 Constitution, specifically in article 7, which states “The Third all-Russian Congress of the Soviet of Deputies of workers, soldiers and peasants believes that now, in the moment of the decisive fight (*v moment rešitel'noj bor'by*) of the proletariat against its exploiters, there must be no room for the ex-

⁴ On April 22, 1918, the Central Executive Committee issued a decree establishing compulsory general military training (*Vsevobuč*) for workers and peasants between the ages of 18 and 40. On May 29th of that year, the same authorities decreed the general conscription into the Red Army.

⁵ The decree of the Soviet of the People's Commissars on the organization of the Worker-Peasant's Red Army (RKKa, *Raboče-Krest'janskaja Krasnaja Armija*) was made on January 15 (28), 1918.

The army's party alliance (*partijnost'*)—clearly evidenced by the use of the adjective ‘socialist’ in the constitutional text to describe the army, as well as in the disarmament of the property-owning class, an act expressly sanctioned by the Constitution—is confirmed by this decree, which also asserts Bolshevism's expansionist nature (text in: *Dekrety sovetskoj vlasti*, 1957, vol. 1, Moscow, p. 356).

The preamble states: “With the passage of power to the working and exploited classes, there arises the need to create a new army that is the bastion of soviet power today, a foundation for substituting in the near future the standing army with an armed populous, one that serves to support the future socialist revolution in Europe.”

In line with this premise, article 1 states that the Red Army must be made up of “the most knowledgeable and organized elements of the working classes”, a requirement verified by military committees and “social democratic organizations” that accept the “platform of soviet power” and also by “social and party organizations”; in other words, by structures affiliated with Bolshevism which was, by definition, the only real *knowledgeable* force.

⁶ ČK, an acronym for *Črezvyčajnaja Komissija*, was also called *Črezvyčajka*, while VČK stands for *Vserossijskaja črezvyčajnaja Komissija (po bor'be s kontrrevoljuciej i sabotazem)*, All-Russian Extraordinary Commission (for the suppression of counter-revolution and sabotage). Even though it was established soon after the overthrow of 1917, and hence several months before the enactment of the Constitutional Charter of the RSFSR of 1918, and even though it had a truly *extraordinary* role, it's not at all mentioned in the Fundamental Laws of 1918. Only the GPU and OGPU are mentioned in article 12 of the Treaty of Union of the USSR of December 30, 1922, and in article 61 of the 1924

plotters in any of the organs of power. The power must belong entirely and exclusively to the working masses and to their plenipotentiary representation: to the Soviet of Deputies of workers, soldiers and peasants.”

This claim lends itself to wide interpretation, since it seems to place on an equal level in the management of power the working masses and the soviet, in clear contrast to the precepts decreed in article 1 of the Constitution, which clearly affirm that “Russia declares itself the Soviet Republic of the Deputies of workers, soldiers and peasants. All central and local power belongs to the Soviet.”

In reality, the Soviets acted in the name and on account of workers; in accordance with this principle, the lawmakers of the subsequent article 65 denied electoral rights to those persons who, not being part of the working classes, were *a priori* considered as elements hostile to the new regime and thus identified as enemies⁷.

The term *ochrana* (meaning defense or protection, as well as guard

Constitution. Lenin fully supported the militarization of society carried out by the Čeka.

On this point we remind the reader of Lenin's letter to G. E. Zinov'ev (Radomysl'skij) dated June 26, 1918, in which he complains that the *čekisty* had not allowed the workers of Petrograd to respond with methods of terror to the assassination of V. Volodarskij (M. M. Gol'dštejn)—director of the *Krasnaja Gazeta* and Commissar of press affairs, propaganda and activism (*agitacija*) for Petrograd and the Northern Region—committed June 20, 1918 by Sergeev, a socialist revolutionary of the left. Lenin wrote: “Today we found out that the workers of Piter [author's note: the name commonly used for Petrograd by its inhabitants] wanted to respond to the killing of Volodarskij with mass terror and that you held them back. I strongly protest! We compromise ourselves: we promise mass terror in the Sovdep resolutions, and when the moment arrives we block the revolutionary initiative of the masses. This is not pos – si – ble! The terrorists will think we're spineless. Militarization is the order of the day. We must encourage the mass energy and character of terror towards the counter-revolutionaries, especially in Petrograd, where the example must be *decisive*” (see V.I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij*, *op. cit.*, vol. 35, p. 275).

Along the same lines one reads in an issue of *Pravda* from August 4, 1918: “Workers and the poor, take up arms, learn to shoot, be prepared for a rebellion of the kulaks or the white guards, rise up against whomever acts against the Soviet power, ten bullets to those who raise their hands against them... The domination of capital will be extinguished only when the last capitalist, the last nobleman, the last Christian, the last officer draw their last breaths” (quoted in Levitskij, B. 1969, *L'inquisizione rossa*, Florence, p. 21).

⁷ On September 23, 1918, the Soviet of the People's Commissars issued a decree establishing the compulsory registration, under penalty of being accused of high treason, of all landowners, capitalists and high functionaries of the *ancien régime*, in order to provide the Bolsheviks with lists of hostages to arrest in case of need (cf. Bach, L. 1923. *Le droit et les institutions de la Russie soviétique*, Paris, p. 147). In reality, the principle of vigilance was introduced by Lenin himself: in the decree on the Extraordinary Commis-

sion sent to Dzeržinskij, Lenin states that all those who are well-off, as well as all employees, are required, under the threat of sanctions, to declare themselves as “potentially suspect persons and to always carry a document attesting to their suspect status” (cf. Lenin, V.I. *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij, op. cit.*, vol. 35, pp. 157-158).

Vigilance was necessarily associated with repression, a concept that Lenin so obsessively insisted upon that one has an overabundance of quotes to choose from. An ordinance from October 10, 1919 on the “Responsibility for the malicious destruction of train equipment” (S.U. RSFSR, 1919, n. 50, 488) is rather eloquent on this point: “Shoot whoever is caught at the scene of the crime as a form of immediate punishment. Whoever is suspected of the crime, but is not caught at the scene, must be judged within 24 hours in accordance with war-time laws.”

“All members of the bourgeois class, men and women, who are capable of working must be placed in a special battalion to dig trenches on the front lines under the watch of the Red Guard; shoot whoever protests” (Cf. “The socialist Fatherland is in danger”, Ordinance of the Soviet of the People’s Commissars, February 21, 1918, article 6, in *Pravda*, February 22, 1918).

One cannot, however, claim that the terror was directed only towards those considered enemies of Bolshevism due to their class or professional affiliation: it struck all those who did not show an explicit and unconditional support of the new regime. By way of example, we note a clause in the ordinance of the Soviet of Defense dated February 15, 1919 written by Lenin himself: “Put Skljanskij, Markov, Petrovskij and Dzeržinskij in charge of immediately arresting members of the Executive Committee and the committees for the poor in those areas in which snow removal is not wholly satisfactory (*ne upolne udovletvoritel’no*). In those same areas take hostages from among the peasants and shoot them until the snow removal is carried out. Order that within one week a report be provided regarding the implementation of the above measures, indicating the number of arrests made” (cf. A.A. V.V. 1995, *Lenin i VČK*, Moscow, pp. 151-152).

Taking hostages and ordering shootings were undoubtedly ideas that occupied Lenin. Thus, he hastily notes in the margin of a telegram denouncing that the District Executive Committees were incapable of meeting the people needed for carrying out certain types of work: “To Dzeržinskij: shouldn’t one arrest two or three members of each Executive Committee?” (ibid. p. 184). And again, in a note to Skljanskij dated June 8, 1919: “It’s necessary to increase the taking of hostages among the bourgeoisie and officers’ families, given the frequency of treason. Discuss it with Dzeržinskij” (ibid. p. 216). On January 31, 1922, Lenin wrote to I.S. Unšlicht: “The publicity (*glasnost*) of the revolutionary tribunals isn’t necessary. You must strengthen their ties (at any cost) with the VČK using *our* people; increase the rate and *strength* of their suppression; raise the Central Committee’s attention to this. The smallest increase in incidents of banditry and similar acts must entail the proclamation of martial law and on the spot executions. The Soviet of the People’s Commissars is capable of working rapidly, provided you don’t lose the opportunity, and can do so even by telephone.” (cf. Lenin, I. V. *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij, op. cit.*, vol. 54, p. 144).

Following the assassination of Volodarskij (June 20, 1918) and the attack on Lenin (August 30, 1918), the all-Russian Soviet of the People’s Commissars issued a decree on September 5th legalizing the *red terror* to which the Čeka undoubtedly made important contributions (cf. *Izvestija*, September 10, 1918, n. 195 and S.U. RSFSR, 1918, n. 789). The decree, signed by the Secretary of the Soviet V. D. Bonč-Bruevič, and by the People’s Commissars for Justice (D. I. Kurskij) and Internal Affairs (G. I. Petrovskij), states: “The Soviet of the People’s Commissars, after having listened to the statement of the President of the Extraordinary Commission for the struggle against the counter-revolution, speculation and sabotage about the activities of the Commission itself, believes that in light of the current situation, the security behind the front lines must be guaran-

teed through terror. However, in order to reinforce the activity of the all-Russian Extraordinary Commission and give it greater balance, it is indispensable that there be included in the Commission as many responsible party comrades as possible. At the same time, in order to protect the Soviet Republic, it is necessary to isolate the class enemies in concentration camps. All those persons involved in White Guard organizations, in conspiracies or rebellions, must be shot. Lastly, it is crucial to publish the names of those shot and the reason for their execution.”

Following these events, the People's Commissar for Internal Affairs (G.I. Petrovskij) sent a telegram to all the local authorities stating that “the insufficient čekist repression shows that, despite their incessant talk about the mass terror against socialist revolutionaries, the White Guard and the bourgeoisie, this terror remains mere words. One must immediately put an end to this laxity and good manners. All socialist revolutionaries known to the local soviets must be arrested. A large number of hostages from among the bourgeoisie and officers must be taken. Moreover, at the least sign of resistance it is necessary to shoot en masse these hostages. The Executive Committees of the Soviet provinces must provide proof of some particular initiative in this field. The administrative sections of the Executive Committees must adopt all measures, with the aid of the Militia and the Čeka, for uncovering and arresting all those hiding behind false identities and must shoot without hesitation all those who maintain connections with the White Guard. The above listed measures must be immediately applied. Each decision concerning these issues taken by any agency of the local soviets must be immediately referred to the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs. The back lines of our army must be cleaned of all White Guards and those who conspire with them. No hesitation and no indecision in the application of mass terror. Confirm the receipt of the present telegram” (Cf. “Eženedel'nik”, September 22, 1918, n. 1, p. 11, French text in J. Baynac, J. 1975. *La terreur sous Lénine*, Paris, p. 63).

In carrying out this order, the Čeka of Petrograd shot 500 hostages (cf. “Eženedel'nik”, n. 5, October 20, 1918, on this topic see also Mel'gunov, S.P. 1923. *Krasnyj terror v Rossii 1918-1923*, Berlin, p. 21); the author notes that even the Pjatigorsk *Izvestija* of November 2, 1918, n. 157, announced the execution of 59 people, including counter-revolutionaries and hostages, and listed another 47 people who, though shot according to official accounts, were actually stabbed to death (ibid. p. 26).

For the rest, if one leafs through the “Eženedel'nik” of that period one finds, as motives for the sentences, accusations of being a “capitalist”, an “old officer” among other accusations that are no more credible, such as “counter-revolutionary activity”, “spying”, “fraudulent gains in gambling” (ibid.). As notes A. V. Obolonskij, other accusations included “hooliganism”, “refusal of one's working duties”, “formal and bureaucratic behavior” and “inability to help the starving workers” (Obolonskij. 1994. *Drama russoj političeskoj istorii. Sistema protiv ličnosti*, Moscow, p. 261 and cited sources).

In the Bolshevik judges' way of thinking, the presumption of guilt was automatically determined by one's class membership, in keeping with Lenin's assertion that: “All the elements of the breakdown of the old society, which necessarily are great in number and tied principally to the small bourgeoisie [...] cannot help but reveal themselves when faced with such profound upheaval. And the elements of this breakdown (*razloženijsa*) cannot help but reveal themselves through the increase in crime, hooliganism, corruption, speculation and misdeeds of every kind. In order to get through this, time is needed as well *an iron hand* (*nužna železnaja ruka*)” (Lenin, V.I. *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij*, *op. cit.*, vol. 36, p. 195).

service or guards)—which does not have an exclusively military connotation—is mentioned just once in article 19 establishing compulsory military service “with the aim of defending by whatever means (*v celjach vsemernoj ochrany*) the achievements (*zavoevanij*, a term having greater military significance with respect to the synonym *dostiženij*) of the Great workers’ and peasants’ revolution (...)”.

The term ‘Presidium’ (of the all-Russian Central Executive Committee of Soviets) found in article 45 of the Constitution and in all the provisions, has no military significance: in fact, the word’s original meaning in Latin was later lost in German, from which Russian took it, eventually becoming synonymous with presidency.

Article 79 declares that the financial policy of the Republic “pursues the fundamental goal of the expropriation of the bourgeoisie”. Now, we do not claim that the term *ekspropriacija* has a military meaning; rather, we want to stress that this goal had been achieved by the Army for supplies and requisitions (*Prodarmija, Prodovol’stvennaja Rekvizionnaja Armija*), which was founded during the spring of 1918, that is to say, before the approval of the Constitution in which no mention is made of it. This was a real Army, albeit one dedicated to specific tasks and targets.

A term that does not appear in the Constitution is that of “war communism”, which consists in the dictatorship of the proletariat with the primary aim of abolishing exploitation and mercilessly suppressing those responsible for such exploitation, as already mentioned.

It is important to note that during the Eighth Party Congress (at the end of 1919) the party’s new statute was approved: this document established both a hierarchical structure and the principle of military discipline (*voennaja disciplina*). According to this principle, party members were to receive mandatory basic military education and were the only ones entitled to be part of the Special Intervention troops led by M. N. Tuchačevskij, and often engaged in suppressing peasant rebellions (*Č.O.N.: Časti osobogo naznačeniija*).⁸

The party thus adopted a military structure, becoming “the operative center of the front line of the working class” (*Partija est’ boevoj štab rabočego klassa*⁹).

⁸ In the soviet language there are several armies: *armija truda*, *ogromnaja komso-mol’skaja Armija*, *Kul’tarmija* (engaged in the program for literacy). One speaks also of cultural marches (*kul’tpochod*), i.e. group visits to cultural centers such as museums, theaters, and cinemas.

⁹ See: Ožegov, S. I., 1973, *Slovar’ russkogo jazyka*, Moscow 1973, heading: Štab.

The desire on the part of lawmakers to bring about a militarized society is shown, finally, by the use of the terms People's Commissar and People's Commissariat, in place of Minister and Ministry. It's not by chance that the term *Komissar* acquired greater military significance especially during the period 1918-1942 with the establishment of the military Commissar (*Voennyj komissar*)—the political director of an army division who was responsible for its combat readiness and political loyalty¹⁰.

Lastly, one could legitimately ask whether the term 'revolution' (*revoljucija*) has military significance, at least in the case of the USSR where the radical overthrow of social life came about through military force, beyond the etymology of the term itself, which originally has a different meaning.

A quantitative analysis of the aggressive nature and repeated use of military metaphors in Soviet political language would be useful. One finds terms such as *rasstrelivat'* (to shoot, for example: *rasstreljali založnikov*, they shot the hostages) and, as noted above, expressions like *bespoščadnoe podavlenie* (merciless repression) used with surprising frequency.

III

The use of military language is also characteristic of later Constitutional documents.

In reading the Declaration on the formation of the USSR of December 20th, 1922, one immediately intuites the Bolshevik regime's concern for its own survival. Because of this concern, it emphasized the strength of the enemy both inside and outside of the country in order to bind the population together.

The domestic enemy was the enemy of the people (*vrag naroda*).

¹⁰ In the spring of 1918, the all-Russian Office of Military Commissars was established as part of the People's Commissariat for Military Affairs. The Commissars, who benefited from the rights given to commanders, were chosen from the Bolshevik party and also from the socialist revolutionary party of the left, prior to its suppression. In the fall of that year the Office was transformed into the Political Administration of the *Revvoensovet* (Soviet Revolutionary Military, presided over by Trockij. Cf. *Revvoensovet, Revoljucionnyj Voennyj Sovet, and Sistematičeskij Sbornik Važnejščich Dekretov 1917-1920*, Moscow 1920, p. 62 ff.).

Further evidence of Bolshevism's military structure is found in the creation, on November 30, 1918, of the Soviet for the defense of workers and peasants (*Sovet Rabočej i Krest'janskoj Oborony*, sometimes simply mentioned as *Sovet Oborony*) presided over by Lenin and which even included Trockij. It was given the task of militarizing the most important branches of industry.

Those persons or groups listed in article 65 of the 1918 Constitution belong by definition to this category, namely: those who make use of wage-earning workers in order to make a profit; those who live from the interest on capital or property; merchants and commercial middlemen; monks and religious ministers; employees and agents of the old police, or of the special defense troops, as well as the members of the imperial family; those convicted of crimes of cupidity and depravation¹¹ for a period set by law or judicial sentence, and so forth. These people were denied electoral rights as well as food coupons.

It is interesting to note that among the penalties provided for in the Principles of Criminal Law issued in 1919,¹² one finds: compulsory political instruction (*politgramota*); the isolation of the condemned from all social relations (*ob"javlenie pod bojkotom*); and their declaration as an enemy of the revolution or of the people (*ob"javlenie vragom revoljucii ili naroda*).

Such sanctions were frequently applied to entire groups of people; for example, in November of 1917 the party of the Cadets (constitutional democrats) was classified as an "enemy of the people", with imaginable consequences. The party-controlled administration of justice, made even worse by the indiscriminate application of the principle of analogy in criminal law, could only lead to unlimited abuses: it's not by chance that already in June of 1918 an ordinance of the People's Commissariat for Justice authorized revolutionary tribunals to freely choose the punishment to be applied.¹³ To this is added the truly aberrant fact that punishments having no limit as to their duration were perfectly lawful!¹⁴

The new regime's fear for its survival, due to the disastrous economic and social situation, pushed it to wave the threat of an "imperialist" attack, thus justifying the need for uniting the forces favorable to socialism in order to resist encirclement by the enemy. As a result, the military terminology in the Declaration is direct and free of euphemistic attempts.

¹¹ *Osuzdennye za korystnye i poročasčie prestuplenija*. The law is intentionally formulated in extremely vague and imprecise terms, in order to lend itself to the most extensive and elastic interpretations.

¹² Cf. Ordinance of the People's Commissariat for Justice of December 12, 1919; cf. S.U. RSFSR, 1919, n. 66, 3. The text is also in: *Čhrestomatija po istorii otečestvennogo gosudarstva i prava. Posleoktjabr'skij period*, ed. O. Čistjakov, Moscow 1994, p. 63ff.

¹³ Cf. Isaev, I.A. 1999. *Istorija gosudarstva i prava Rossii*, Moscow, pp. 403-404.

¹⁴ Article 25 of the Directive Principles includes among the punishments: "the denial of liberty for a determinate period, or indeterminate period, until an agreed event takes place." (*na opredelennyj srok, ili na neopredelennyj srok do nastuplenija izvestnogo sobytija*, point n). This amounts to saying, for example: until the complete victory of communism, or until the definitive defeat of the bourgeoisie, and so on!

Despite this climate of fear, the Declaration and the Treaty of Union of the USSR of December 30, 1922 (and the Constitution of 1924), maintain a certain triumphal and military tone: “in solemnly proclaiming the unshakable bases—*nezyblemost’ osnov*—of the Soviet power”...the lawmakers begin by claiming that the Soviet Republics “succeeded in resisting the attack (*otbit’ napadenija*) of imperialists from throughout the world” and in “successfully terminating (*likvidirovat*) the civil war”.

“On the other hand, the instability of the international situation and the danger of new attacks (*napadenij*) make the creation of a single front (*edinogo fronta*) of the Soviet Republic against capitalist encirclement (*okruženie*) unavoidable.”¹⁵

In reinforcing outward security, the new Federal State presented itself “as the crowning achievement of those principles of peaceful coexistence (*mirnoe sožitel’stvo*),” one that would “serve as a sure bastion (*vernym oplo-tom*) against world capitalism...”

As one can see, military terminology characterizes the phrases cited above.

The provision of article 12 of the Treaty of Union of the USSR is significant: in establishing the Supreme Court (as part of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR) and the State Political Administration (the notorious GPU,¹⁶ part of the Soviet of the People’s Commissars of the USSR) the lawmakers declare *apertis verbis* that the aim in creating these organs is to “reinforce revolutionary lawfulness”¹⁷ and to “unite the efforts of the Federated Republics in the struggle against counter-revolution.”¹⁸

In the concept of revolutionary lawfulness, the adjective took precedence over the noun from the moment that justice in the new Bolshevik

¹⁵ The concept is obsessively repeated in a number of different acts. See, for example, the Message of the Presidium of the CIK of the USSR to all the people and governments of the world, from July 13, 1923 (“there being the need to oppose aggression from capitalist states and counter-revolutionary attempts carried out against the Soviet regime from within its borders”; “The reinforcement of the global reaction and of the aggressive aims of imperialist governments and the related danger of new threats make the unification of all the Soviet Republics into the hands of a single federal center unavoidable”). The passage cited in the text is taken up again to the letter in the first part of the Constitution of the USSR from January 31, 1924.

¹⁶ Following the reorganization in February of 1922 of the earlier all-Russian Extraordinary Commission, better known as the VČK, or simply ČK.

¹⁷ The phrase is taken up again in art. 43 of the 1924 Constitution of the USSR.

¹⁸ Article 61 of the 1924 Constitution of the USSR, which establishes the Unified State Political Administration states: “In order to unite the revolutionary efforts in the struggle against political and economic counter-revolution, spying and banditry.”

regime set as an end for itself the militarization of society, with the aim of constructing the new communist man through the dictatorship of the proletariat and the elimination of class enemies. It is exactly this desire to abolish the enemy, both domestic and foreign, which confers a military character to the system. To this end, the Revolutionary Tribunal was established with decree no. 1¹⁹ concerning the tribunal immediately following the 1917 insurrection.

The Revolutionary Tribunal, however, is not mentioned in the Constitution. The revolutionary tribunals of workers and peasants were established “for the struggle against counter-revolutionary forces in order to protect the revolution and its achievements from such forces, and also to try cases of looting, robbery, sabotage and other abuses on the part of merchants, industrialists and others” (art. 8). As one clearly sees from the letter of the law itself, the main goal is military, that is, to defend the revolution by annihilating hostile forces. It anticipates the provisions of articles 3 and 9 of the 1918 Constitution mentioned at the beginning, as well as those calling for the repression of criminal acts and “other abuses” (*pročimi zloupotreblenijami*: the terminology is intentionally vague and imprecise) committed by certain categories of people (*torgovcy, promyšlenniki*) considered *a priori* as hostile to the regime, to the point of being denied voting rights and other related benefits, such as food coupons, which were especially important in those years of famine.

The Revolutionary Tribunal, already anticipated in decree no. 1 concerning the tribunal, was re-instituted with the decree of the People’s Commissariat for Justice on December 19, 1917 (January 1, 1918) and modified by subsequent acts, in particular by the decree of the Soviet of the People’s Commissars in May 1918. The lawmakers emphasize that the Revolutionary Tribunal has jurisdiction over persons who “foment rebellion against the power of workers and peasants, who oppose them or incite others to dissidence or opposition”; as well as those who “use their position as state or public employees to hinder the work of the institutions or businesses in which they work (through sabotage²⁰, falsifying

¹⁹ Issued by the Soviet of the People’s Commissars of the RSFSR. Dekret o Sude n° 1, from November 22 (December 5) 1917, in SU RSFSR 1917, n.4, 50.

²⁰ The criminal code of the RSFSR of 1926 places the crime of sabotage among crimes against the State, specifically among counter-revolutionary crimes (art. 58/14). The code from 1960 places it among particularly dangerous crimes against the State (art. 69). The 1958 law on punishment for crimes against the State doesn’t mention sabotage, substituted instead by the Russian term *vreditel’stvo*, having the same significance (damage).

documents, etc.)”; or who “suspend or reduce production without having the authority to do so”; and who “do not carry out the decrees, decisions, directives and other orders issued by the organs of power of workers and soldiers”—which is to say over all those who were enemies of the revolution. The fact remains that the governing norms at that time recognized the full freedom of the revolutionary tribunals to choose the means “for fighting the counter-revolution”²¹ and required judges to apply the decrees of the all-Russian Executive Committee, of the Soviet of the People’s Commissars, as well as the provisions contained in the programs of the Bolshevik party and socialist revolutionary party of the left (art. 5 and note to the article); and they revoked rules that conflicted with the spirit of the revolution and the “revolutionary juridical conscience.”

The Directive Principles (*Rukovodjaščie načala*) of criminal law of December 12, 1919, completely legitimize all of this. In fact, the introduction states: “The armed people (*vooruzennyj*) have defeated and will continue to defeat their oppressors without special rules or codes.”

IV

The Constitution issued on December 5th, 1936 was aimed at ruling a society in which the bourgeoisie had been destroyed and class divisions had been overcome²², thus rendering meaningless the principles stated in articles 3 to 6 of the previous Constitution.

Article 11 sets out the idea that the soviet economy is geared toward strengthening the independence of the USSR (*ukreplenija nezavisimosti*) and reinforcing its defensive capability (*usilenija ego oboronosposobnosti*).

Article 131 declares that those who attack state property are enemies of the people (*vragami naroda*), while the following article states that military service in the ranks of the armed forces is a duty of honor (*početnaja objazannost*) for soviet citizens;²³ this principle is repeated in article 134, which maintains that the defense of the fatherland (*otečestvo*) is the sacred

²¹ See, for example, Isaev, I.A. 1999 *Istorija gosudarstva i prava Rossii, op.cit.*, 1999, p. 412.

²² Art. 2: “The Soviet of Workers’ Deputies, which was created and strengthened following the overthrow (*sverženija vlasti*) of landowners and capitalists and the success of the proletariat dictatorship, constitutes the political basis of the USSR.” Likewise, art. 4 refers to the “liquidation (*likvidacija*) of the capitalist economic system, the abolition (*otmeny*) of private property, the tools and means of production,” and to the “liquidation (*uničtoženie*) of man’s exploitation of man.”

²³ The 1977 Constitution places itself along these same lines, cf. art. 63.

duty (*svjaščennyj dolg*) of every soviet citizen and that treason (*izmena ro-dine*) is to be punished as the most serious of crimes (*samoe tjažkoe zlo-de-janie*)²⁴.

There is no doubt that the actual number of specific military terms found in the Constitution of 1936 is lower than that of the previous Fundamental Law. Nevertheless, this terminology is certainly no less important than it was in 1918.

In establishing the dominant role of the communist party, that is, the unique exclusive sovereign authority of the soviet system, article 126 states that: “the most active and conscious citizens²⁵, coming from the ranks (*iz rjadov*) of the working class and from other strata of workers, come together in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which is the vanguard squad (*peredovoj otrjad*) of the workers in their fight (*v ich bor’be*) to strengthen and develop the socialist edification and which represents the directive nucleus of all the workers’ organizations, both social and national”²⁶. The abundance of military terms is exceedingly obvious.

V

The Constitution of October 7, 1977 doesn’t break with the tradition of using military terminology, which we already find in the preamble that summarizes the various steps for building the communist society. We learn that the October revolution “has overthrown the power (*svergla vlast’*) of capitalists and landowners, has broken the chains of oppression, has established the dictatorship of the proletariat and has built up the Soviet state: a new type of a state, a fundamental instrument²⁷ for defending the revolutionary achievements (*osnovnoe orudie zaščity revoljucionnych*

²⁴ Similarly, the 1977 Constitution defines national treason as the most serious crime against the people (*tjažčajšee prestuplenie pered narodom*, art. 62). Significantly, the same article 62 establishes the duty of citizens of the USSR to not only protect the interests of the Soviet state, but also to contribute to the strengthening of its power and authority, 62, Ic. (“*oberegat’ interesy sovetskogo gosudarstva, sposobstvovat’ ukrepleniju ego moguščestva i avtoriteta*”).

²⁵ *Naibolee aktivnye i soznatel’nye*.

²⁶ The last part of the article would later be changed as follows: “coming from the ranks of the working class, of the *working peasants and the working intelligencija*, they willingly come together in the communist party of the Soviet Union, which is the vanguard squad of workers in the struggle for the *construction of a communist society* and which represents the directive nucleus of all workers’ organizations, both social and national.”

²⁷ *Orudie*: this term has the same etymology as *oružie*, arm or weapon, cf. Fasmer, M. 1987. *Etimologičeskij slovar’ russkogo jazyka*, vol. III, Moscow, p. 154; and also Dal’, V. 1881. *Tolkovoj slovar’ živago velikoruskago jazyka*, vol. II, St. Petersburg – Moscow p. 692.

zavoevanij)." Similarly, it states that in the USSR a vanguard science and culture (*peredovaja nauka i kul'tura*) have been produced. In this new state of the people, the party is now called the vanguard of the people (*avangard vsego naroda*), a statement that will be reiterated in article 6 that for the first time gives a systematic definition of the role of the party. In the strategic statement of article 6, subsection 1, the party is defined as "a directive and instructive force" (*rukovodjaščaja i napravljajuščaja*), an idea that's repeated in the following subsection listing the tactical lines to be followed. The words used by the lawmakers do not leave any doubt: "The party, armed (*vooružennyj*) with Marxist Leninist doctrine, establishes the general perspective for the development of society, the course of domestic and foreign policy of the USSR, directs the great construction projects of the soviet people, confers a systematic and scientifically based character to the fight of the people for the victory of communism."

Under the party's guidance, which is the "nucleus of the political system and of social and national organizations" (article 6, 1) the collectives of workers "support the diffusion of vanguard working methods" (*peredovykh metodov raboty*; article 8, 2). It should be noted that the adjective *peredovoj* has a particular, though not exclusive, military significance²⁸.

The Constitution of 1977, apart from the military terminology, can be taken as an example of euphemizing the military terminology itself.

We refer in particular to articles 28 and following, whose content is summarized below:

1) The lawmakers maintain that the USSR follows not just a generic policy of peace, but a Leninist policy of peace, where the adjective qualifies the meaning of peace. We have to bear in mind that, by policy of peace, the soviet doctrine of that time meant everything that favored the expansion of Bolshevism, in accordance with article 6, 2, which states that the party is the only authority entitled to determine foreign policy. Consequently, the idea of peace becomes strictly associated with the party; as a result, peace and war become concepts that are "merely instrumental, and linked to a future peace that corresponds to the waning of capitalism"²⁹;

²⁸ For example *peredovaja linija, p. pozicija* (front line, advance position).

²⁹ Belardinelli, S. 1986. *Marx e la guerra*, in "La nottola", no. 1-2, p. 143.

The concept of peace is never stated as an objective without being qualified with an adjective by the lawmakers. Thus the 1918 Constitution declares the desire to seek the *democratic* peace of workers through revolutionary means (art. 4); this presupposes the attribution to the concepts of peace and war a unique and partisan semantic content.

- 2) Wars of liberation do not constitute a violation of peace. In fact, article 28, 2, states that soviet foreign policy aims at creating conditions that favor the “strengthening of the positions of world socialism, [and that] support popular struggles for national liberation and social progress”;
- 3) The USSR makes a distinction between just and unjust wars; in keeping with this the Constitution affirms that the Soviet Union makes every effort to avoid wars of aggression and not wars in general. This is in line with Lenin’s thought, when he writes: “If the exploiting class fights to strengthen its domination as a class, this is a criminal war and the *defense of the fatherland* in such a war is an infamy and a betrayal of socialism. If the proletariat who defeated the bourgeoisie in his own home wages war for the reinforcement and development of socialism, then it is a just and *holy war*”³⁰;
- 4) The USSR and socialism will win without having to go to war, according to the principle of peaceful coexistence, which is only applicable as concerns the military;
- 5) The USSR has legitimate authority to intervene in order to save a socialist regime. This is nothing else but the projection onto the international arena of the domestic principle regarding the subordination of the State to the party (article 6).

In light of these considerations, the prohibition of war propaganda (article 28, 3) is limited to wars of aggression, obviously as seen from a Bolshevik point of view.

In truth, totalitarianism has always been dominated by ideas of war and force, which are necessary for making the activity of propaganda productive and for mobilizing to the highest degree the population. It is not by chance that Lenin adopted Clausewitz’s famous statement that war is the continuation of politics through different means. However, A. Besançon points out that Lenin should have turned this sentence around, to say that politics is the continuation of war through different means³¹.

Michael Voslensky correctly notes that: “The propagandists of the Nomenklatura emphasize that the ideological struggle of socialist realism against its adversaries does not have a moment of rest. One is accustomed to characterizing this struggle in technical military terms: the ideological

³⁰ Lenin, V.I. 1950. *Sočinenija*, vol. 27, Moscow, p. 229.

³¹ Besançon, A. 1978. *Le origini intellettuali del leninismo*, Florence, p. 197.

front, ideological offensives, ideological adversaries etc. The ideological front, for its part, is itself divided into various fronts: economic, philosophical, historical, literary, etc. The Nomenklatura requires of those on the fronts a fighting spirit, vigilance, intransigence, perseverance and other virtues typical of guard dogs.”³²

VI

The use of military terms in the Constitution gave impetus to expanding the militarization of society through laws, decrees, circulars and so forth. According to this legislation, the social organizations directly connected to the party are structured following military standards and criteria. We can mention here the pioneers and the komsomol.

The pioneers (children aged from 9 to 14) were divided into patrols (*družiny*, a term deriving from the old slavonic *droužina*, which in the former Russia was the prince's guard), which in turn were composed of squads (*otrjady*, a typically military word meaning a special military group³³), units (*zven'ja*: the etymological origin is uncertain, but the term undoubtedly has a military content, “small organizational cell, or military unit”³⁴) and subgroups with different names: all these groups were guided by a komsomol leader, called *Vožatyj* (from the verb *vodit'*, to lead, whence *Vožd'*, commander, ‘duce’—a term attributed to Stalin, Lenin, Ceauscescu, etc).

The Communist Leninist Youth Union of the USSR (komsomol, also mentioned in the 1977 Constitution, article 7) was likewise a party organization whose activities were based on a military pattern: for example, they organized student squads (*studenčeskie otrjady*) for work during the summer season.

The use of military terminology is also extremely common in political and ideological language: for example, atheism had to be militant (*voinstvujučij*). We should also note that during the Party congresses it was absolutely normal to make statements such as: “to launch the offensive on the whole front” (*razvernut' nastuplenie po vsemu frontu*), “liquidation of the kulaks” (*likvidacija kulačestva*), not to mention the excessive use of

³² Cf. Voslensky, M.S. 1980. *Nomenklatura. La classe dominante in Unione Sovietica*, Milan, p. 353.

³³ See Ožegov, S.I. *Slovar' russkogo jazyka*, p. 438.

³⁴ See Ožegov, S.I. *Slovar' russkogo jazyka*, p. 210.

terms like “fight” (*bor’ba*), or “strike” (*udar*)³⁵ that are frequently accompanied by intensifying adjectives.

Honors and decorations were also inspired by war terminology, such as “Mother heroine” (*mat’geroina*), “Maternal glory” (*materinskaja slava*), “Hero of labor” (*geroj truda*), or “Hero of socialist labor” (after 1938), “Worthy of socialist emulation” (*Otličnik socialističeskogo sorevnovanija*).

In this political and ideological environment it was completely normal for this organizational pattern to be extended to the world of production: we can mention here the “Brigades of communist labor” (*Brigady*³⁶ *kommunističeskogo truda*), the “Assault worker of communist labor” (*Udarnik kommunističeskogo truda*), the “Assault brigades” (*udarnye brigady*), the “Assault units” (*udarnye otrjady*), the “Assault troops” (*udarnye časti*), the “Labor front” (*trudovoj front*). All these expressions come from *udar* and from *udarit’*, which means to strike, hit, assault and attack.

The same considerations hold for the term *Vachta*, from the German *Wacht*, which means guard or lookout, and that always refers to militarized labor and productivity; thus the sentence “to take on a productive commitment” is translated in the Bolshevik language as “to put some-

³⁵ As an example of this rhetorical technique of lexical and semantic repetition, I cite an excerpt from a set of secret orders issued in 1933: “It would be mistaken to think that a new situation and the need for moving on to new working methods should determine the liquidation, or even the weakening, of the class *struggle* in the countryside. To the contrary, the class *struggle* in the countryside will necessarily become even harsher. It will become harsher from the moment that the class *enemy* sees that the kolchoz have won, sees that they have reached their last days of existence and that they can do nothing but desperately cling on to the hardest forms of *struggle* against the soviet power. Because of this, one can’t speak of a weakening of our *struggle* against the class *enemy*. Rather, our *struggle* must be strengthened as much as possible. Let’s talk, then, of strengthening our *struggle* against the class *enemy*. The fact is that strengthening the *struggle* against the class *enemy* and liquidating him, through the use of old working methods, is no longer possible in the current, new situation since these methods have passed their time. Let’s talk, then, of how to improve the old methods of the *struggle*, of how to rationalize them and make of them our most precise and organized *blows*. Let’s talk, finally, of how each of our *blows* must be politically prepared in advance, in such a way that each *blow* is reinforced by the mass actions of the peasants. Only by improving our working methods in this way will we be able to pursue the final liquidation of the class *enemy* in the countryside.

The Central Committee and the Soviet of the People’s Commissars have no doubt that all our soviet party organizations and judicial čekist will take the new situation into account, brought about by our victory, and will consequently conform their work to the new conditions of *struggle*”. Cf. Codevilla, G. 1996. *Dalla rivoluzione bolscevica alla Federazione Russa*, Milan, p. 193.

³⁶ From *brigadir*, originally a German word having clear military significance that entered the Russian language, keeping its original meaning, at the time of Peter the Great.

body on productive guard” (*Stat’ na trudovuju vachtu*)³⁷. In the Soviet press one could find sentences like “the whole country has put itself (*vstala*) on guard against assault (*na udarnuju vachtu*) in honor of the party congress.” The tribunals also adopted the military terminology, especially in the first years after 1917: The tribunals were invited “to draw up in fighting position” (*perestroit’sja po boevomu*)³⁸.

One particular aspect of the militarization of society is seen in the ordinance jointly issued in 1959 by the Central Committee of the party and the Soviet of the Ministries of the USSR on “The participation of workers in keeping public order in the country” that established within government agencies, the kolchoz, the sovchoz, educational institutions, and even individual tenants’ associations etc., new *organizations of mass education and self-education of workers*, composed of leading citizens (*pere-dovyje*) of these same institutions. These were the People’s Volunteer Patrols for the defense of the public order (*Dobrovol’nye Narodnye Družiny po Ochrane obščestvennogo porjadka*) whose specific task was to help maintain public order, and protect the tribunals, the operative squads of the komsomol (*Komsomol’skie Operativnye Otrjady*) and other organizations that worked in conjunction with the party and the Militia.

These rather peculiar patrols, found in every city and identifiable by the broad red band proudly worn on the members’ arms and their uncritical party loyalty, have an historical precedent in the Society for Militia Support (*Obščestva sodejstvija milicii*), created on the initiative of the Ural workers in 1928, and also in the Brigades of Militia Support (*Brigady sodejstvija milicii*) that was established in 1932.

Party and military tasks were common to all social organizations and volunteer associations. Thus, the charter of the DOSAAF³⁹ Society—which was awarded the Order of the Red Flag for collaboration with the army, air force and navy of the USSR, and worked with the komsomol, unions and sports organizations under the direction of the party—states that the Society’s aims are to: “develop the technical-military aspects of sport and to raise the level of preparedness of specialists for the army and national economy, to actively participate in the education of the soviet people towards developing a high level of vigilance (*bditel’nost’*), as well as

³⁷ See: N. A. Skvorcova – B. N. Majzel’, 1977. *Russko ital’janskij slovar’*, Moskva, p. 1007 (Vachta).

³⁸ See “Eženedel’nik sovetskoj justicii”, 1922, no. 10.

³⁹ Vsesojuznoe dobrovol’noe obščestvo sodejstvija armii, aviacii i flotu SSSR.

in the constant preparation for the defense of the socialist Fatherland, and in preparing young people for military service.”⁴⁰

Some argue that the militarization of language can be traced back to Peter the Great who, in a certain sense, militarized Russian society. Yet such a claim is too strong, since at best it’s true only for a short historical period and for particular areas of language. In fact, legal language of that time was not at all contaminated by military terminology.

In conclusion, we can say that Bolshevism had militarized the language in general, including legal language, transforming it into a tool for enslaving the population. This deep and disturbing manipulation led to a total political domination over the word, and had one precise goal: that of simulating as true and real what simply did not exist—which is part of the process for constructing communism’s perfect society.

⁴⁰ Cf. *Izvestija*, December 21, 1971.

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