

European Elites and Revolutionary Change: 1789 – 1848 – 1917. The Aftermath

Veranstalter: Anna Ananieva / Andreas Schönle, Queen Mary University of London (QMUL)

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Against the backdrop of a Long Nineteenth Century and the emergence of a European Modernity, Anna Ananieva and Andreas Schönle organized the international conference „European Elites and Revolutionary Change: 1789 – 1848 – 1917. The Aftermath“. The conference took place on the 2nd and 3rd of November at Queen Mary University of London and received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme. Central was the question of a renegotiation of social relations, group belonging and structures of agency in the aftermath of the revolutions of 1789 – 1848 – 1917 in their national as well as transnational ramifications.

ANNA ANANIEVA (London), a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellow, introduced the conference by formulating the goal of gaining a historically more precise understanding of the „European elite“ as a socially heterogeneous formation through the contributions to the conference: Were the „old“ elites always on the losing side of the revolutions? In a diachronic view, can one speak of a „shared destiny“ of the elites and thus also of a „European elite“? Can the analytical view of the repositioning of the elite(s) be used to define shifts in the social power architectures and thus determine the outcome and impact of the revolutions?

The first panel on the effects of the revolution of 1789 was opened by ANDREAS SCHÖNLE (London), who emphasized the post-revolutionary stimulation and change of discursive spaces. WILLIAM DOYLE (Bristol) highlighted the events of August 4th 1789 as an ambivalent key step against the social power architecture. On the one hand, on this day feudalism was abolished and therefore it

can be understood as a manifestation of egalitarian aspirations. On the other hand, the French elite, which used to be relatively open in European comparison, became a closed elite through the legal prohibition of venality in office. The cleavage between aspiration and outcome derived from the mismatch between official recognition of the elites and popular acknowledgement. Where the belief in „noble blood“ remained, nobility could not be abolished.

FRIEDEMANN PESTEL (Freiburg) deconstructed in his presentation the stereotype of a homogeneous, closed and separated French migrant community of staunch royalists. By pointing at the complex composition of the community itself and its dynamic entanglement with the host societies, he argued for a more heterogeneous picture of the migrants. He emphasised that, contrary to the exile of the Jacobites, the migration in the aftermath of 1789 was for most a temporary one. Many migrants focused on the earliest possible return, which led to a high number of repatriates in the 1790s and early 1800s.

The „pamphlet war“ in Britain following the French revolution of 1789 was analysed by DAVID DUFF (London) as an attempt to „sell the revolution and the counter-revolution to the British“. David Duff moved the prospectus into the centre of interest. With the prospectuses, publishers tried to obtain advance sales and it functioned as a marketing device especially for periodicals or expensive illustrated books. As Duff showed, a seemingly mundane discipline as the book trade became drawn into the ideological debate in the time of the French Revolution. The genre of the prospectus was used as an ideal instrument to sell political argument to the British intellectual elite. Thus it can be used as a barometer to analyse the shifting political atmosphere in Britain and as a manifestation of an intellectual phenomenon being anthologized as it was happening.

ALEXANDRA VESELOVA (St Petersburg) and MIKHAIL MILIUTIN (St Petersburg) examined the remarks concerning the French Revolution in the memoirs of the eighteenth-century Russian writer Andrei Timofeevich Bolotov. They argued that Bolotov’s disapproving look on the happenings in France can

only be understood in the context of two recent events in Russian history. The first event was the experience of mass violence against the Russian nobility in the Pugachev Rebellion. Similar to his analysis of the French Revolution, Bolotov described this event as a threat to traditional order by the simple folk. Bolotov's political views, however, were not based on a mere solidarity with the provincial landlords' class, nor did they imply a wholesale condemnation of revolutions. This becomes clear by looking at Bolotov's narrative of the palace revolution of 1762, which put Catherine on the throne. This revolution, which he entitled a „glorious revolution“ in reference to the events in England in 1688, seemed to be a counterpart to the French revolution and revealed Bolotov's interest in German natural law theory, which could legitimize revolution in case of power abuse by the ruler.

CHRISTINA VON HODENBERG (London) introduced the second panel featuring the aftermath of the revolutionary events in 1848. HEINRICH BEST (Jena) analysed the pivotal role of the Constitutional Assemblies in the revolutionary dissolution of the old and the consolidation of the new institutional orders. By addressing the interplay between the elite formation and state-building in the Frankfurt and the Paris National Assemblies of 1848/49, Best showed how neither in France nor in Germany a consensus elite could have been formed after the revolution of 1848, primarily because the political process in these assemblies could not address social inequalities. Nevertheless, in the long run the National Assemblies became the dominant organizational principle of political order in complex societies. In retrospect, the parliamentary work of 1848 could be seen as a time of apprenticeship for representative democracy.

Through a biographical approach, JONATHAN KWAN (Nottingham) presented the revolutionary experience and its biographical and intellectual repercussions in the life of Moritz Kaiserfeld in the context of the Habsburg monarchy. Kwan showed convincingly that firstly elite formation in the Habsburg context often meant integration within the German cultural and educational

system. Secondly he demonstrated that as an outcome of the revolutionary events liberal thought was integrated within elite culture rather than radicalised: Referring to a memorandum on the unity and stability of the Austrian state written by Kaiserfeld in the 1850s, Kwan showed how along with the revolution and the integration of revolutionaries into institutions, a process of readjusting ideas on the personal level took place.

DENIS SDVIZHKOV (Moscow) traced in his presentation a double-tracked development in Russia around the revolution of 1848. On the one hand, for the masses in Russia, 1848 was not a year of revolution, but of cholera, crop failures and fires. The greater part of the nobility elite saw Russia's role as saviour of Europe evaporating. This could only be understood in the context of the depoliticisation and nationalisation of the nobility after the November uprising of 1831 in Poland and the subsequent Russian-Polish war. On the other hand, Sdvizhkov carved out a „silent revolution“ concerning the educational elite: newly established cafés and reading rooms opened a discursive space, in which the events in the West could be learned and pondered. Because there was no revolution in Russia, intellectuals had the opportunity to comment and reflect on the happenings in the West. Sdvizhkov argued that the process of figuring out a „Russian“ position towards the events created a discursive practice that prepared the Great Reforms of the 1860s.

Introducing the panel featuring 1917, KLAUS GESTWA (Tübingen) underlined the novelty of the perspective adopted by this conference, looking at the aftermaths of the revolutions, in this year's accumulation of revolutionary centennials. DIETRICH BEYRAU (Tübingen) outlined the consequences for the Russian elite of the events from 1916 on. He showed that although the leading elites underwent humiliation, de-bourgeoisization and expropriation, there were ways to make a profit out of their cultural capital. For young people, the best option was to „proletarianize“: by working at the fabric they became workers in the official Soviet discourse, which subsequently enabled their academic career. Another pos-

sibility to continue the previous work was to turn into a „bourgeois specialist“, a category of people who became key figures in the Soviet rebuilding process after the Russian Revolution.

JANE PRITCHARD (London) examined in her talk the impact of the revolutionary theatre on the Ballets Russes. She especially highlighted the intermedial references between avant-garde painting, art nouveau costume design and the practices of dancing. After the revolution, constructive design and theatre practice had an equally significant impact on the Ballets Russes. The combination of these different medias provided the Ballets Russes with an enormous storehouse of innovative forms and enabled Diaghilev to sell what was perceived as „Russianness“ as an export product to western Europe, continuously trying out new styles and forms.

In his address, MARKIAN PROKOPOVYCH (Birmingham) discussed continuities and ruptures in architectural and urban planning practices as well as the use of public spaces in Central Europe after the end of World War I. Although the symbolic politics of space in the Hungarian Soviet Republic and the radical modernist architecture of 'Red Vienna' and Czechoslovakia certainly point towards a rupture, Prokopovych showed convincingly that there also can be found significant continuities with the earlier imperial practices. Focussing on these continuities in the Habsburg Empire, he questioned the predominant narrative of rupture due to the coming to power of new, leftist elites. Prokopovych argued that the latter might have used modernist architecture and new street politics to legitimise their regimes, but that little in those politics and practices was entirely new.

OLGA SOBOLEV (London) and ANGUS WRENN (London) analysed the reception of the Bolshevik revolution in the writings of H.G. Wells and Bernard Shaw as the two principal opinion makers among British intellectuals. Sobolev and Wrenn offered a close reading of Shaw's one-act play „Annajanska“ as an ironic commentary of the events in Russia, depicting the Revolution as a chaotic and not well-thought-out set of events. However, together with Wells, Shaw became one

of the most decided promoters of the idea that a country needs an effective governing elite, taking Lenin as its prototype. Labelling their effort as an attempt to „read the writing on the eastern wall of Europe“, the two writers developed their own cultural policy, trying to make their Anglophone readership break with cultural stereotypes.

In sum, the conference offered profound insights in the cultural and social transformations in the Long Nineteenth Century. Bringing together researchers specializing in French, German, Austrian and Russian history of the 18th, 19th and 20th century, the conference revealed new links: one surprising outcome of this wide-angle comparison is that power elites remained surprisingly constant over the course of revolutionary ruptures, while cultural practices, discursive formations and institutional structures changed. These transformations, however, became the grounds for profound structural changes, enabling a cosmopolitan elite to establish transnational networks and discursive spaces, inventing Europe as an imagined community and developing cultural practices as representative democracy.

Conference Overview:

Welcome & Introduction

Anna Ananieva / Andreas Schönle (QMUL)

Section: 1789

Chair: Andreas Schönle (QMUL)

William Doyle (University of Bristol): „The Limits of Legislation: Beliefs and Bloodlines“

Friedemann Pestel (University of Freiburg): „La France du dehors: French Émigrés and European Spaces of Political Exile“

David Duff (QMUL): „The Prospectus War of the 1790s: New Light on the French Revolution Debate in Britain“

Alexandra Veselova (RAS, St Petersburg) & Mikhail Miliutin (St Petersburg State University): „The Russian 'glorious revolution' of 1762 and the French 'bloodshed' of 1789 in the assessment of a Russian provincial nobleman of the 18th century (according to the memoirs of A.T. Bolotov)“

Section: 1848

Chair: Professor Christina von Hodenberg

(QMUL)

Heinrich Best (University of Jena): „The Apprenticeship of Democratic Representation: The Frankfurt and Paris National Assemblies in the Revolutions of 1848 – 1849“

Jonathan Kwan (University of Nottingham): „The Experience of the 1848-49 Revolutions and the Development of Liberalism in the Habsburg Monarchy“

Denis Sdvizhkov (GHI Moscow): „The Revolution that Did Not Happen: Russia and the Impact of 1848“

Section: 1917

Chair: Klaus Gestwa (University of Tübingen)

Dietrich Beyrau (University of Tübingen): „Destruction, Dispersion and Survival of an Elite: The Case of the Russian Empire 1917-1922“

Jane Pritchard (V&A London): The shock of the new: the impact of the revolutionary theatre on the Ballets Russes and related companies

Markian Prokopovych (University of Birmingham): „Transformation of Urban Spaces in Interwar Central Europe: Continuities and Ruptures in Architecture and the Symbolic Politics of Space“

Olga Sobolev & Angus Wrenn (LSE): „Interpreting the ‘Writing on the Eastern Wall of Europe’: G. B. Shaw & H. G. Wells on the Russian Revolution“

Final Discussion

Tagungsbericht *European Elites and Revolutionary Change: 1789 – 1848 – 1917. The Aftermath*. 02.11.2017–03.11.2017, London, in: H-Soz-Kult 08.12.2017.