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**“The Seventeenth-Century Crisis” and Soviet Historiography:
B.F. Porshnev and A.D. Lublinskaya**

Irina Doubrovina

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

History

**Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
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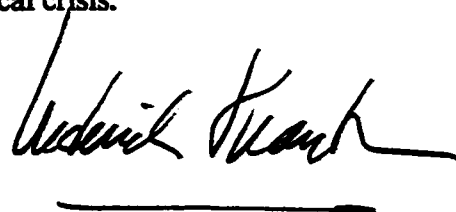
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ABSTRACT

**"The Seventeenth-Century Crisis" and Soviet Historiography:
B.F. Porshnev and A.D. Lublinskaya**

Irina Doubrovina

This essay deals with the main problems around which the historical discussion of the "Seventeenth-Century Crisis" has unfolded. These problems are the following: the analysis of the economic crisis (crisis of feudalism and the emergence of capitalism); the discussion of the character of the English revolution; the analysis of the social and political crisis (the struggle against the Absolutist State) and of the role of the Thirty Years' War in the Crisis. A summary of different approaches offered by historians working on seventeenth-century Europe is given. This essay also focuses on the historians of the Soviet School, Boris Porshnev and Alexandra Lublinskaya, and analyses their contribution to the discussion of the Seventeenth-Century Crisis. The point of view supported here is that in order to prove the reality of a Seventeenth-Century Crisis, this phenomenon has to be analyzed in terms of the general economic, social, political, and intellectual processes, unfolding in seventeenth-century Europe. In so far as the present discussion goes, it is argued that the only firmly established fact is that seventeenth-century absolutist states experienced a social and political crisis.



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I

*...Peace is despair'd;
 For who can think Submission? Warr then, Warr
 Open or understood must be resolv'd.
 He spake: and to confirm his words, out-flew
 Millions of flaming swords, drawn from the thighs
 Of mighty Cherubim; the sudden blaze
 Far round illumin'd hell: highly they rag'd
 Against the Highest, and fierce with grasped Arms
 Clash'd on thir sounding shields the din of war,
 Hurling defiance toward the Vault of Heav'n.*
 John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, l.660 (1667)

Since the middle of the twentieth century many historians have for several reasons preoccupied themselves with the problem of the "Seventeenth-Century Crisis." Some tried to explain the phenomenon of the emergence of the *Modern Age* out of the apparent economic chaos and unrest of the seventeenth century. Others focused on the question of a new form of political power that spread all over Europe at the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth, centuries, absolutism. Did absolutism represent the prototype of modern political power? Why were the absolutist powers of the seventeenth century engaged in constant warfare? These are questions that drew the attention of contemporaries then, as well as modern historians. Historians interested in political and social questions, such as Roland Mousnier, Hugh Trevor-Roper and John Elliott¹ were tackling an enigma: how the remnants of feudal power dispersion, "liberties," and (last, but not least) natural economy, were finally overcome?

Economic historians strove to explain the tremendous changes in industry and agriculture that European countries underwent in the seventeenth century. At least one of these countries, England, in the course of the seventeenth century turned from being a

¹ Roland Mousnier, J.H. Elliott and H.R. Trevor-Roper, "Trevor-Roper's 'General Crisis': Symposium" in *Crisis in Europe. 1560-1660. Essays from Past and Present*, ed. Trevor Aston (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966)

"second-class power" into "the greatest world power."² Historians like E.J. Hobsbawm, Carlo Cipolla and Immanuel Wallerstein³ posed the question of how and when European peoples, still living according to traditional customary laws, saw the dawn of the *Modern Age*?

There were historians who simply wanted to comprehend the significance of the singular event, the English revolution. It can be said that this revolution embodied the enigma of the seventeenth century. In whose interests was the revolution in England achieved? Was Protestantism an expression of a new revolutionary, bourgeois, ideology?

In 1954, an article by Christopher Hill, "The English Revolution and the Brotherhood of Man", was published. Hill ascribed to Protestantism the role of a revolutionary ideology for the new bourgeoisie. The religious struggles between the Reformation and the Catholic Church, according to Hill, could be characterized as a revolutionary movement that opened the way for the political power of the bourgeoisie. Thus, the religious and revolutionary battles of the seventeenth century were connected to the problems of economic development of the European countries: the rise of capitalism and the economic and political crisis of the old regime.

The struggles associated with the Protestant reformation are an expression of this crisis. In Spain and Italy Protestantism and the bourgeoisie were defeated: both countries entered on a long period of economic stagnation.⁴

The debates led to the elaboration of a theory of the birth of the *Modern Age* in the flames of revolutionary movements. The fierce battles of the first all-European War (from 1618 until 1648), the Thirty Years' War, concealed the same undercurrent, the

² Christopher Hill, *The Century of Revolution 1603-1714*. (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1961), 2

³ E.J. Hobsbawm, "The Seventeenth Century in the Development of Capitalism", *Science and Society*, XXIV (1960), 97-112; Carlo M. Cipolla, *The Fontana Economic History of Europe. The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, Vol. 2 (Sussex: Harvester Press/Barnes & Noble, 1977); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World-Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979)

⁴ Christopher Hill, "The English Revolution and the Brotherhood of Man", *Science and Society*, Vol. XVIII (1954), 290

struggle of the "conscience against authoritarian tyranny," the battle of Christ and Anti-Christ⁵, as Hill summarized his perception of the epoch.

This historian, whose work on the English Revolution received a large degree of recognition, was not alone in his view that the seventeenth century bore within itself a Crisis of the old European civilization.

The discussion of the "Seventeenth-Century Crisis", the term first used by E.J. Hobsbawm in his article "The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century", had begun.⁶ As was mentioned above, numerous representatives of different orientations of historical thought joined in the discussion of the Seventeenth-Century Crisis. Almost all of them, regardless of the field of their research (whether it was economic, social, or political history) were interested in the seventeenth century. Moreover, almost all of them agreed on the reality of such a phenomenon as a Crisis embracing half of the seventeenth century. Not all of them argued, as Marxist historians like Hobsbawm and Hill did, that in order to be significant an historical epoch should bear within itself a tumult, a violent struggle, a crisis. But they almost unanimously agreed that there was social and political struggle on an unprecedented scale in the seventeenth century.

In the first part of this essay I will consider the main problems around which the discussion of the Seventeenth-Century Crisis has unfolded. These problems are the following: the analysis of the economic crisis (crisis of feudalism and the emergence of capitalism); the discussion of the character of the English revolution; the analysis of the social and political crisis (the struggle against the Absolutist State) and of the role of the Thirty Years' War in the Crisis.

In the second part of this essay I will focus on the historians of the Soviet School, Boris Porshnev and Alexandra Lublinskaya, and will analyze their contribution to the discussion of the Crisis. Given their Marxist position, it is much easier to understand why the notion of a violent crisis that marked the beginning of the *Modern Age* was inherent in their work on the seventeenth century. It is a well-known fact that the main task of the

⁵ Ibid., 293

⁶ E.J. Hobsbawm, "The Crisis of the Seventeenth century", *Past and Present*, Nos. 5 and 6 (1954), 33-53, 44-65

Soviet historical school was the rewriting of history in Marxist terms, showing the mechanisms of internal struggle and violent social turbulence that supposedly incited and accompanied every "progressive" change in the economic, social, and political aspects of society. The Soviet historians defined their task as the outlining of a conflict between the relationship of production (the economic basis) and the productive forces (the social basis) of every country and significant historical event:

Teachers and students tried to solve all these problems apart from the historical facts on the basis of the declared principles of the "classics of Marxism" or of general considerations resulting from Marxist doctrine as they understood it.⁷

Boris Porshnev was one of the most well-known and controversial figures of the Soviet Historical School, who dedicated his work to illuminating the role of the peasants' class struggle in history. His pioneering work *Les soulèvements populaires en France de 1623 à 1648*, was published in Russian in 1948, and translated first into German (1954) and then into French in 1963, "by Mousnier's [*French historian Roland Mousnier*] rivals at the Sixième Section."⁸ The study of the role of seventeenth-century peasants in French revolutionary movements was picked up like a banner by some of the Western historians, including such distinguished scholars as the Marxist historian of the French Revolution, Albert Soboul. One can ask if the choice of the subject in Soboul's work *Problèmes paysans de la Révolution (1789-1848): études d'histoire révolutionnaire* (1976), was not inspired by his Soviet colleague. Soboul surely made personal acquaintance with Porshnev during international historical congresses and his own frequent visits to Moscow.⁹

Porshnev was one of the first advocates of a Seventeenth-Century Crisis. It is obvious, however, that Porshnev's conviction, that there was a Crisis in seventeenth-century Europe, originated from a different source than the same conviction of his

⁷ K.F. Shteppa, *Russian Historians and the Soviet State* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1962), 38

⁸ Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution. The Annales School, 1929-89* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1990), 60

Western colleagues. What was the logical path that led Porshnev to his position? And why, after publishing his "oeuvre-maitresse", *Les soulèvements populaires*, and an article "The Legend of the Seventeenth Century in French History" in *Past & Present* (1955), pertaining to seventeenth-century historiography's illusion of the "Grand Siècle", did Porshnev not go back to the study of the question? A monograph on the popular uprisings of the second half of the seventeenth-century, conceived by Porshnev in the late forties, never saw the light of day. In the introduction to his work *Narodnye vosstania vo Frantsii pered Frondoi (1623-1648) (Popular Uprisings in France before the Fronde)*,¹⁰ Porshnev refers to the already-published articles that were to constitute a part of his work *Narodnye vosstania vo Frantsii pri Kolbere (Popular Uprisings in France under Colbert)*.¹¹

In the late fifties - early sixties, Porshnev's name almost completely disappeared from the pages of Soviet historical journals. Like many of his prominent Western colleagues, including Fernand Braudel, Porshnev became interested in problems adjacent to the historical disciplines. Porshnev's works and articles on philosophy, anthropology, and social psychology, were published in specialized journals during the nineteen-fifties, nineteen-sixties.¹² In the early nineteen-fifties and sixties such works by Porshnev as *Essay on the Political Economy of Feudalism* (Moscow, 1956), *History of Socialist Doctrines* (Moscow, 1962), *Social Psychology and History* (Moscow, 1966) appeared.

⁹ While I have as yet not found direct evidence for this, collaboration between French and Soviet historians from the late 1950's was quite close. Joint conferences and publications were common.

¹⁰ B.F. Porshnev, *Narodnye vosstania vo Frantsii pered Frondoi (1623-1648)* (Moscow-Leningrad: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1948), 29

¹¹ "Narodnye vosstania vo Frantsii pri Kolbere", *Srednie veka (The Middle Ages)* No. 2, 1946; "Tseli i trebovania krestian v Bretonskom vosstanii 1675 g." ("Goals and Demands of Peasants during the Breton Uprising of 1675") *Trudy MIFLI (Works of Moscow Institute of Philosophy, Literature, and History)* Vol. VI, 1940; "Vosstanie v Bordeaux v 1675 g." (The Bordeaux Uprising of 1675) *Reports and Papers of the Faculty of History of the Moscow State University*, No. 2, 1945

¹² Articles like "Materialism and Idealism in Problems Related to the Formation of Human Society" appeared in No. 5, (1955) in *Voprosy filosofii (Questions of Philosophy)*, and Porshnev's book on the history of social ideas was conceived ("Jean Meslier et les sources populaires de sa conception du monde", *Reports from X International Congress of Historical Science in Rome*, 1955)

However, the question remains as to whether Porshnev's withdrawal from the work on popular uprisings was voluntary:

In the article "The Significance for Historiography of the Works of J.V. Stalin on Questions of Linguistics" in *Problems of History* during 1951...a few words were also devoted to mistakes 'of a subjectivist, idealistic nature' in those works of B.F. Porshnev dealing with the decay of the feudal structure in Western Europe. Porshnev, it appeared, had reduced all the sociopolitical changes in the Middle Ages to a single revolutionary struggle, ignoring the forces of production and production relationships.¹³

In the nineteen-sixties Porshnev went back to the study of seventeenth-century history, but this time he focused on the problem of the interconnection between Russian foreign policy and the foreign policies of other European countries in the period of the Thirty Years' War. His article "Political Relations between Western and Eastern Europe in the Period of the Thirty Years' War", appeared in *Voprosy Istorii*, No.10 (1960) and was followed by monographs *Francija, Angliiskaja revolutsia i evropeiskaja politika v seređine 17 veka* (*France, the English Revolution and European Politics at the Middle of the Seventeenth Century*) (Moscow, 1970) and *Tridtsatiletniaa vojna i vstuplenie v nee Shvetsii i Moskovskogo gosudarstva* (*Moscovy and Sweden in the Thirty Years' War, 1630-1635*) (Moscow, 1976). It is more than possible that his interest was revived by contemporary changes in Soviet internal and external policies. The late fifties and early sixties in the Soviet Union were marked by several crises in Soviet foreign policy. The feeling of insecurity was present in all fields of social life. In historical work this sentiment was translated into a conviction that the precarious balance of forces between the East and the West was about to be disrupted again.

That balance was, in Porshnev's opinion, established in the seventeenth century and its violation led to the First and Second World Wars. At the source of both disastrous wars that profoundly wounded the twentieth century lay three centuries of German bitterness over the devastation and humiliation suffered at the hands of France, as a result of the Peace of Westphalia (1648).¹⁴ It is important to mention that Porshnev's concept

¹³ K.F. Shteppa, *Russian Historians and the Soviet State*, 298

¹⁴ B.F. Porshnev, *Tridtsatiletniaa vojna i vstuplenie v nee Shvetsii i Moskovskogo gosudarstva* (Moscow: Nauka, 1976), 37, 57-58

was elaborated as a response to the German aggression during the Second World War, a fact that Porshnev admits in the introduction to his monograph:

Of course, there could, previously, be no talk of the actual influence of the military-political power of the Moscovite State on Western Europe. Therefore, it is easy to see that making such an encroachment on tradition and providing a solid foundation for my attempt has constituted a discovery. It arose in my mind during the process of lighting upon and comparing more and more new documentary data, but I cannot fail to mention that it was also prompted during the years of the great historical clash between our country and Nazi Germany - the inheritor of everything reactionary that had accumulated over the many centuries of German history. Just such a reappraisal of the "Russo-German" historical theme during the stormy years of the war encouraged in particular a reconsideration of the problem of "Russia and the Thirty Years' War" (and a number of other questions about Russia's place in the historical past among the European political forces).¹⁵

The theme of the Seventeenth-Century Crisis thus became relevant for Soviet historical research in the troubled years of the mid-twentieth century.

There is a different approach to the Crisis theory from the second Soviet historian who is mentioned later in this paper, Alexandra Lublinskaya. She offered an overwhelmingly negative critique of the "General Crisis" theory in her monograph *French Absolutism: the Crucial Phase, 1620-1629*.¹⁶ Although her declared position was Marxist, she too (as Porshnev did) stepped back from considering primarily economic factors in the analysis of the possible existence of the General Crisis, and concentrated her study on consideration of political and social aspects of French absolutism. This approach led her to the conclusion that there was no seventeenth-century General Crisis in Europe:

She considers that what characterized Europe in this complex and transitional period was precisely the very different economic, social and political situations in each of the states. Consequently, although there were many political upheavals in this period they did not have the same causes nor were they equivalent in character. The English Civil War and the Fronde were the products of quite different class relations and political

¹⁵ B.F. Porshnev, *Moscow and Sweden in the Thirty Years War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), xviii

¹⁶ A. D. Lublinskaya, *French Absolutism: the Crucial Phase, 1620-1629* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968)

conflicts. In particular, these various upheavals were not the effects of a general 'economic crisis' since there is no evidence to suggest the existence of an integrated economy at this time.¹⁷

However, Roland Mousnier, in the Introduction to his *Fureurs paysannes*, 1967, a monograph dealing with the now-famous "simultaneous revolutions" of the seventeenth century, proclaimed that even contemporaries recognized that the time they lived in was unusually harsh:

Les contemporains on eu conscience de vivre en des temps particulièrement durs. Robert Mentet de Salmonet, dans l'avant-propos de son *Histoire des troubles de la Grande-Bretagne* publiée à Paris en 1649, exprime très bien ce sentiment: "Je ne veux rien prononcer sur les moeurs du siècle où nous sommes. Je peux bien assurer seulement qu'il n'est pas des meilleurs, estant *un siècle de fer*, qui est un mauvais réformateur de la vie des hommes, la guerre apportant d'ordinaire un débordement de vices avec la désolation des provinces. Tousiours est-il fameux pour les grandes et estranges révolutions qui y sont arrivées."¹⁸

These words can be fully applied to the twentieth century itself. But who cannot say the same of the age he lives in, after all?

Was the discussion of the Seventeenth-Century Crisis, then, a tribute to a particular twentieth-century mentality? It is more than possible that twentieth-century historians engaged in the discussion of the Seventeenth-Century Crisis in order to comprehend the harsh reality of their own times. Was this term *General Crisis*, applied to the seventeenth century, more appropriate than the old-fashioned concept of *Le Grand Siècle*?

Following these observations on the unprecedented historical discussion of the Seventeenth-Century Crisis, I would support the view that the roots of this discussion lie in contemporary historical problems and the contradictions of twentieth-century political and social life.

¹⁷ G.M. Littlejohn, "An Introduction to Lublinskaya", *Economy and Society*, No. 1 (1972), 59

¹⁸ Roland Mousnier, *Fureurs Paysannes: Les paysans dans les revoltes du XVIIe siècle (France, Russie, Chine)* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1967), 9

II

The concept of a trans-European Crisis that occurred at the beginning of the seventeenth century and lasted until the eighteenth century was probably first outlined in the works of Karl Marx. Marx considered the period of transition from feudalism to capitalism, that embraced nearly two centuries (starting with the expropriation of English peasants at the end of the sixteenth century and finishing with the French Revolution of 1789), as a "violent" and turbulent time:

The transformation of scattered private property based upon individual labor into capitalist property is, of course, a far more protracted process, a far more violent and difficult process, than the transformation of capitalist private property (already, in actual fact, based upon a social method of production) into social property. In the former case we are concerned with the expropriation of the mass of the people by a few usurpers; in the latter case we are concerned with the expropriation of a few usurpers by the mass of the people.¹⁹

It was a period when the Absolutist State was a prevailing political structure in Europe. Capitalist market economy was spreading its influence over larger fields of economic and even political life, but Marxist historians, following Marx, hesitated to classify this period as capitalist, because of the predominantly agricultural character of European economy. As Immanuel Wallerstein puts it:

But the same confusion left the Marxists, including Marx, with the problem of explaining what was the mode of production that predominated in Europe from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, that is before the industrial revolution. Essentially, most Marxists have talked of a 'transitional' stage, which is in fact a blurry non-concept with no operational indicators. This dilemma is heightened if the unit of analysis used is the state, in which case one has to explain why the transition has occurred at different rates and times in different countries. (This is the dilemma, I feel, of E.J. Hobsbawm in explaining his so-called 'crisis of the seventeenth century'.)²⁰

Marx's theory of a revolutionary shift from one mode of production to another, more "progressive", demanded that a clearly demarcated border be traced between the

¹⁹ Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 2 (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1962), 846-847

feudal and the capitalist age. This is why, probably, the beginning of the capitalist era was seen only in the period after the French Bourgeois Revolution of 1789. The French Revolution was an ideal border to mark an event of such historical importance as the advent of capitalism:

France is the land where, more than anywhere else, the historical class struggles were each time fought out to decision, and where, consequently, the changing political forms within which they move and in which their results are summarized have been stamped in the sharpest outlines. The centre of feudalism in the Middle Ages, the model country of unified monarchy, resting on estates, since the Renaissance, France demolished feudalism in the Great Revolution and established the unalloyed rule of the bourgeoisie in a classical purity unequalled by any other European land.²¹

Later, historians pushed the culmination point of the Crisis, in whose tumults the *Modern Age* was born, back to the English Revolution. Still, the English Revolution of the seventeenth-century and the French Revolution of the eighteenth-century, taken separately, could not support the theory of the birth of capitalism on the European, let alone on the universal level. Thus, the whole of European history of the seventeenth-century was considered as a sequence of events unfolding according to a single scenario, with some local variations. The possibility of applying universal laws of historical development was important to Marxist historians of the twentieth century who tried to demonstrate the objective, scientific, and all-embracing character of their methodology. To replace the view that the turning point from agrarian and feudal to industrial and capitalist society was a singular event, such as the English or French Revolution, the theory of a Trans-European crisis (economic, social, and ideological) was shaped in the middle of the twentieth century.²²

²⁰ Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World-Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 15

²¹ F. Engels, "Preface to the Third German Edition of Karl Marx' 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte'" in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1968), 95

²² "It is probable – though here we venture on the complex territory of price history – that the crisis began about 1620; perhaps with the slump period from 1619 into the early 1620s. It seems certain that, after some distortion of price movements by the Thirty Years War, it reached its most acute phase between 1640 and the 1670's though precise dates are out of order in the discussion

According to the Soviet historian Boris Porshnev, the discussion of the Seventeenth-Century Crisis started with the publication of the Soviet *Manual of Modern History* in 1951. The emphasis was put on the simultaneity of revolutions that occurred in different European countries at the middle of the seventeenth century:

The discussion began, as I well remember, from the reaction of English Marxist historians to the question of simultaneity of the English bourgeois revolution of the seventeenth century and different events of political and social struggle in different countries of Europe during the last period of the Thirty Years' War, raised in the Soviet Manual of Modern History for Universities. (*Modern History. Manual for History Departments of Universities*, Vol. 1, 1640-1789, under the redaction of B.F. Porshnev.)²³

The attention of Soviet as well as Western historians to the issue of simultaneous seventeenth-century revolutions was attracted by the work of an English historian, Roger Bigelow Merriman. In his monograph *Six Contemporaneous Revolutions*, first published in 1938, Merriman pointed to so-called seventeenth-century "simultaneous revolutions." He stressed the fact that almost simultaneously with the English Revolution, the most dramatic event of the seventeenth century, there occurred five other "revolutions" in Europe.

Merriman, as well as many other historians after him, starts the discussion with the assertion that even contemporaries living in the seventeenth century were puzzled by the number of tumults and revolutions that took place at different geographical points in seventeenth-century Europe. The revolt in Catalonia broke out in August 1640 and lasted until 1652. Its main political goal was independence from Spain.²⁴ The revolution in Portugal, under the same political banner of independence from Spain, started in December 1640, and continued until 1668, the year of the official recognition of

of long-term economic movements. From then on the evidence is conflicting. Probably the signs of revival outweigh those of crisis, not only (obviously) in the maritime States but elsewhere. However, the wild oscillations of boom and depression, the famines, revolts, epidemics and other signs of profound economic trouble in 1680-1720 should warn us against antedating the period of full recovery." E.J. Hobsbawm, "The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century" in *Crisis in Europe (1560-1660)*, ed. Trevor Aston, 13

²³ B.F. Porshnev, *Francija, Anglijskaja revolucija i evropejskaja politika v seredine 17 veka* (Moscow: Nauka, 1970), 34

²⁴ Roger Bigelow Merriman, *Six Contemporaneous Revolutions* (London: Archon Books, 1963), 8

Portugal's independence by Spain.²⁵ The uprising at Naples raged from July 1647, until August 1648. An upheaval in the Netherlands, a movement that also had its origin in the struggle of Holland for independence from Spain, started in 1580 and "resulted, in 1650, in the displacement of the centralized monarchical stadtholderate of the house of Orange in the Netherlands, and in the establishment there for the next twenty-two years of the separatist republican pensionary government of the de Witts."²⁶ And finally, the sixth revolution, the Fronde in France, considered by Merriman solely as a Parliamentary and aristocratic movement against the detested Prime-Minister Mazarin, ravaged the country from 1644 until 1653. Merriman does not venture into generalizations concerning the formation of absolutist states in seventeenth-century Europe or the reaction to this process of "feudal" Parliaments striving to defend customary freedoms. He does not imply that a larger undercurrent of rejection of the novel *absolutist* politics of the French monarchs might have found its expression in the hatred towards the Prime-Ministers who were personifying these politics. Writing in the 1930's, Merriman does not even try to trace a deeper trend in all these upheavals. For him, "the cause of every one of them was financial."²⁷

Merriman concerns himself with explaining that the English Revolution took a more resolute and tragic course than all the other revolutions. He relates it to the accidental, simultaneous rise of the financial problems, that provoked the uprising, and the religious issues that made this uprising so obstinate and uncompromising:

There the religious question, as we have already pointed out, was in the final analysis the most fundamental of all; and this fact doubtless goes far to explain why the English revolution was able to attain results so much more far-reaching than those of any of its contemporaries.²⁸

However superficial his conclusions might appear, Merriman has the merit of outlining for the first time common traits and particularities of the simultaneous revolutions of the seventeenth century.

²⁵ Ibid., 15

²⁶ Ibid., 71

²⁷ Ibid., 90

²⁸ Ibid., 91

In France, in the 1930's, interest in social and economic history had led to the formation and development of the Annales School. The partisans of this "movement" contemplated economic and social changes revealing themselves over a long period of time, a "longue durée", affecting whole regions and continents. Through the use of "quantitative" history, the Annales School also made a claim to the scientific and objective character of historical science that was first introduced by the Positivists at the beginning of the nineteenth century. However, the Annales School largely rejected the validity of applying the Marxist "scheme" of historical materialism to their research, while using the term "histoire matérielle." The Annales historians largely adopted this attitude of denying the relevance of the Marxist method, as the legacy of the Positivists.²⁹

However, the influence of Marxism on twentieth-century historiography did not entirely by-pass the Annales. The monographs by the Annales historian representing the Marxist trend of the school, Ernest Labrousse, *Esquisse du mouvement des prix des revenus en France au XVII^e siècle* (1933) and *La crise de l'économie française à la fin de l'ancien régime et au début de la révolution* (1944), both opened up an era of study of *conjoncture* for the Annales School, and influenced the rush to study the economic crises of seventeenth-eighteenth century France:

His [Ernest Labrousse] two monographs were pioneering studies of what the *Annales* historians would later call *conjoncture*. They have been criticized on occasion for forcing the data to fit the model, but they have been extremely influential.

In his famous essay on 'History and the Social Sciences' (1958), which centered on the concept of *longue durée*, Braudel called Labrousse's *Crisis* 'the greatest work of history to have appeared in France in the course of the last twenty-five years'.³⁰

In 1949, Fernand Braudel [*French historian, director of the Annales from 1956 until 1972*] published his influential work on the changing role of the Mediterranean in the economic, social, and political life of sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe. He

²⁹ Guy Lemarchand, "La question de la transition en Europe du féodalisme au capitalisme aujourd'hui et l'apport d'A. Soboul", *Bulletin d'histoire de la Révolution Française. Années 1992-1993* (Paris: Éditions du C.T.H.S., 1994), 60

³⁰ P. Burke, *The French Historical Revolution*, 55

recognized the existence of a "longue durée," or on-going latent, crisis that affected the seventeenth-century countries surrounding the Mediterranean:

Le siècle entier change de signe, peut-être vers 1550, plus sûrement vers 1580. Une crise latente s'installe au moment même où s'accélère la circulation ne disons pas sans plus la révolution de l'argent....Mais, explication-clef c'est l'inélasticité de la vie agricole qui est en jeu. Un plafond a été atteint...De cette situation insurmontable va naître la "reféodalisation" du XVII siècle, cette révolution agricole à rebours.³¹

François Simiand, the leading economist of the Annales School, following Soviet economist Nikolai Kondratieff³², developed a theory of "longue durée" economic phases that governed the commercial and industrial history of pre-modern Europe. This interest was stimulated by the attempts to explain the financial crisis of 1929, and by the rise of new economic theories. Indeed, the main contribution of the Annales movement to the historical research of the twentieth century lies in the establishment of techniques to study the history of prices and demographic history:

The history of population was the second great conquest of the quantitative approach, after the history of prices.³³

Both of these methodological tools, designed by the Annales school, were used by historians in the nineteen-fifties in order to substantiate the theory of the existence of the Seventeenth-Century Crisis.

The Annales School, that offered the most advanced mid-century French historical research, established, under the direction of Fernand Braudel, a cooperation with Marxists in France and abroad alike. Braudel was personally acquainted with Porshnev, whose name is mentioned in the second edition of the *Méditerranée*.³⁴ According to Peter Burke, Braudel was extremely open-minded towards new ideas and trends of research and was, in the 1950's and 1960's, influenced by Ernest Labrousse.³⁵

³¹ Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le Monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*, deuxième édition, Vol. 1 (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1966), 390

³² Nikolai Kondratieff, *The Long Wave Cycle* (New York: Richardson & Snyder, 1984)

³³ P. Burke, *The French Historical Revolution*, 56

³⁴ F. Braudel, *La Méditerranée*, Vol. 1, 403

³⁵ P. Burke, *op.cit.*, 55-56

Historical determinism and Marxism made their way back into European historical research with the blessing, conscious or unconscious, of Braudel:

Their [*The Annales*] commitment to political neutrality as well as their concern with the "material history" of the broad masses made it possible for them after Stalin's death to establish, in some cases re-establish, close contacts with historians in the Socialist countries of Eastern Europe. Soviet and *Annales* historians, Braudel observed, will inevitably pose different problems, but insofar as they are honest historians, they will be able to agree on the results of their research.³⁶

Writing a synthesis of universal and European history on the basis of new economic, statistical, and historical data became an appealing and rewarding task. Braudel worked on his *Civilisation matérielle et capitalisme*, for over twenty years. Roland Mousnier, professor at the Sorbonne and a rival of the *Annales* movement, "who has been as influential a director of research on the early modern period as Braudel and Labrousse,"³⁷ in his *Les XVIe et XVIIe siècles*, attempted to outline the interdependence of events and historical processes in different countries in the middle of the seventeenth century. Although he was opposed to the Marxist interpretation of historical processes as a "progressive" development towards new economic formations, erupting in fiery revolutionary tumults, he too tried to put together a coherent theory that could explain (from a different point of view) the general trends of historical development in the seventeenth century and the emergence of the Modern Age.

As Alexandra Lublinskaya later put it:

The increased interest in the economic history of the seventeenth century is closely linked with the interest that many foreign historians are showing in the important and complicated problems of the origins of capitalism and its development within the womb of feudal society. Very noteworthy in this connection was not only the appearance, as long ago as 1946, of a book by the British Marxist Maurice Dobb, but also the lively discussion which arose in connection with this book and which has continued right down to the present time.³⁸

³⁶ George G. Iggers, *New Directions in European Historiography* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press: 1975), 75

³⁷ P. Burke, *The French Historical Revolution*, 59

³⁸ A.D. Lublinskaya, *French Absolutism: the Crucial Phase, 1620-1629* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 5

The exchange between Marxist and non-Marxist historians had started in 1954, with the appearance of four major works arguing for the existence of a General Crisis of the seventeenth century. These were E.J. Hobsbawm's "The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century", first published in *Past and Present*, Nos. 5 and 6 (1954), Hugh Trevor-Roper's "The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century" in *Past and Present* No. 16 (1959), and Roland Mousnier's *Les XVIe et XVIIe siècles*, the first edition of which appeared in 1954, under the title: *Les XVIe et XVIIe siècles. Les progrès de la civilisation européenne et le déclin de l'Orient 1492-1715*. Porshnev's *Les soulèvements populaires en France de 1623 à 1648*, where he formulates his theory of the absolutist state's social and political crisis in seventeenth-century France, was published in Russian in 1948, and translated first into German (1954) and into French by the Sixième Section³⁹ in 1963. A.D. Lublinskaya considers that it is the merit of Porshnev's work that it introduces the concept of social, as opposed to economic (the theory based on the fall in prices and decline of population), Crisis.⁴⁰

According to the partisans of the Crisis theory, the period that changed the face of society lasted some forty years, approximately from 1620 until 1660, and affected the whole of Europe, America, and possibly even Asia. During this period of unusual social, political, and economic tension, a new capitalist society was born.

The Marxist aspect of Western "Crisis" historiography was represented by E.J. Hobsbawm, for whom the Crisis marked the shift from agrarian society to industrial revolution:

...the European economy passed through a "general crisis" during the seventeenth century, the last phase of the general transition from a feudal to a capitalist economy.⁴¹

³⁹ P. Burke, *The French Historical Revolution*, 31: "Febvre's greatest achievement in the post-war years was to set up the organization within which 'his' kind of history could develop, the Sixth Section, founded in 1947, of the École Pratique des Hautes Études. Febvre became president of the Sixth Section, concerned with the social sciences, and director of the Centre des Recherches Historiques, which was a section within the section."

⁴⁰ A. D. Lublinskaya, *French Absolutism*, 5-6

⁴¹ E.J. Hobsbawm, "The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century" in *Crisis in Europe 1560 – 1660, Essays from Past and Present*, ed. Trevor Aston, 5

For Hobsbawm the notion of Crisis implies the economic stagnation and retrogression that were overcome only at the end of the seventeenth century, by the transition to a capitalist mode of production. Prior to the period following the Seventeenth-Century Crisis, the capitalist economy existed in Europe but was adapted to the feudal framework, the factor that conditioned the most negative effects of the Crisis in the countries where the contradiction between these two structures was strongest (for example, Italy):

The decline of Italy (and the old centres of medieval commerce and manufacture in general) was the most dramatic result of the crisis. It illustrates the weaknesses of 'capitalism' parasitic on a feudal world.⁴²

He sees the causes of the Crisis in the incompatibility of the existing social structure with constantly developing economic factors. The feudal framework and rural structure of society restrained the nascent capitalist forces. The more capitalist productive forces adapted themselves to the feudal mode of production, the harder they were hit by the crisis that swept away the last obstacles to the development of modern capitalism:

These different aspects of the crisis may be reduced to a single formula: economic expansion took place within a social framework which it was not yet strong enough to burst, and in ways adapted to it rather than to the world of modern capitalism. Specialists in the Jacobean period must determine what actually precipitated the crisis: the decline in American silver, the collapse of the Baltic market or some of many other possible factors. ...in the subsequent period of economic crisis and social upheaval the decisive shift from capitalist enterprise adapted to a generally feudal framework to capitalist enterprise transforming the world in its own pattern, took place. The Revolution in England was thus the most dramatic incident in the crisis, and its turning-point.⁴³

Accordingly, Hobsbawm considers the English Revolution as a bourgeois revolution that insured political support for the development of a "mass production (that is, production for the greatest profits per sale) instead of production for the maximum profit per unit sale."⁴⁴ He argues that the main reason for the occurrence of such a

⁴² Ibid., 18

⁴³ Ibid., 27

⁴⁴ Ibid., 16

political event in England was the existence of economic pre-conditions for the transformation of an English political system:

We are therefore faced with the paradox that capitalism can only develop in an economy which is already substantially capitalist, for in any which is not, the capitalist forces will tend to adapt themselves to the prevailing economy and society, and will therefore not be sufficiently revolutionary.⁴⁵

Hobsbawm's "Crisis" theory can be summarized in the following sequence: 1) the industrially developed areas, such as Italy, Germany, and partly France and Poland irreversibly became "a typical backward peasant area"; 2) this decline became most visible in commerce, that underwent a decisive shift from the Mediterranean and the Baltic to the Atlantic; and 3) the colonial empires of Spain and Portugal contracted and changed character; the Dutch and English colonial expansion shrank:⁴⁶

It is therefore understandable that the 'old colonial system' passed through a profound crisis; and that its effects on the general European economy were far-reaching. A new pattern of colonial exploitation which produced steadily rising exports of manufactures from Europe did indeed replace it.⁴⁷

This European-wide transformation was marked by violent revolutionary upheavals not only in the West Europe, but also in Russia and Ukraine.⁴⁸

In the political sphere, the Crisis found its realization in flamboyant absolutism. Hobsbawm considers the splendor of lavish European courts as an attempt by the State to conceal its economic weakness. The originality of Hobsbawm's theory lies in the fact that he, unlike other historians, such as Trevor-Roper, Porshnev and others, sees in absolutism a means of overcoming the Crisis and moving toward a capitalist mode of production, as opposed to a tool of feudal exploitation or an increased imposition that hindered economic development.

⁴⁵ E.J. Hobsbawm, "The Seventeenth Century in the Development of Capitalism", *Science and Society*, XXIV (1960), 104

⁴⁶ E.J. Hobsbawm, *op.cit.*, 9-11

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 23

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 12: "In the sixteenth century there had been few revolts against the growing enservment of peasants. The Ukrainian revolution of 1648-54 may be regarded as a major servile upheaval."

Only in one respect did the seventeenth century as a whole overcome rather than experience difficulties. Outside the maritime powers with their new and experimental bourgeois regimes most of Europe found an efficient and stable form of government in *absolutism* on the French model. (But the rise of absolutism has been taken as a direct sign of economic weakness. The question is worth exploring further.)⁴⁹

The chief result of the Seventeenth-Century Crisis, according to Hobsbawm, was the concentration of capital that allowed the development of large-scale economic enterprise. Absolutism also proved to be an effective form of government that favored capitalist concentration:

The crisis therefore produced no automatic mechanism for investing capital in the right places. However, it produced two indirect ways of doing so. First, in the continental countries, government enterprise in the new absolute monarchies fostered industries, colonies and export drives which would not otherwise have flourished, as in Colbertian France, expanded or saved from collapse mining and metallurgy and laid the foundations of industries in places where the power of the serf-lords and the weakness or parasitism of the middle classes inhibited them.⁵⁰

The English Revolution embodied the most important outcome of the Crisis. For Hobsbawm, it was the first "bourgeois" revolution that eliminated political obstacles to capitalist expansion:

But of all the economies the most 'modern', the most wholehearted in its subordination of policy to the capitalist entrepreneur was England: the country of the first complete 'bourgeois revolution'. Hence, in a sense, the economic history of the modern world from the middle of the seventeenth century hinges on that of England, which began the period of crisis – say in the 1610's - as a dynamic, but a minor power, and ended it in the 1710's as one of the world's masters. The English Revolution, with all its far-reaching results, is therefore in a real sense the most decisive product of the seventeenth-century crisis.⁵¹

However, assuming the validity of all this argument on the seventeenth-century Crisis and its outcome, one question remained unanswered. Precisely why, if the obstacles to capitalist development were largely overcome by the end of the seventeenth

⁴⁹ Ibid., 12-13

⁵⁰ Ibid., 40

century, at least in England, did it take another century for the industrial revolution to take over? Essentially, the characteristics of English capital remained the same as before "the Crisis." Traditional agriculture, dispersed manufacture, and commerce prevailed over large-scale industrial production until the end of the eighteenth century (England underwent the industrial revolution between the 1780's and 1840's.)⁵²

Lublinskaya in *French Absolutism*, considers that the statement of this problem by Hobsbawm is not scientifically grounded. She sees the slowness in the development of the means of production (or Industrial Revolution) as a factor inherent in the normal development of manufacture. The Industrial Revolution occurred only at the stage of developed industrial production. The economic basis of early Modern society was simply not ripe for the Industrial Revolution, and neither Crisis nor its resolution could influence these objective economic conditions:⁵³

Yet the slow course of capitalist development in its manufactory stage is not accidental or wholly due to the feudal framework, decline in demand and so on. This characteristic was inherent in manufacture, to the same degree as the rapid rate of development was inherent in the capitalism of the nineteenth century, and was one of its typical properties... The cause of this slowness lies in the retention throughout the entire manufactory period of the previous technical basis, that is, of production by hand... Marx notes that 'during the period between the sixteenth century and the epoch of modern capitalism, capital failed to become the master of the whole disposable working-time of the manufacturing laborers.'⁵⁴

However, there is another view of this question, formulated by Immanuel Wallerstein. He asserts that capitalism was fully established in Europe already by the fifteenth century: "It is only with the creating of a *European* division of labor after 1450 that capitalism found firm roots."⁵⁵ Indeed, seventeenth-century society could not, without reservations, be called "feudal". Hobsbawm's, as well as Lublinskaya's, error is that of attributing to seventeenth-century society economic aspects that it had not borne

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 53

⁵² *Ibid.*, 29-30

⁵³ A.D. Lublinskaya, *French Absolutism*, 56

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 65-66

⁵⁵ I. Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World-Economy*, 19

since the end of Middle Ages. The period from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, then, was a period of capitalist, but not yet industrial, mode of production:

If capitalism is a mode of production, production for profit in a market, then we ought, I should have thought, to look to whether or not such production was or was not occurring. It turns out in fact that it was, and in a very substantial form. Most of this production, however, was not industrial production. What was happening in Europe from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries is that over a large geographical area going from Poland in the northeast westwards and southwards throughout Europe and including large parts of the Western Hemisphere as well, there grew up a world-economy with a single division of labor within which there was a world market, for which men produced largely agricultural products for sale and profit. I would think the simplest thing to do would be to call this agricultural capitalism.⁵⁶

In Wallerstein's opinion, it was not economic, but political changes, precisely the establishment of "bureaucratic" national states and the failure of the Habsburgs to establish a "world empire," that incited the shift in economic and political status of European states. This shift occurred somewhere around 1640, in the world-wide market, and was considered by historians as a crisis of feudalism:

The emergence of the European world-economy in the 'long' sixteenth century (1450-1640) was made possible by an historical conjuncture: on those long-term trends which were the culmination of what has been sometimes described as the 'crisis of feudalism' was superimposed a more immediate cyclical crisis plus climatic changes, all of which created a dilemma that could only be resolved by a geographic expansion of the division of labor...It was the system-wide recession of 1650-1730 that consolidated the European world-economy and opened stage two of the modern world-economy...In this struggle England first ousted the Netherlands from its commercial primacy and then resisted successfully France's attempts to catch up. As England began to speed up the process of industrialization after 1760, there was one last attempt of those capitalist forces located in France to break the imminent British hegemony. This attempt was expressed first in the French Revolution's replacement of the cadres of the regime and then in Napoleon's continental blockade. But it failed.

Stage three of the capitalist world-economy begins then, a stage of industrial rather than of agricultural capitalism.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Ibid., 16

Oddly, this view on the causes of the Crisis that occurred in the seventeenth century as situated in the sphere of economic and political competition between the European national states, corroborates the main conclusions of Lublinskaya's critique of the "crisis theory", that will be considered later in this paper. The essence of this critique is the assertion that if a Crisis had occurred in the seventeenth century, it was first and foremost a political crisis. The shift in the economic role of European states was due to the "normal" economic and political competition among them. Thus, opposing Hobsbawm's view, a trend of denying the seventeenth century any credit for profound economic transformations, is articulated.

As Hugh Trevor-Roper justly pointed out in his article, "The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century", Hobsbawm's Marxist outlook takes for a basic premise the postulate that the only possible cause of such a dramatic social upheaval as the English Revolution, was the intensification of antagonism between progressive "productive forces" and the stagnant "relationships of production." Hobsbawm's theory of economic crisis thus originated from the assumption that the English Revolution was a bourgeois revolution that modified existing relationships of production. Trevor-Roper's conviction, on the other hand, is that the Revolution in England in 1640, was in its roots and outcome a social movement whose slogans against an oppressive and economically unbearable, parasitic State, expressed the "mood of Puritanism."⁵⁸

According to Trevor-Roper, the fact that the English Revolution opened up a new era of economic expansion in England, does not by itself mean either that the Revolution possessed capitalist characteristics, or that, as the 'turning point', it started a new stage in economic development. There is even less foundation for the assumption that other revolutionary movements in other parts of the world possessed the same character and effected the same changes as the Revolution in England. The conclusion that evolves naturally out of the argument developed by Trevor-Roper, is that large generalizations

⁵⁷ Ibid., 25-27

⁵⁸ H.R. Trevor-Roper, "The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century" in *Religion, the Reformation, and Social Change*, ed. H.R. Trevor-Roper (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1967), 70-71

can be quite superficial and misleading when talking of a particular event at a particular place.

Trevor-Roper himself, however, is not at all free from a taste for large generalizations. His is the premise that the sixteenth century was an age of economic "expansion"⁵⁹, and the seventeenth century was an age of economic "depression" and of "general revolution."⁶⁰ For Trevor-Roper, the period from 1500 until 1620, is the age of Renaissance; the years 1620-1660 - the years of revolution; and from the 1660's on, "for another century and a half,"⁶¹ - the age of Enlightenment. Trevor-Roper elaborated this theory in detail in his article "Religion, the Reformation, and Social Change"⁶² that gave the name to his book fully dedicated to the seventeenth century and its Crisis.

The resolution of the Crisis was found in "mercantilist" policies "based on the economic interest of society."⁶³ By "mercantilist" State, that partially developed as a result of the Crisis in France,⁶⁴ for example, Trevor-Roper means a state whose policies were directed towards protection and development of commerce and business. It was not, however, a "new, capitalist" type of state. On the contrary, it was a State that took as a model the old "city-state" of the Venetian type.⁶⁵

Thus, the Crisis of the seventeenth century was the crisis that set State (in Trevor-Roper's terms, the Princely Renaissance State) and Society against each other. Although there was not a clear-cut division between these two opposing social structures,⁶⁶ Trevor-Roper defines the Princely State and its bureaucracy as the "Court" and all of the social groups that suffered the burden of taxes and of the state bureaucracy as the "Country."⁶⁷ These were, respectively, the mercantilism-oriented gentry, peasants, merchants, city-entrepreneurs, and workers:

⁵⁹ Ibid., 60

⁶⁰ Ibid., 46,68, 70

⁶¹ Ibid., 50

⁶² H.R. Trevor-Roper, "Religion, the Reformation and Social Change" in *Religion, the Reformation, and Social Change*, 1

⁶³ Ibid., 77

⁶⁴ Ibid., 83

⁶⁵ Ibid., 89

⁶⁶ Ibid., 74

⁶⁷ Ibid., 61-65

...in so far as it was a general crisis – i.e. ignoring inessential variations from place to place – ...it was a crisis in the relations between society and the State.⁶⁸

The revolutions of the seventeenth century thus realized the struggle of society against the Princely Renaissance State, a reactionary social and political structure.⁶⁹ The revolution in England swept away "the most obstinate and yet, given the political structure of England, the frailest of the Renaissance monarchies...."⁷⁰

The discussion of the character of the Crisis that affected Europe in the seventeenth century was furthered by Roland Mousnier, who in 1954, brought out the fourth volume in the series *Histoire générale des civilisations*, entitled *Les XVIe et XVIIe siècles*. In this work, for the first time, Mousnier openly defined the seventeenth century as a time of permanent and general economic, social, political, and intellectual crisis:

Le XVII^e siècle est l'époque d'une crise qui affecte tout l'homme, dans toutes ses activités, économique, sociale, politique, religieuse, scientifique, artistique, et dans tout son être, au plus profond de sa puissance vitale, de sa sensibilité et de sa volonté. La crise est permanente, s'il est permis de s'exprimer ainsi, avec de violentes variations d'intensité...L'État, le corps, la classe sociale, l'individu luttent sans cesse pour rétablir dans leur milieu et en eux-mêmes l'ordre et l'unité. Bataille haletante, acharnée, pour un équilibre toujours fuyant, où l'humanité accomplit en Europe une transformation décisive, certains vont jusqu'à dire une mutation de l'espèce....⁷¹

Mousnier, like many other Western historians, was reluctant to apply to the historical process Marxist terms like "economic formation" and the notion of its "inevitable" change in the course of "class struggle." He did not recognize the necessity of a revolutionary movement in order for one *economic formation* to be substituted by a

⁶⁸ Ibid., 55

⁶⁹ Ibid., 50: "We must look past the background, into the structure of society. For all revolutions, even though they may be occasioned by external causes, and expressed in intellectual form, are made real and formidable by defects of social structure.

Contemporaries who looked at the revolutions of the seventeenth century saw them as political revolutions: as struggles between the two traditional organs of the ancient "mixed monarchy" – the Crown and the Estates. This was the form they took."

⁷⁰ Ibid., 87

⁷¹ R. Mousnier, *Les XVIe et XVIIe siècles: La grande mutation intellectuelle de l'humanité, l'avènement de la science moderne et l'expansion de l'Europe* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967), 163

more "progressive" one. He saw economic, political and social development as a continuous evolution with cyclical, gradual shifts from expansion to contraction. Economic development was unfolding continuously in phases of expansion and contraction, each phase being a necessary prerequisite of the other.⁷² For him, the seventeenth century was a phase of economic contraction that was aggravated to the point of a "catastrophe" by ecological disasters, rise in prices, and the prolonged hostilities of the Thirty Years' War.⁷³

Mousnier refers to the rise of prices, due to the influx of precious metals from America, as one of the causes of the price revolution and the unusual hardship that struck Europe in the seventeenth century. Along with the rise of prices, poor harvests, unstable development of industry, and long hostilities, coupled with the growth of population, made survival, not only of peasants and city workers, but even of merchants and nobles, a questionable matter.

Concerning the ecological aspect of the epoch, Mousnier expresses the view that the seventeenth century was the century of never before seen economic and ecological disasters that became the major cause of social unrest in seventeenth-century Europe.⁷⁴ This point became crucial in Mousnier's later work, such as *Fureurs Paysannes: Les paysans dans les révoltes du XVIIe siècle (France, Russie, Chine)* (1967). The negative influence of climatic conditions on the troubled character of the epoch was, however, refuted already in 1959, by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie:

⁷² Ibid., 87-88: "La fin du XVe siècle est, en même temps, la fin d'une phase B. de François Simiand, c'est-à-dire la fin d'une période de pénurie des métaux précieux, de baisse des prix, de contraction des échanges et de la production. Les difficultés de l'économie stimulèrent les recherches...et déclenchèrent une phase de hausse d'ensemble de longue durée des prix, et des quantités produites et échangées, une phase A. de Simiand....Et ces trafics se montrent affectés de cycles de croissance et de décroissance qui rappellent tout à fait les grands cycles de la vie économique reconnus par les spécialistes pour le haut capitalisme du XIXe et du XXe siècle: cycle de 50 à 60 ans ou cycle de Kondratieff, cycle de 7 à 11 ans ou cycle de Juglar, cycle de 3 ou 4 ans, ou cycle de Kitchin. N'est pas un cycle de Kondratieff, qui commence vers la fin du XVe siècle avec l'élan donné aux affaires par la découverte des nouvelles routes océaniques, qui se termine par la grande récession de 1550-1559, dont les premiers symptômes sont de 1547-48, et qui ne cède vraiment à une reprise des affaires que vers 1562-63?"

⁷³ Ibid., 168-170

⁷⁴ Ibid., 168-169

Inversement, la crise du XVII^e siècle, parfois présentée comme l'incidence humaine et historique du 'petit âge glaciaire,' atteint en fait ses paroxysmes dans des périodes de rémission climatique.⁷⁵

Mousnier's theory is based on the admission of the existence of a more or less developed capitalist sector in the economy of sixteenth and seventeenth-century Europe. This capitalist sector was influential not only in the cities, but also extended its effects to the country-side. But he does not assume that the country-side was in fact the cradle of this economy. For him, as for many other historians, capitalism equals industrialisation. And seventeenth-century capitalism was most active in the sphere of commerce, and only partially in that of industry:

Ce grand commerce capitaliste pénétra, par l'intermédiaire d'une foule de marchands, jusque dans les bourgs agricoles, où le paysan riche se vêtit le dimanche avec un luxe de citadin, et où l'activité productrice et l'entreprise se trouvèrent stimulées. Mais l'économie n'en resta pas moins avant tout une économie citadine régionale. De grandes villes s'étaient développées au détriment des villes moindres. Venise, Florence, Anvers, Paris, Lyon, Londres, Nuremberg, Augsbourg, Lübeck, dépassent 30, 40 et 50.000 habitants, parfois 100.000. Avec leurs industries, ce sont des centres de consommation, de transformation et de redistribution, qui exigent des importations nombreuses. Mais la plus grande part des denrées et matières premières consommées est, en général, fournie par la région.⁷⁶

This predominantly merchant bourgeoisie, according to Mousnier, constituted the social basis of the new political institution that emerged in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the absolutist monarchy. We come again to the question of the absolutist monarchy, its formation, and its role in the Crisis of the seventeenth century (if, indeed, the Crisis ever occurred.) The absolutist monarchy found economic and political support largely in the bourgeoisie, and thereby, initiated the subsequent development of the modern "non-class" state:

Monarchie absolue et grand capitalisme apparaissent ainsi comme fonction l'un de l'autre. La monarchie absolue, avec ses domaines, avec ses impôts prélevés surtout sur l'agriculture, avec ses monopoles

⁷⁵ Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, "Histoire et Climat", *Annales*, janvier-mars (1959), 31

⁷⁶ R. Mousnier, *Les XVI^e et XVII^e siècles*, 97

commerciaux, devient une sorte de grande entreprise capitaliste dont les techniciens, les partenaires et les fournisseurs sont les financiers.⁷⁷

The bourgeoisie was used by the absolutist state as a buffer between the rivaling interests of other social groups or, in Mousnier's terms, "ordres" that constituted the society. He is convinced that the absolutist state played the role of some kind of nationalising element that conducted its policy without taking into consideration the interests of any social group in particular. Following Mousnier's theory of absolute monarchy, its place in the historical process was that of an arbiter between different social groups. According to him, the King represented a *balancing* element in this hierarchical, *non-class*, "société d'ordres." He was placed above all existing social groups and defended the traditional place of each one of them.⁷⁸

The "Grand Absolutist Revolution" in France, that was incarnated in the reign of Louis XIV, consisted in the eventual transformation of the absolutist monarchy, dependent on the bourgeoisie, into the autocratic monarchy. The autocratic "personal" monarchy of Louis XIV functioned through an already hereditary group of State functionaries. The main characteristic of this social group was their distinction from both nobles and bourgeois, who had constituted the "ordres" previously admitted to power:

Ainsi le Roi, partageant les fonctions entre deux classes, mais réservant les plus importantes à la classe moindre, la bourgeoisie, élevant systématiquement celle-ci et l'opposant à l'autre, la plus forte, ramène la lutte de classes à un point d'équilibre entre les classes qui assure son pouvoir personnel et, dans le Gouvernement et l'État, l'unité, l'ordre, la hiérarchie. Mais aussi, peut-être contraint par la crise et la guerre et sans avoir voulu changer la structure sociale du Royaume, le Roi nivelle et égalise de plus en plus, dans le service dû à l'État, la soumission totale, l'obéissance sans limites et, avec Louis XIV, son pouvoir devient autocratique et révolutionnaire.⁷⁹

Mousnier does not deny in this early work, as opposed to the later monograph *Fureurs Paysannes: Les paysans dans les révoltes du XVIIe siècle (France, Russie, Chine)* (1967), that, being a "société d'ordres" as it was, the French absolutist monarchy

⁷⁷ Ibid., 98

⁷⁸ Ibid., 186

⁷⁹ Ibid., 256

bore within itself a class character that represented the interests of the rich against those of the poor. The State was not egalitarian:

L'État réserve aux marchands-fabricants les fonctions municipales et l'autorité dans les villes. L'État soutient tous les patrons contre les ouvriers, dans leur effort pour éliminer la concurrence, réduire les salaires, obtenir le maximum de travail.⁸⁰

Moreover, according to Mousnier, the monarchs had progressive goals in mind. But they also had to promote the interests of the nobility and of the ennobled bourgeoisie (*noblesse de robe*) as the social groups endowed with power and most able to exercise it: "les souverains avaient des objectifs positifs, mais leur politique devait tenir compte des sentiments des classes cultivées."⁸¹

At this point Mousnier stresses once again his theory that seventeenth-century French society was not a class society, that is, according to the definition given in his later work *Fureurs Paysannes*, it was not a capitalist society. For him, seventeenth-century French society was a complicated mixture of new trends and old traditions, later defined as "la société d'ordres."⁸²

In contrast with France, Mousnier treats English society as a bourgeois society, that is, a class society that had turned against the king, and initiated the English revolution as a "bourgeois revolution":

Le Roi n'incarne plus l'idéal national et les classes rivales peuvent s'unir contre lui. Il a, devant lui, une société embourgeoisée.⁸³

Mousnier notes that one of the reasons for the difficult political situation in France consisted in prolonged hostilities between the French monarchy and the Habsburgs. The national politics of absolutism led to a financial distress that affected all levels of society, and provoked social revolts:

La fiscalité devient vite la raison, le motif ou le prétexte d'insurrections. Contre l'impôt royale, les seigneurs et les paysans sont d'accord, car, si la récolte n'est pas bonne, l'impôt royal va empêcher le paiement des

⁸⁰ Ibid., 174

⁸¹ Ibid., 194

⁸² Ibid., 183

⁸³ Ibid., 187

redevances seigneuriales. De plus et surtout, les augmentations d'impôt, les créations d'impôts nouveaux, sont une violation de la coutume. Or, la coutume locale est sacrée. Dans ce type de société, tout ce qui est ancien et de coutume est bonne et vénérable. Tout ce qui est nouveau est suspect et mauvais. Toute nouveauté est insupportable. De plus, ces impôts et ces taxes, décidés par le Conseil du Roi, lointain et inconnu, sans l'avis des personnages respectés du "Pays"...Les innovations royales, la centralisation croissante de l'État moderne, blessaient tous les coeurs et unissaient tous les groupes sociaux contre le Roi pour la défense de la coutume, de la tradition et des libertés.⁸⁴

Furthermore, the necessities of war favored the formation of monarchies (with the example of the Netherlands),⁸⁵ where the rivaling trends led to the establishment of a mixed, capitalist and absolutist, form of government. With the same spirit Mousnier examines Germany. He states that the main goal of the imperial politics of Ferdinand II was the creation of an absolutist state:

C'est de ce chaos impuissant que le Habsbourg tente de faire un État... Le pouvoir impérial devenait un pouvoir monarchique absolu et l'Empereur, pour l'Europe, un plus grand danger.⁸⁶

One of the most persistent adversaries of this point of view, concerning the Habsburgs' politics, was a Soviet historian, Boris Porshnev. Porshnev denied that the main goal of the Habsburgs consisted in the establishment of an absolutist monarchy. He also argued with Mousnier's general perception of the social and political structure and dynamics of seventeenth-century French society.

Later, Wallerstein corroborated Porshnev's perception of the Habsburgs' politics as utterly reactionary. These politics were directed towards a creation of a world empire and not of a national state:

The imperial framework established political constraints which prevented the effective growth of capitalism, set limits on economic growth and sowed the seeds of stagnation and/or disintegration.

By a series of historical accidents too complex to develop here, the nascent European world-economy of the sixteenth century knew no such imperium. The only serious attempt to create one - that of Charles V and

⁸⁴ Ibid., 180

⁸⁵ Ibid., 188

⁸⁶ Ibid., 190-191

the Habsburgs - was a failure. The failure of Charles V was the success of Europe.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ I. Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World-Economy*, 37-38

III

Marxist theory was used as a unique methodological tool for historical research in the Soviet Union. The Marxist materialist outlook emphasized relationships of production and the development of productive forces as determining factors in the life of society. The glorification of proletarian dictatorship, that had to be established in order to ensure the just redistribution of income, constituted the key element of the ideological campaign of the Soviet governmental elite. This ideology was propagated incessantly and became a necessity of everyday life. Of course, Lenin and Stalin, the "fathers" of Soviet ideology, adjusted Marxist theory of the proletarian revolution to the Soviet conditions. From the 1930's on, the Stalinist-Marxist outlook was brutally enforced and dissidents were disciplined. Hence, the main theme of historical research in the Soviet Union was to analyze the development of economic formations and of course, the class struggle that brought to life progressive shifts in the relationships of production. Soviet historians sought to elucidate these concepts in terms of concrete historical examples. Thus, the huge and ideologically overloaded enterprise of rewriting history on the Marxist basis evolved. Most of the work that was done by the Soviet historians in this direction proved completely irrelevant after the collapse of the Soviet Union, which discredited its ideological foundations.

According to Konstantin Shtepa, who writes on the ideological evolution of the Soviet Historical School in his monograph *Russian Historians and the Soviet State* (1962) the discussion of "social formations" and their change in the course of class struggle was one of the most important elements in Soviet historiography. This question pertained to the very basis of Marxism-Leninism and what was termed "Party Marxism."⁸⁸ The discussion of "social formations" started in the 1920's and lasted for more than ten years. With the appearance of *The Short Course on the History of the All-Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik)* in 1939, all the theoretical questions had been settled according to the Party line, "and revision was henceforth anathema."⁸⁹ The "first big engagement" of this

⁸⁸ K.F. Shtepa, *Russian Historians and the Soviet State*, 48

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 52

discussion was the critique of D.M. Petrushevsky's *Outline of the Economic History of Medieval Europe*, published in 1928. In his work, this Marxist historian of the old (pre-Revolutionary) Russian School suddenly stepped outside of Marxist thought by interpreting feudalism "not as a social-economic formation, but merely as a political structure, and consequently tore the superstructure from its base."⁹⁰ A similar type of "error" would be committed twenty years later by Boris Porshnev in his research on the peasant uprisings in seventeenth-century France.

Boris Fedorovitch Porshnev was born on March 7, 1905, in St-Petersburg.⁹¹ Historian and sociologist, professor since 1941, Doctor of History since 1941, Doctor of Philosophy since 1966, honorary professor at Clermont-Ferrand University since 1957, Porshnev had started his scientific and teaching career in 1929, in Rostov-on-Don. In 1943, he began teaching at Moscow State University. He also taught at Moscow Pedagogy Institute (1935-1946), Moscow Institute of Philosophy, Literature, and History (1937-1941), and in the Academy of Social Sciences at the Central Committee of the Communist Party (1946-1962). From 1957 until 1966, Porshnev was head of the Department of Modern History of Western Europe at the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences; since 1968 he was head of the Department of History of Ideas at this Institute. He died on November 25, 1972, in Moscow, while finishing his trilogy on the international relations of the period of the Thirty Years' War, the second part of which was dedicated to the Crisis in the relations between West and East Europe⁹², and is still awaiting publication.

The best known historical work of Porshnev is *Les soulèvements populaires en France de 1623 à 1648*. The main achievement of this work, dealing with popular uprisings in seventeenth-century France, involves bringing to light the role of peasants' movements in the evolution of French society from feudalism to capitalism.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 53-54

⁹¹ *Sovetskaia Istoricheskaya Encyclopaedia* (Moscow, 1975), 460; " B.F. Porshnev. Obituary.", *Voprosy istorii*, No. 1 (1973), 218

⁹² B. Porshnev, *Moscow and Sweden in the Thirty Years' War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), x

The work was written in its grand lines in 1941, as Porshnev's doctoral thesis, and was first published in Russian in 1948. Rich in factual material and offering a detailed analysis of social and political life in France under Richelieu and Mazarin, the monograph attracted the attention of historians world-wide and proved to be the most important achievement of Porshnev's professional career. Amassed and interpreted by Porshnev, the body of scientific data from the archives of St.-Petersburg, was recognised as bearing a salient scientific value. These archival materials, that underlay Porshnev's research, constituted a part of the personal archives of the French Chancellor Pierre Séguier (1588-1672), who is perpetuated in history as head of the punitive expedition to Normandy after the revolt of the "Va-nu-pieds" in 1639. During the French Revolution of 1789, a part of these archives ended up in the hands of a secretary of the Russian Embassy in Paris, Pierre Dubrowsky, who sold this collection to the Russian government and became its curator in St-Petersburg's Public Library in 1805.⁹³

In recognition of the scientific value of his work, Porshnev was honoured by the USSR State Award in 1950. As an expression of international recognition came Porshnev's nomination in 1957, as an honorary professor at the University of Blaise Pascal at Clermont-Fernand in France, a status that distinguished Porshnev from the rest of his Soviet colleagues. In my opinion, this appointment can also be related to a series of public lectures that Porshnev delivered in Paris during 1957.⁹⁴ It is likely that Porshnev's appointment as an honorary professor at the University bearing the name of Blaise Pascal⁹⁵ was determined by the theme of his research, although there can be other reasons, such as possible Marxist orientations of the administration of the University at Clermont-Ferrand. The fact that Albert Soboul also obtained his first university appointment at this University and taught there from 1960 until 1967 could sustain this theory.⁹⁶

⁹³ B.F. Porshnev, *Narodnye vosstania vo Frantsii pered Frondoi (1623-1648)* (Moscow-Leningrad: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1948), 7-10

⁹⁴ "Group for Research in French History", *Voprosy istorii*, No. 5 (1957), 204

⁹⁵ Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), French philosopher and scientist.

⁹⁶ Claude Mazauric, "Albert Soboul dans la mémoire collective" in *Bulletin d'histoire de la Révolution Française. Années 1992-1993*. (1994), 24, 30: Albert Soboul, a French Marxist historian writing on the French Revolution. Born on April 27, 1914, died on September 11, 1982.

The theoretical framework onto which the scientific data analyzed in Porshnev's work was fitted however, provoked a critical outburst outside as well as within the Soviet School. Indeed, the second "award" that Porshnev received for the work that brought him world-wide recognition was official censure for his "theoretical" errors.⁹⁷

An article in the main Soviet historical journal *Voprosy istorii* (*Questions of History*) in 1952, No. 2, p.197, was especially consecrated to the errors of Porshnev. As Shteppa puts it:

One mistake of Porshnev was his opposition of peasant property, as though it were labor property, to bourgeois nonlabor property. However, he made another very serious political mistake by transposing the statement of Stalin to the effect that "the national question is basically a peasant question" from the epoch of "imperialism and proletarian revolution" to the epoch of feudalism and capitalism. From his critics we read:

Porshnev considers that "open" peasant war played a pre-eminent role in the formation of nations...B.F. Porshnev dissolves the material conditions of production in the class struggle in order to picture the class struggle as the only creator of nations...This question is quite differently elucidated by the classics of Marxism-Leninism. They consider the establishment of nations as an historically lawful process, resulting in the last analysis from the development of productive forces and production relationships and not dependent upon the will of the people and productive relationships. They subordinate the class struggle to this material foundation, as a by-product, in the process of which nations are formed...While intending to strike a blow at the theories which were diminishing the role of the class struggle of the peasantry in the historical process, B.F. Porshnev came to reject the material bases of the historical lawfulness of this struggle and came to diminish the historical role of the proletariat and of proletarian revolution.⁹⁸

In addition to throwing a new light on the peasant struggle and interpreting its role in the development of French society, Porshnev represented class struggle as a unique motor force of historical progress. But for him, as opposed to the orthodox Marxists, the class struggle was determinative of the economic conditions that followed, instead of economic conditions preparing and insuring the success of the latter:

Rien ne peut être expliqué scientifiquement, en ce qui concerne l'histoire des siècles passés, si l'historien perd de vue, un seul instant la poussée de

⁹⁷ K.F. Shteppa, *Russian Historians and the Soviet State*, 196

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 197

cette force souterraine et gigantesque, contre laquelle se créaient, afin de l'opprimer et de la dompter, des États, des religions, divers systèmes de morale, de lois, d'idées.⁹⁹

However, the founders of Marxism considered the peasantry as a merely conservative social group. Marx and Engels advocated the revolutionary character of the bourgeoisie and the historical mission of the proletariat, the supreme product of capitalist development. Proletariat, in alliance with the bourgeoisie, was destined to save the world from exploitation:

The lower middle class, the small manufacturer, the shopkeeper, the artisan, the peasant, all these fight against the bourgeoisie, to save from extinction their existence as fractions of the middle class. They are therefore not revolutionary, but conservative. Nay more, they are reactionary, for they try to roll back the wheel of history.¹⁰⁰

It is probable that Porshnev's conviction of the revolutionary role of the peasantry originated from observations on the experience of the Russian Revolution of 1917, and Stalin's treatment of the Russian peasantry in the period of the February and Bolshevik Revolutions of 1917, as the natural ally of the revolutionary proletariat:

Meanwhile, Russia saw the rise of the greatest popular revolution in the world. It was led by the most revolutionary proletariat in the world, that had such a serious ally as the revolutionary Russian peasantry.¹⁰¹

In any case, Porshnev's theoretical position could not be classified as that of an orthodox Marxist. He went against the classics of Marxism by counterpoising the "immanent, so to speak, reactionism of the bourgeoisie" to the "genuine revolutionism of the peasants."¹⁰² From the Western side, quite ironically, Porshnev's work was accused of being a bold application of the Marxist theoretical framework to French history:

Les soulèvements populaires en France de 1623 à 1648 relèvent donc ici d'une histoire 'marxiste' de la France de Richelieu et de Mazarin. C'est

⁹⁹ B.F. Porshnev, *Les soulèvements populaires en France de 1623 à 1648*, (Paris, S.E.V.P.E.N, 1963), 18

¹⁰⁰ K. Marx and F. Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party" in *Selected Works*, 44

¹⁰¹ I.V. Stalin, "On the foundations of Leninism" in *Sochinenia*, Vol. 6 (Moscow, 1947),

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¹⁰² K.F. Shtepa, *op.cit.*, 196

une application du 'modèle' marxiste de la lutte des classes à l'histoire de la société française au XVII^e siècle.¹⁰³

It is true that the monograph treated the history of the first half of the seventeenth-century in France as a cluster of class-struggles of the French peasantry, and at times the bourgeoisie. Porshnev depicted the popular uprisings, unfolding in the period of the strengthening of absolutism, as a struggle against feudal exploitation. In the time of absolutism, feudal rent was not only centralised but also represented a triple burden on the peasants and city populace. In addition to paying customary feudal dues and Church tithe, peasants and merchants were also taxed by the Absolutist State:

Ainsi, vers la fin du Moyen Age, la France présentait une autorité féodale, redoublée: seigneuriale et centralisée, et une exploitation ou rente féodale double: seigneuriale et centralisée. On comprend aisément, que le but essentiel de l'état absolutiste étant la répression des mouvements antifiscaux, ses fonctions d'exploiteur augmentaient le joug qui pesait sur les producteurs directs et devaient infailliblement stimuler ces mêmes mouvements. En d'autres termes, la règle du féodalisme était: celui qui prend-réprime, qui réprime-prend. En même temps que sous l'aspect d'un Etat centralisé se créait une organisation spéciale pour la répression, une partie de la rente féodale prélevée dans tout le pays sur les producteurs directs lui revenait sous forme d'impôts. La pression fiscale représentait une augmentations de la rente féodale totale, c'est-à-dire l'augmentation de l'exploitation féodale.¹⁰⁴

Seventeenth-century France represented the quintessence of feudal exploitation, strengthened and organised by the Absolutist State. The State taxes were nothing but a disguised feudal rent:

Il faut encore une fois noter que les impôts sur la population perçus par un état féodal, n'étaient autres qu'une forme centralisée de la rente féodale, de même que par son origine le pouvoir royal n'était que le maillon central de la hiérarchie féodale.¹⁰⁵

The originality of Porshnev's perception of class struggle in seventeenth-century France lay in his conviction that the peasant uprisings, whose immediate cause was the

¹⁰³ Robert Mandrou's "Foreword" in B.F. Porshnev, *Les soulèvements populaires*, 8

¹⁰⁴ B.F. Porshnev, *Les soulèvements populaires*, 395-396

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 395

burden of State taxes, were directed in fact against feudal exploitation generally, and thus promoted the development of capitalism:

C'était le point vulnérable, le talon d'Achille, de l'absolutisme français; les attaques contre le système fiscal devaient infailliblement se transformer en attaques contre «l'ancien régime» tout entier. Ensuite ce système fiscal freinait le développement du capitalisme en France et incarnait la suprématie du féodalisme sur le capitalisme. C'est pourquoi la lutte antifiscale facilitait le développement du capitalisme en France, même si des éléments réactionnaires prenaient part à cette lutte. Le programme antifiscal fut également le terrain qui facilita l'union des deux forces révolutionnaires, paysanne et plébéienne...Donc la lutte contre les impôts créait un front unique paysan-plébéien, ce qui renforçait au premier chef la puissance de combat du mouvement.¹⁰⁶

Porshnev denies the nobility and bourgeoisie any active role in the popular movements against feudalism, dismissing the existence of some evidence to this respect. The basis for this critical attitude is the assumption that neither the nobility nor the bourgeoisie had any reason to struggle with the absolutist state. They were protected by this state, whose main function was the suppression of popular movements and the preservation of the property of the rich. The nobles also received all kinds of privileges, pensions, and rents from the absolutist state, that thus "redistributed" feudal rents.

Porshnev's statement with regard to the monarchy not representing the rule of the bourgeoisie is corroborated by the data he amassed on bourgeois participation in uprisings at the beginning of the seventeenth century. As long as these uprisings did not become threatening to the existence of social order, the bourgeois were sympathetic towards outbursts of popular wrath against the government. Porshnev uses this example to illustrate his theory of the shifting position of the bourgeoisie, its opposition to the regime, and its conservative, non-revolutionary character. This fact again demonstrates Porshnev's "leftist" inclinations:

Au XVIIe siècle, la bourgeoisie française avait une attitude politique et sociale pleine de contradictions; elle était trop étroitement liée avec le régime féodal et absolutiste pour s'aventurer à prendre la tête d'une révolution paysanne antiféodale.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 347

The role of the bourgeoisie in French seventeenth-century social structure was more ambiguous than that of the nobility who, as noted in the quotation above, constituted the supporting beam of the absolutist monarchy. The bourgeoisie was admitted to the circle of privileged classes, first and foremost, for its participation in the suppression of popular movements:

Autrement dit, le rapprochement entre l'Etat nobiliaire et la bourgeoisie que celle-ci désirait ardemment, n'était, du point de vue de l'État nobiliaire, qu'un mal inévitable.¹⁰⁸

According to Porshnev, absolutism was the supreme expression of feudalism and the instrument of its conservation. In this respect, its main functions were: the suppression of popular movements menacing to overthrow feudal rule; the maintenance of the alliance with the bourgeoisie; the redistribution of feudal rent among the nobles, and, if possible, the extension of national frontiers in order to accumulate more wealth by which the nobility can profit.¹⁰⁹

In order to ensure the political support from the bourgeoisie in case of popular uprisings and, by the same token, to extract some much-needed money for its expensive foreign policies, the monarchy allowed a partial participation of the bourgeoisie in the administration of the State. This participation was materialised through the sale of offices. The purchase of offices not only represented a way of crediting the state, but also insured the admittance of the bourgeoisie into the ruling classes. By the same token, the bourgeoisie could not be considered as a class that contributed to the development of "progressive" capitalist relations in France and the establishment of the capitalist political rule. The economic and political role of the bourgeoisie in feudal-absolutist France was "reactionary":

La bourgeoisie n'utilisait pas sa richesse pour déployer une activité capitaliste, mais pour prendre place dans les rangs de la noblesse et c'est la seconde façon pour la bourgeoisie de perdre ses caractères de classe, la première étant l'engouement quasi général des bourgeois pour les offices

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 84

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 563

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 458

de cet État, dont le rôle était précisément d'empêcher la révolution bourgeoise.¹¹⁰

The economic activities of the French bourgeoisie unfolded in the direction of full cooperation with the state and assimilation of its feudal characteristics. The inspirations of the French bourgeois were turned towards the obtainment of privileges that were accorded to the nobles. On several occasions Porshnev repeats that only nobles (with some bourgeois exceptions) were exempt from taxes during absolutism, a fact that proves the nobiliary and feudal character of the absolutist monarchy. It is important to remember here, that for Porshnev taxes were the realization of feudal exploitation, or dependence. Consequently, the bourgeoisie, by its economic activities directed towards the obtainment of privileges, assimilated the regime's reactionary, feudal character:

La bourgeoisie aisée n'investissait pas ses capitaux dans les seuls offices. Lorsqu'un marchand ou un négociant réussissait à accumuler un capital considérable, il cherchait souvent à acheter des terres et ainsi s'assimiler à un seigneur, bien que cet investissement du capital ne fût pas très avantageux.¹¹¹

The class struggle of the French peasants also contributed to the "unmasking" of the feudal nature of French absolutism and its eventual fall at the end of the eighteenth century. Porshnev asserts that in the course of the continuous resistance of this "gigantic force" that was the French peasantry and city populace, feudalism was finally overthrown by the French Revolution of 1789. The advent to power of the capitalist bourgeoisie, through the eventual realization of its alliance with the peasantry, reflected the changes in the economic basis of French society, where capitalist relationships of production were essentially established. As opposed to the eighteenth century, the seventeenth century did not bear economic characteristics that could justify the assumption of the existence of capitalist mode of production:

La conclusion générale tirée de ces incursions dans le régime économique et social de la France est claire: c'était, dans ses grandes lignes, une société encore féodale caractérisée par la prédominance des rapports féodaux de production et des formes féodales d'économie; les rapports capitalistes comme structure étaient seulement épars dans ce féodalisme

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 553

¹¹¹ Ibid., 552

massif. Ils se concentraient principalement dans les villes, et encore pas dans toutes. Dans l'ensemble de l'agriculture française, régnait encore le plus authentique féodalisme médiéval, et seule la révolution de 1789 lui porta un coup mortel.¹¹²

The social struggle in seventeenth-century France culminated and began its decline during the Fronde (1648-1653). In the French historiography the Fronde was considered as an aristocratic mutiny against the regent Anne of Austria, Prime-Minister Mazarin and young Louis XIV. Porshnev, on the contrary, describes the Fronde as an unsuccessful bourgeois revolution:

Il est impossible de comprendre l'origine de la Fronde sans avoir préalablement étudié les soulèvements des années vingt à quarante du XVIIe siècle... Si la bourgeoisie s'était mise à la tête de cet énorme mouvement sur un plan national, nous aurions devant nous une révolution bourgeoise... Il est bien évident que la Fronde à ses débuts fut une tentative de révolution bourgeoise à laquelle la noblesse ne prit aucune part.¹¹³

The main reason for the decline of the Fronde, and its transformation from a "social-political storm into a feudal quarrel" lay in the capitulation of the French bourgeoisie that backed off from the open war with the royal power.¹¹⁴ As a result of this defeat, the Fronde brought about the complete exclusion of the bourgeoisie from power. The period after the Fronde is the period when the feudal character of the Absolutist State reached its apogee. The hey-day of absolutism, that found its culmination in the reign of Louis XIV, "the Sun King", was also the beginning of the end of absolutism. The bourgeoisie, alienated from the governing classes, inevitably allied itself with the peasantry and city populace. The peasantry and city populace, crushed under the "triple" burden of feudal exploitation, led a constant struggle for survival. The peasants and workers' revolutionary action combined with the malcontent of the alienated bourgeoisie, swept away the oppressive feudal state during the Revolution of 1789.

¹¹² Ibid., 43

¹¹³ Ibid., 520-521

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 138

The English Revolution, on the contrary, represented a successful example of the same type of struggle: the struggle of popular masses against feudal institutions and their supreme expression - the absolutist monarchy.

On the basis of the analysis of class struggle in seventeenth-century France, Porshnev concluded that the seventeenth century was wrongly promoted by "bourgeois" historians as "le Grand Siècle." After the Fronde and reconciliation with the nobles, the Absolutist State reconsidered its position towards the bourgeoisie, which was, from now on, denied access to the royal administration. In the article "The Legend of the Seventeenth Century in French History", published in *Past and Present* (1955), Porshnev is critical of the French historical tradition that began with Thierry, Michelet, and Saint-Simon, who considered the seventeenth century as the apogee of the ascension of the bourgeoisie to political power:

Parallel with the idea of class peace, Thierry also developed the idea of a government above classes. He saw nothing feudal or aristocratic in the French monarchy, at any stage of its existence. The monarchy was a "national tradition", which belonged to the Third Estate.¹¹⁵

Porshnev argues that the seventeenth century, grand as it was in the achievements of arts and science, was the age when the conservative nature of the feudal Absolutist State expressed itself fully. Access to the Court was closed to the descendants of other than noble social groups. The State was now used to sustain the power of the high nobility, and became the quintessence of feudal domination over French society. That is why the French Revolution of the eighteenth century was considered by Porshnev as an event of unprecedented importance and the breakthrough for the French bourgeoisie, which for the first time acceded to political power:

In other words, owing to the revolution, political power came to correspond to the more or less fully developed *bourgeois* economy. In the seventeenth century this *bourgeois* economy was far more feebly developed and the *bourgeoisie*, if that term is to mean the representatives of capitalist relations of production, was in no sense in power.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ B.F. Porshnev, "The Legend of the Seventeenth Century in French History", *Past and Present*, No. 8 (1955), 21

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 27

The society based on the exploitation of personally dependent peasants by landowners, in order to extract from them feudal rent, was considered by the Soviet school as *feudal*. Porshnev personally made a weighty contribution to the articulation of this concept in his 1964 work, *Feodalizm I narodnye massy (Feudalism and Popular Masses)* that will be considered later in this thesis.

Also, Porshnev made a first statement of the theory of a social crisis in seventeenth-century Europe. He considered these French popular movements as part of a European-wide social and political trend that represented the growing resistance to feudal exploitation centralized and reinforced by the Absolutist State. Porshnev calls this period "the general crisis of the feudal-absolutist regime":

...la Fronde se situe à la charnière de deux grands cycles de mouvements populaires, campagnards et urbains, dont chacun occupe environ vingt-cinq ans: approximativement 1623-1648 et 1653-1676. Elle fut en quelque sorte le point culminant de ces mouvements et joua le rôle de plaque tournante quand cette guerre civile latente faillit se transformer en crise générale du régime féodal-absolutiste, en passant de la crise sociale profonde à la surface politique.¹¹⁷

Although this is the first, and probably the only, mention of the General Crisis of the feudal-absolutist regime in Porshnev's work, Porshnev was one of the first historians to outline the theory of a revolutionary crisis that shook the political foundations of seventeenth-century Europe. The publication of his book in France by the Sixième Section also marked the beginning of a long-lasting rivalry between Porshnev and Mousnier,¹¹⁸ professor at the Sorbonne and one of the most influential opponents of the Annales School in the period of its almost undivided rule over French historical science.¹¹⁹

This disagreement between the two historians was on the theoretical, not the factual, level. There is a striking similarity in Porshnev's and Mousnier's conclusions with regard to the causes of seventeenth-century popular uprisings, and the participation of nobles, bourgeois, ecclesiastics, and parliaments. But the factual material is put into a

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 40-41

¹¹⁸ Paul Duke, "Russia and Mid-Seventeenth Century Europe: Some Comments on the Work of B.F. Porshnev", *European Studies Review*, No. 1 (1974), 81

completely different theoretical framework. Porshnev's differences with contemporary French historiography, as well as with the orthodox Marxist theory on the question of popular uprisings and on the character of the Fronde, start precisely with the analysis of the role of the bourgeoisie and its historical function in society. In his *Les soulèvements populaires* he critically considers two works dealing with the problem of bourgeois participation in French economic and political life. One of them is Georges Pagès' article "La vénalité des offices dans l'ancienne France", first published in the *Revue historique* in 1932; the other is the monograph by Roland Mousnier published in 1945, *La vénalité des offices sous Henry IV et Louis XIII*.

Porshnev refers to Pagès' article as "... brillant par l'érudition et sa conclusion inattendue..."¹²⁰, creating an impression that Pagès shared his own opinion of seventeenth-century French society as largely feudal, with the sprouts of capitalism popping out occasionally only in the cities:

Des faits de la plus grande importance ont été mis en évidence prouvant que l'absolutisme français du XVII^e siècle était un état nobiliaire et la société française du XVII^e siècle une société féodale, ou du moins plus féodale et aristocratique qu'au XVIII^e. (G. Pagès, "La vénalité des offices dans l'ancienne France", *Revue Historique*, 1931, tome 169, p.493)¹²¹

However, Pagès *does not* hold that seventeenth-century French society was feudal or "at least more feudal and aristocratic than the French society in the eighteenth century." What Pagès does, in fact, say in terms of general characteristics of French society, in an article consecrated specifically and only to the institution of the sale of offices, is that capitalism was a factor of considerable importance in France already in the fifteenth century:

Or, il n'est pas douteux qu'au XV^e siècle - a l'aube du capitalisme moderne - l'intérêt des bénéficiaires et des officiers s'attache beaucoup plus au revenu qu'à la fonction.¹²²

¹¹⁹ P. Burke, *The French Historical Revolution*, 59-60

¹²⁰ B.F. Porshnev, *Les soulèvements populaires*, 38

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 37

¹²² G. Pagès, "La vénalité des offices dans l'ancienne France", *Revue Historique*, Vol. 169 (1932), 482

Pagès' article was the first on the subject of the venality of offices and influenced both Mousnier and Porshnev in their quest to clarify the character of the seventeenth-century French monarchy and the role within that of the bourgeoisie. Pagès states that the sale of offices ensured large social support for the absolutist monarchy. This social basis of the absolutist monarchy was constituted mostly of bourgeois of all possible shades:

Mais il n'en est pas moins vrai qu'avec eux toute la bourgeoisie, jusqu'à la plus petite, est associée à l'exercice et aux profits de la puissance publique. Et c'est pourquoi la bourgeoisie tout entière est intéressée à soutenir la Monarchie absolue, qu'elle a secourue de son argent, et qui lui a peu à peu abandonné, en retour, l'honneur et le bénéfice d'administrer le royaume en son nom.¹²³

At the end of the seventeenth century, according to Pagès, as opposed to the sixteenth century and the first half of the seventeenth century (until the ascension of Louis XIV), the monarchy was transfigured from "absolutist" into "administrative." To the detriment of the bourgeoisie, the king delegated public power to a narrow elite of functionaries, the intendants, who, although being initially of bourgeois origin, promoted the interests of the nobles. The reason for this transformation was the gradual ennoblement of royal functionaries not only in their life-style, but also in their aspirations. These new "noble" functionaries largely replaced the bourgeoisie at the helm of State. The loss of the large "base dans la nation" constituted of bourgeois led " la Monarchie administrative" to its fall in the eighteenth century.¹²⁴ This theory is close to Porshnev's outlook by its admission of the nobiliary character of the regime of Louis XIV, but not of the monarchy as such:

La vénalité des offices a contribué puissamment, dans l'ancienne France, à l'ascension des classes inférieures, au renouvellement des classes dirigeantes, et cela beaucoup plus qu'on ne le dit communément... On ne songe pas assez que la vénalité était devenue, au XVIIe siècle, un élément essentiel dans la structure politique et sociale du royaume: en la supprimant, on eût ébranlé tout l'édifice.¹²⁵

¹²³ Ibid., 493

¹²⁴ Ibid., 495

¹²⁵ Ibid., 492-493

The Soviet historian also considered the period between 1643 and 1715 (the reign of Louis XIV) as the turning point in the development of French absolutism. He stated that at this point in time, absolutism had enclosed itself in the feudal and noble character proper to it, in which finally, it had found its full expression. Thus, the development of absolutism went according to the Marxist line on the normal development of a feudal state. Eventually the contradictions inherent in this antagonistic-exploitative society provoked the violent outburst of the Revolution that swept away its retrogressive and parasitic superstructure.

With respect to Mousnier, Porshnev's conviction that he was advocating the "bourgeois" conception remained unchanged. Although it is difficult to agree that Mousnier's theory could be summarized as follows, Porshnev states:

Mousnier, à la différence de Pagès, est plusieurs fois, là et plus loin, sur le point d'admettre que la vénalité des offices n'était pas autre chose qu'une façon de fournir à la classe féodale de nouvelles recrues issues de la bourgeoisie.¹²⁶

In reality, Mousnier assumed that the bourgeoisie did not have in its possession the majority of the offices, contrary to what Pagès had established. In his *La vénalité des offices sous Henri IV et Louis XIII*, Mousnier develops a theory of the formation of the "quatrième état" that progressively took over all the leading positions in the State and that was distinctive from the bourgeoisie. By its mode of life and mentality it was even closer to the high nobility:

Tout officier recherchait l'office qui lui donnait des revenus plus élevés, plus d'influence et de considération dans le pays... Tout officier recherchait la terre qui lui assurait un établissement solide, lui permettait une façon de vivre qui sentait sa noblesse, et surtout le fief, dont la possession le rapprochait davantage des gentilshommes et lui donnait l'espérance de voir son petit-fils, officiellement et sans discussion, un vrai noble.

De tels sentiments détournaient les capitaux de l'industrie et du commerce, bien plus que la concurrence des étrangers. L'agriculture même n'en profitait guère, car la mise en valeur du sol était, le plus souvent, laissée à des fermiers sans moyens... les efforts sérieux de Henri IV pour développer les manufactures, les immenses efforts de Richelieu pour faire de la France une rivale victorieuse des Hollandais et des Anglais, pour lui

¹²⁶ B.F. Porshnev, *Les soulèvements populaires*, 39

donner même l'hégémonie économique par l'accroissement de l'industrie et la création de grandes compagnies de commerce aient finalement à peu près échoué. Le pays ne suivait pas.¹²⁷

Porshnev defines state functionaries as "feudalized bourgeoisie", by saying that the purchase of offices by the bourgeoisie was the way to avoid taxes and thus to move on to the circle of the privileged classes. Consequently, Porshnev does not agree with Pagès on the point that the bourgeoisie was represented in the absolutist government. Mousnier's theory that the monarchy was "tempered" by the participation in public power of functionaries is also criticized by Porshnev:

Dans notre préface, nous avons exposé la théorie des historiens français contemporains: Pagès et Mousnier affirment que l'institution de la vénalité et de l'hérédité des offices avaient amené la bourgeoisie au pouvoir et limité l'autorité monarchique selon la volonté de la bourgeoisie. Selon Pagès, La Fronde fut à son début une auto-défense des bourgeois-proprétaires d'offices, contre les intendants qui pouvaient être nommés et destitués, et qui étaient le soutien de l'absolutisme naissant. Comme nous l'avons exposé précédemment, notre désaccord avec cette nouvelle théorie consiste en ce que, sans contester ses arguments, nous en tirons une conclusion exactement opposée: la vénalité des offices n'entraînait pas "l'embourgeoisement" du pouvoir, mais la "féodalisation" d'une partie de la bourgeoisie....¹²⁸

It might be useful at this point to consider Mousnier's position closely. In his *La vénalité des offices sous Henry IV et Louis XIII*, a monograph published in 1945, and written on the basis of his doctoral thesis, Roland Mousnier develops a somewhat different view of the sale of offices. He promotes a theory that the character of absolutism started to change with the introduction of the sale of offices. Through this institution the monarchy ensured for itself the rapid attainment of financial resources, allowing it a more aggressive external policy. However, as the character of the institution of offices changed, the character of the social groups who took advantage of it also changed. Mousnier speaks of a nascent "quatrième état", a social group of professional bureaucrats that was formed by officers and their descendants whose main income consisted in

¹²⁷ Roland Mousnier, *La vénalité des offices sous Henry IV et Louis XIII* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1971), 493-494

¹²⁸ B.F. Porshnev, *Les soulèvements populaires*, 576

carrying out the office's duties. These people acted and lived in a particular way that was quite distinctive both from that of the bourgeoisie, living out of commerce, or of the nobility, traditionally men of arms. In the course of time the "quatrième état" came to constitute a powerful force that attempted to check royal politics:

Ainsi, détenteurs de la puissance publique, partagent avec le roi l'administration du royaume, seigneurs et justiciers des paysans de leurs fiefs, unis entre eux et à des membres des autres classes, les officiers étaient une force. Les attaquer, simplement les mécontenter, c'était parfois courir le risque d'un soulèvement.¹²⁹

As Mousnier's narrative unfolds, we can state with him that already in the fifteenth century the sale of offices, fully controlled by the king, represented an important means of State equilibrium. In a way this institution checked royal actions and thus opened up a possibility for the establishment of a monarchy tempered by office-holders. But at the same time, the feudal character of the institution of the sale of offices was fully manifest.¹³⁰ The unstable balance between the feudal traditions, completing oddly the inspiration to limit the royal power in favor of the nascent bureaucracy, and the strengthening state persisted until the second half of the seventeenth century. Then a sudden turn in royal politics allowed the king to downplay the interests of the different social groups constituting the "quatrième état", to divide it and, eventually, to reduce it to the role of an obedient executor of the royal will. The feudal monarchy, "tempered by the sale of offices", ceded its place to the absolutist monarchy. The absolutist revolution of the second half of the seventeenth century was thus successfully achieved.

Mousnier concludes that the sale of offices led to the establishment in France of a tempered monarchy "au XVIe siècle et dans la première moitié du XVIIe siècle," but that in the second half of the seventeenth century this same institution allowed the establishment of a fully-achieved absolutist rule. Thus, according to Mousnier, the second half of the seventeenth century bears with it a revolution, the absolutist revolution brought to its apogee by "le grand révolutionnaire de la France," Louis XIV. This is the part of Mousnier's theory that Porshnev fiercely criticizes:

¹²⁹ R. Mousnier, *La vénalité des offices*, 85.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 33

Voilà de quelle façon la conception historique moderne de la bourgeoisie en France explique la genèse de la Révolution de 1789: ce n'était pas tant, démontre-t-elle, une révolution: plutôt une contre-révolution, opposée à la «révolution absolutiste», qui avait écarté la bourgeoisie du pouvoir...face à cette conception de Pagès et Mousnier appelée simplement à redorer l'ancienne légende du «Grand Siècle», nous voulons opposer un point de vue radicalement différent, centré sur la question de l'évolution du capitalisme au sein de la France féodale et absolutiste.¹³¹

Summarizing Mousnier's conclusions, Porshnev does not speak against Mousnier's conception in particular, but against the whole French historical "bourgeois" tradition, whose representatives see in the Revolution of 1789, a counter-revolution of social groups which strove to go back to the ancient freedoms.

In 1967, the monograph by Roland Mousnier *Fureurs Paysannes: Les paysans dans les révoltes du XVIIe siècle (France, Russie, Chine)*, was published. This study was undertaken in the framework of "a programme of collective research into peasant risings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries." The research was launched by Mousnier in the early nineteen-sixties "partly to refute the Marxist interpretation of French peasant revolts put forward by the Soviet historian Boris Porshnev."¹³² The monograph was dealing with the same subject as Porshnev's *Les soulèvements populaires*, that is, with the peasants' movements in seventeenth-century France, but Russia and China were added, probably as a tribute to the comparative history.

Mousnier calls the seventeenth century "une grande époque de révolte et de révolutions, où tous les groupes sociaux sont intervenus." He proposes that a series of studies by independent historians be undertaken in order to clarify the question as to whether the revolts in different parts of the world bore enough similarities to be classified as parts of a worldwide *Crisis*.

Mousnier begins his work with the analysis of seventeenth-century French society. He elaborates on his theory that this society was not a "class society", that is, not a society divided into groups of population according to their place in the process of

¹³¹ B.F. Porshnev, *Les soulèvements populaires*, 39-40

¹³² P. Burke, *The French Historical Revolution*, 60

production¹³³, but a society where the social distinctions were determined by some kind of social rank, or "état". This rank, however, in Mousnier's exposition, corresponded precisely to people's occupation. The society was not feudal and it was not capitalist, it was "la société d'ordres":

D'abord, il paraît net que c'est la dignité, l'estime sociale si l'on veut, attachée à la qualité ou à la profession qui classe les hommes, beaucoup plus que la fortune ou les revenus...¹³⁴

These are its characteristics:

The society was constituted of different social groups where the family and lineage related to it prevailed.¹³⁵ The social groups were differentiated according to the social esteem that was attributed to them. Accordingly, the most respected social group was that involved in the profession of arms, and which, consequently, displayed the ability to command and to protect.¹³⁶

In my opinion, the facts that Mousnier uses to support his own classification of seventeenth-century French society, speak precisely in favor of its still feudal character. This would start with the assumption that in the hierarchy of this "société d'ordres" warriors occupied a predominant place, and would finish with the persistence of family lineage and other social relations that linked one man to another by the "ties of dependence and protection", as defined by Marc Bloch.¹³⁷

¹³³ Roland Mousnier, *Fureurs Paysannes: Les paysans dans les revoltes du XVIIe siècle (France, Russie, Chine)* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1967), 15

¹³⁴ Ibid., 28-29

¹³⁵ Ibid., 13

¹³⁶ Ibid., 15

¹³⁷ Marc Bloch, *La société féodale* (Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 1949), 244

"Bien que les obligations nées de la parenté y fussent conçues comme très vigoureuses, elle ne se fondait pas tout entière sur le lignage. Plus précisément, les liens proprement féodaux n'avaient de raison d'être que parce que ceux du sang ne suffisaient pas. D'autre part, malgré la persistance de la notion d'une autorité publique, superposée à la foule des petits pouvoirs, la féodalité coïncida avec un profond affaiblissement de l'État, notamment dans sa fonction protectrice. Mais la société féodale n'était pas seulement différente et d'une société de parentèles et d'une société dominée par la force de l'État. Elle venait après des sociétés ainsi constituées et portait leur empreinte. Les rapports de dépendance personnelle qui la caractérisaient gardaient quelque chose de la parenté artificielle qu'avait été, à beaucoup d'égards, le primitif compagnonnage et, parmi les droits de commandements exercés par tant de menus chefs, une bonne part faisaient figure de dépouilles arrachées à des puissances régaliennes."

Moreover, for Mousnier, the social struggle in this society was not a "class struggle", but a struggle of orders. That is, not a struggle of the inferior (subjected) orders with the superior (dominant), but, mostly within the superior order, between the nobility of arms (*noblesse d'épée*) and the nobility of robe (*noblesse de robe*). Consequently, this struggle of orders, of warriors and functionaries, allowed this form of society to become a more "progressive" one, the autocratic monarchy of Louis XIV.¹³⁸

The only evidence used by Mousnier to sustain his theory of the non-materialistic dynamic advancing seventeenth-century French society is that, regardless of their privileged position in the social hierarchy, "la noblesse de robe" strove obstinately to replace the nobles-warriors at the top of the social pyramid. But this struggle, to which Mousnier relates as to something purely idealistic, can be very well explained in terms of a struggle of the "nouveaux-riches" who fought to obtain the social recognition that corresponded to their economic position in the society. A society where the pride of feudal lords in exercising the sacred duty of a warrior, and their pretension to enjoy different privileges because of this, seemed a little outdated:

En général, les robins restent dans leur ordre. Mais il y a un effort constant, opiniâtre, révélé par l'attitude et les propos du tiers aux états généraux de 1614-1615, par la politique du Parlement de Paris, par son rôle et par celui des autres Parlements pendant la Fronde, non pour transformer la société d'ordres en société de classes mais pour changer la hiérarchie des ordres, pour faire reconnaître, comme le premier ordre, l'ordre des magistrats, des "gentilshommes de plume et d'encre", pour changer le principe de la société et faire considérer comme le plus digne, non le service des armes, mais le service civil de l'État.¹³⁹

In Mousnier's terms, the Fronde was the revolution of the "robins" and not a bourgeois revolution. Consequently, Mousnier elaborates, if the revolution was not a bourgeois revolution, than the society was not a feudal society:

Peut-on qualifier cette société de "féodale"? C'est sans doute risquer bien de confusions. Certes, juridiquement, le système féodal existe toujours et va exister jusqu'à la Révolution. Certes, probablement les neuf-dixième des propriétés foncières dans le royaume sont des fiefs et des censives, et de cette forme de propriété découlent d'important rapports sociaux, mais nous n'avons plus du tout affaire au type de société en procès d'environ

¹³⁸ R. Mousnier, *Les fureurs paysannes*, 28

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 31

850 à environ 1250, entre Loire et Meuse, qui est proprement société féodale. Dans la société française du XVII^e siècle, si les rapports sociaux découlant des fiefs et des censives sont encore importants, ils ne sont plus les rapports dominants. Les rapports sociaux sont dominés par la hiérarchie des dignités et par les fidélités. Les fidélités n'ont pas de sanction juridique, c'est pourquoi les textes officiels n'en parlent pas et qu'on peut facilement en sous-estimer l'importance... Louis XIII avait Richelieu et Richelieu avait Séguier, Bouthillier, Sublet de Noyers, qui avaient leurs fidèles. Le fidèle ne s'engage pas par un acte de foi et d'hommage et il n'attend pas un fief en récompense, pour s'entretenir. Il n'y donc pas ici féodalité.¹⁴⁰

The society was not feudal anymore, because "fidélité" was not "féodalité". Why? Because there was not an act of homage. After this elaboration the author warns the reader against superficiality, and especially importantly, against confusing causes and consequences:

Au reste, il n'est pas douteux que ces "fidèles" dérivent, dans ce pays et à cette époque, de la féodalité et de la période de vassalité qui avait précédé cette dernière. Mais ne confondons pas origine et nature. Les fidélités ne sont pas liées à la féodalité.¹⁴¹

The same methodology, that is, ascertaining whether or not the act of homage existed, was used by Mousnier in order to establish what kind of society existed in Russia.¹⁴² It seems again that Mousnier follows Bloch, who mentioned "en passant" in his *La société féodale*, that Slavic peoples did not know the feudal fief as such.¹⁴³ Mousnier's conviction is that Russian feudalism differed from the French.

The same applies to the analysis of China that, somehow, Mousnier sees as quite similar to French society, for it too represents a "société d'ordres." Speaking of China, Mousnier states (although it is not clear what his factual basis is) that:

C'était une société d'ordres, mais organisées non, comme en France, sur le principe de la supériorité de métier des armes et de la noblesse de guerrier, mais sur le principe de la supériorité d'une bureaucratie de magistrats recrutés au concours....¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 34

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 35

¹⁴² Ibid., 168-215

¹⁴³ Marc Bloch, *La société féodale*, 247

¹⁴⁴ R. Mousnier, *Les fureurs paysannes*, 237

It is clear that Mousnier constructs his theory of "la société d'ordres" on the assumption that there existed in French society since the Middle Ages the supremacy of professional warriors, characteristic of the feudal society, as defined by Marc Bloch. The main feature of feudalism was the dispersion of power and the formation of the social pyramid on the basis of mutual protection and dependence.¹⁴⁵ The supremacy of professional warriors, that Mousnier stresses so much in order to justify his theory of "société d'ordres", in my opinion, speaks clearly to the persistence of feudal characteristics in the seventeenth-century French society.

Further in his narrative, however, Mousnier concentrates on the differences of the revolts in France, Russia, and China. Two of these countries represented the "société d'ordres" while Russia represented a "société de classes."¹⁴⁶ Therefore, it is logical to conclude that there were more differences than similarities in these uprisings. Yet, Mousnier brings our attention to quite a few similarities between them.

First of all, according to Mousnier, the main cause of the popular uprisings in different parts of the world, that was common to all of them, was the vile nature of man:

La cause profonde des séditions et de ce qui les provoque, c'est le péché originel et le refus d'obéir aux commandements de Dieu.¹⁴⁷

Also, the reason for uprisings in these otherwise so different states was the same, that is, just as Porshnev determined, their fiscal policy.¹⁴⁸ In his last analysis Mousnier concludes that in France and China, being "sociétés d'ordres", peasant revolts were not revolutionary (not directed against the existing order.) In Russia, on the contrary, a genuine "class society" (meaning a society where social distinctions are based on the monetary value of the person), revolts were revolutionary.¹⁴⁹

Mousnier justifies the unbearable State imposition by its expensive foreign policies, stating that it was erroneous to ascribe, as Trevor-Roper did, the tax burden to Court expenses. In Mousnier's analysis the courtiers, nobles, and ecclesiastics are presented as even bigger victims of the expensive State's policies than peasants crushed

¹⁴⁵ M. Bloch, *La société féodale*, 245-250

¹⁴⁶ R. Mousnier, *Les fureurs paysannes*, 168-215

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 308

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 308-309

under the burden of imposts.¹⁵⁰ Mousnier considers absolutist foreign policies, as well as the process of formation of the autocratic State, as a "progressive" process against which popular uprisings were directed. In his quest to refute Porshnev's conclusions, Mousnier sometimes sounds more Marxist than his Soviet adversary in his assumption of the *conservative* nature of peasants. In addition, Mousnier holds that the peasants did not initiate the uprisings, the leading forces of mutiny were constituted of the nobles and bourgeois:

En somme, nulle part on ne peut dire que les paysans ont pris l'initiative des révoltes. Celles-ci sont toujours venues d'autres éléments et souvent, en France, société d'ordres plus diversifiées, elles ont été provoquées encore davantage qu'ailleurs par les strates supérieures de la société.¹⁵¹

An important factor according to Mousnier, was that the uprisings were aimed not against the landlords, but against the novelties of the absolutist monarchy. This factor determined the temporary and, in its essence non-revolutionary, character of the revolts, at least in France and China. (Russian troubles had a more serious character in Mousnier's presentation.) The French peasants wanted to return to the amount of taxes they had paid under Henry IV. This was serious, according to Mousnier, because it meant the retreat from national policies, and the sabotage of the further development of the State. Here, I would rather agree that the real reason for the uprisings was precisely, as Porshnev formulated it, the fact that the peasantry and city populace were constantly on the edge of physical extinction, so that the least aggravation of their situation put in question their very existence:

Quelles étaient donc les causes profondes des soulèvements? Elles résidaient sans nul doute dans le fait que durant la première moitié du XVII^e siècle, une large couche de la population en France était économiquement si faible que la moindre aggravation de sa situation menaçait son existence.¹⁵²

This situation, troubled by revolts, according to Mousnier, could not have been produced by the social order, because there were still uprisings in the eighteenth and

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 347

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 310

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 329

¹⁵² B.F. Porshnev, *Les soulèvements populaires*, 268

nineteenth centuries, when the particular to the seventeenth-century *feudal order* (in Porshnev's terms) did not exist. The "Crisis of the Seventeenth Century" was caused by temporary and secondary circumstances. Mousnier expresses his mistrust towards the theories that the Crisis was caused by tensions in the social and political structure of society. In order to refute the validity of the theoretical elaboration of his Soviet opponent, Mousnier juxtaposes the Russian and French situations:

Mais, il serait souhaitable de voir dans quelle mesure l'on pourrait comparer aux "bandits" russes et chinois, ces nombreux gentilshommes français qui se livraient à la tête de paysans au faux saunage à main armée...L'on voit donc combien les circonstances, la conjoncture, au sens le plus large du terme, contribuent à expliquer les révoltes. L'on peut même se demander si celles-ci n'étaient pas essentiellement une affaire de conjoncture. Certains historiens ont mis en cause des structures sociales ou politiques, l'État moderne absolutiste, la société "féodale". Est-ce nécessaire? Il est tout de même remarquable qu'entre 1815 et 1848, alors que la société prétendue "féodale", l'ordre seigneurial, les droits "féodaux", la monarchie absolue n'existaient plus, il y ait eu encore des mouvements paysans en France, dans les périodes de disette. Ces mouvements se sont raréfiés au XIXe siècle...Ce sont les progrès techniques qui ont amélioré la situation plus que les transformations sociales.¹⁵³

Should we consider that Porshnev's "erroneous" interpretation of French history, according to Mousnier, originated from the fact that he, being Russian, projected a reality of "bandits russes" onto the history of the "gentilshommes français"? It is possible, of course, that Porshnev made some mistakes in his treatment of the seventeenth-century French society. Unfortunately, he did not leave us enough material to analyze this possibility, because *Les soulèvements populaires* remained his only book dedicated to French social history. This can be explained by the serious methodological critique that Porshnev's work underwent at the hands of the Soviet historians at the time when any accusation of deviation from Marxist orthodoxy could cost a scholar his not only his career, but his life.

The "thaw" of the rigid censorship over social and political thought in the Soviet Union had begun only after in 1954. This new trait in Soviet social and political sphere

¹⁵³ R. Mousnier, *Les fureurs paysannes*, 320

came about as a life-asserting reaction to dictatorship and lasted approximately ten years. In the political sphere "democratization" of "Soviet ways" came to an end already in 1957 (the year of the invasion in Hungary.) In the realm of social and cultural thought this period extended until 1964 (the year of the replacement of Khrushchev and of the "reestablishment" of the "hard" party line in internal politics):

The cultural and political thaw, which had lasted from soon after Stalin's death until the aftermath of the Hungarian invasion, was momentarily reversed.¹⁵⁴

Although not working on the subject of popular uprisings in the period of transition from feudalism to capitalism, Porshnev elaborated in detail the general theory of feudalism. In his monograph, dedicated to the analysis of the feudal mode of production, *Feodalizm i narodnye massy (Feudalism and Popular Masses)*, 1964, Porshnev explains that feudal rent, the basis of the feudal economy, quite often took the form of state taxes:

The means to maintain feudal production included the coercion of peasants in order to render to landlords the product of surplus labour. This coercion was achieved by way of the realisation of the landlord's property in land – by the allotment of peasants with the land, the economic dependency of peasants and partly of artisans was created – as well as by way of the realisation of the landlord's limited property in the person of his peasants – serfs. As a result, the latter were compelled to alienate their surplus labour to the landlord, in exchange for the minimum to satisfy their basic needs. As was explained above, the feudal rent represented the economic realisation of feudal property. As long as the latter was concealed by "common right", quite often the feudal dues took the form of imposition, or State taxes.¹⁵⁵

It is important to consider what the difference in the definition of feudalism of the Soviet and Western Schools was. According to Marc Bloch, feudalism was the agrarian economic system that functioned through the ties of seigniorial protection and dependence.¹⁵⁶ Porshnev, on the contrary, affirms that feudalism was an antagonistic

¹⁵⁴ Donald Filtzer, *The Khrushchev Era. De-Stalinisation and the Limits of Reform in the USSR, 1953-1964* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1993), 25

¹⁵⁵ B.F. Porshnev, *Feodalizm i narodnye massy* (Moscow: Nauka, 1964), 66

¹⁵⁶ M. Bloch, *La société féodale*, 118

class society that gave way to more elaborate forms of class exploitation, such as capitalist society. In any case, in Porshnev's theory there is no place for such terms as feudal protection or rights. These terms concealed the limited property of a landlord in the person of a peasant. The ties of dependence are presented by the Soviet historian as plain economic exploitation, with the goal of extracting a feudal rent. Porshnev is also trying to present a coherent theory of the economic functioning of feudalism. He admits that until the present time there is no systematic explanation, similar to Marx's analysis of capitalism, as to how, in economic terms, the feudal system of exploitation actually worked. What Porshnev has to offer in terms of methodology for solving this problem, is to consider feudalism as a form of exploitative society inferior to capitalism:

Capitalism represents a more developed, more complex form of social organization and, because of that, capitalism is the key to the understanding of feudal economy and not the opposite.¹⁵⁷

Porshnev also admits that the difficulty of making any clear definitions in this matter underlies the fact that, although a simpler form of social development, feudalism is farther from us in time and requires more abstraction in thinking. But he insists that the main line of his research on feudal society rests on the Marxist notion of antagonistic class society.¹⁵⁸

In his chapter on the basis of the political economy of feudalism, Porshnev starts with an admission that any definition of economic formation will involve a high degree of scientific abstraction. There is no such thing as a pure economic formation. This is especially true with respect to feudalism, because its forms are very diverse and its main characteristics are variable. But all this diversity can be reduced to a common denominator by defining feudalism deductively:

Feudalism lies between mature slave formation and capitalism, with essential distinctions from the one and the other...The variety of its characteristics is not unlimited, and is restricted to the basic differences between the two adjacent formations.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ B.F. Porshnev, *Feodalism i narodnye massy*, 11

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 12: "The main notion that relates the first part of this book to the second is the notion of antagonism. The main idea of the present research is that nothing in the economic, social, spiritual, or political life of feudal society can be understood without applying the dialectic category of antagonism."

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 20

Feudal economy is based on small individual agricultural production.¹⁶⁰ The small peasant's household, and not the feudal estate, is the main unit of feudal economy:

Thus we came close to the most important and the most disputable question in the general characterisation of the feudal economy, what was the main economic unit of feudal society? Soviet historians offer two different answers to this question. F.J. Poliansky and others think that the main economic unit of feudalism is the feudal estate (manor, seignury). This position represents the attempt to rethink one of the main trends in the study of economic history of the Middle Ages – the theory of the feudal estate, or seignury...But this tentative attempt can not be called successful, because feudal estates represented the organisational structure of feudal economy only at certain stages of its development, particularly at the stage of the late feudal-serf economy and at the stage of early feudal estate economy, when labour rent represented the main form of feudal rent. For other huge periods of feudal history, the organisation of the economy through estates is not at all characteristic...¹⁶¹

Two reflections on the subject are possible: either Porshnev is right that the large feudal estate did not represent the main organisational element of the feudal economy, or that feudal economy can be characterised as such only during the two stages of development mentioned by Porshnev, namely, the early feudal estate economy, or late feudal-serf economy in Eastern Europe. Certainly, the Western School of Medieval historiography, including the Annales School, recognises the large feudal estate as the main economic unit of feudal economy, thereby establishing the periodization of feudalism according to the development of this particular economic form.

Leaving aside all the remnants of the late classical Roman law that affected the structure of feudal society, Porshnev suggests that the only right way of comprehending this society is by defining it on a purely economic basis, that is, without considering what its judicial form was:

The feudal form of property differs from slave and capitalist forms by the fact that not all the means of production were alienated from the producer. But the main means of production of this time, the land, did not belong to the producer; the overwhelming majority of producers did not have land at their complete disposition, land was the property of landlords.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 22

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 26

¹⁶² Ibid., 30

This interpretation, however, does not seem to be historically justified, precisely because Porshnev dismisses the fact that legally the land was not the complete property of either landlords or labourers. Again here, Porshnev is more extreme than Marx. Marx asserts that peasants have the same feudal right on their land as the landlords themselves.¹⁶³ Porshnev's response to it is greatly strained. He elaborates on his theory of unlimited and unconditional landlord's property in land with the example of the nineteenth-century Russian serfdom:

Even being most unlimited and most unconditional, pomechik's [*landlord in Russian*] property does not cease to be feudal property according to its economic content. For this form of property underlies the feudal, and not capitalist, form of economic relations, as long as it was being used for the extraction of feudal (labour) rent from the peasant, allotted with land, and not for farmer-capitalist production.

The essence of feudal property in the means of production consists in the fact that labourers did not have land, that is, the main means of production at their full disposition. Land was allotted to them by the owner-landlord as a conditional property. Because of that, they had to work for the landlord. Marx defines the feudal peasant as a "cultivator-proprietor" of the land, whose unpaid surplus labour went directly to the owner of the land.¹⁶⁴

Marx seems to be much closer to the point of view of modern Western historians than Porshnev. Essentially, Porshnev paraphrases the classic view in an attempt to fit the historical example of Russia into the European framework.

Later in life, Porshnev became interested in political, social, and economic interrelations in Russian and European development. He published a few monographs dealing with a European-wide Crisis: *Tridtsatiletniaa voina i vstuplenie v nee Shvetsii i Moskovskogo gosudarstva* (Moscow: Nauka, 1976) (*Moscow and Sweden in the Thirty Years War*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); *Francija, Angliiskaja revolutsia i evropeiskaja politika v seređine 17 veka*, (*France, the English Revolution and European Politics at the Middle of the Seventeenth Century*), 1970.

The monograph *Moscow and Sweden in the Thirty Years War*, was conceived by Porshnev as the first part of a trilogy on the international history of the seventeenth

¹⁶³ Ibid., 37. Porshnev refers to K. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, (Moscow, 1955), 723

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 35-36. Quotation from K. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 3, 811, 815

century. This part of the trilogy, along with its last part, *France, the English Revolution and European Politics at the Middle of the Seventeenth Century*, was published in the 1970's, and prepared for the edition by the author himself. In his monograph Porshnev presents to the reader a somewhat different image of the seventeenth century. It is not so much feudal, after all. A nascent capitalist order revealed itself through the activation of revolutionary movements since the end of the fifteenth century. The bourgeoisie is mentioned as a class that played an important role in these revolutionary upheavals against feudal order. The Reformation was an ideological expression of the new mentality that revolted against obscure Catholic dogmas of the Middle Ages:

Gigantic revolutionary forces concentrated at this time within the feudal society. The emergence of a class of the bourgeoisie immediately gave new reason and new power to the traditional anti-feudal peasant-plebes' movements. The last fifteen years of the fifteenth century in Europe are already full of peal of revolutionary thunder - from the revolt of Savonarola in Florence to democratic uprisings in the cities of Flanders; from peasant jacquerie in Catalonia to the tumults of the union of Sabot in Elsass. The ideologists of humanism and preachers of Reformation everywhere "cleansed" minds from the burden of the past...Precisely to this menace the political leaders of feudalism responded by a counter-attack.¹⁶⁵

Accordingly, just as the new "revolutionary spirit" took the form of the Reformation, feudal counter-revolution took the shape of Counter-Reformation or Catholic reaction.¹⁶⁶

The struggle between European Counter-Reformation, which was embodied in the former empire of Charles V, and "revolutionary spirit" on the international plan realized itself as the struggle between the Habsburgs and national-absolutist states of Europe. Historically, following the political development of the struggle with the Empire for their independence, the absolutist states came to defend what was new and progressive: the Reformation and capitalist order.¹⁶⁷ The fact that the whole of the European conflict had unfolded around the Spanish-Dutch War also reflected this assumption. The "reactionary"

¹⁶⁵ B.F.Porshnev, *Tridtsatiletniaa voina i vstuplenie v nee Shvetsii i Moskovskogo gosudarstva* (Moscow: Nauka, 1976), 11

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 22

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 23

forces set themselves on the side of the Spanish monarchy, the Austrian Habsburgs, and the Church. And the progressive forces (England and France among them) "inevitably" appeared on the side of Holland. However, the double nature of the absolutist states showed itself clearly, their politics were indecisive, tending to find a compromise with the Habsburgs, and only the latter's bold aggressiveness determined the eventual passage of the absolutist states into the "revolutionary" camp:

The experience of unrealized war of 1610, shows clearly how little the governing circles of national absolutist states (England, and especially France) were interested to prevent actions of the Habsburgs. There were two reasons for this:

The first reason was that any war against the Habsburgs and the Catholic reaction would inevitably unleash the revolutionary, anti-feudal forces, with which Europe was saturated.

The second reason was that for fighting with the Habsburgs, the national absolutist states were forced to ally themselves with the embodiment of every possible mutiny, the Dutch Republic.

The Dutch-Spanish War that lasted since 1572, with a brief intermission in 1609, remained the central problem for every European war. Around this axis the forces of the Anti-Habsburg and the Habsburg coalition were inevitably rotating. And this very fact attributed to the revolutionary coloring of the Anti-Habsburg coalition, the result that the members of the coalition tried to avoid (all this because the Dutch war for the independence from Spain was no less than a bourgeois revolution.)¹⁶⁸

Thus, the politics of national-absolutist states cannot be unreservedly defined as progressive, because of their attempts to compromise with the Empire. The first and foremost reason for these collaborationist politics was the fear of progressive popular movements that would be unleashed as soon as the national-absolutist states engaged themselves in the struggle against the Empire. Politically speaking, by abstaining from the war with the Habsburgs, the national-absolutist states placed themselves in the intermediary position between the Habsburg - Catholic reaction and the Dutch, who embodied the beginnings of a new bourgeois order.¹⁶⁹

In his monograph *France, the English Revolution and European Politics at the Middle of the Seventeenth Century*, written as a third, concluding part of the trilogy on interconnections in world history, Porshnev gives the theoretical foundations of his view

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 46

that the history of one country is inconceivable. Porshnev bases this conviction on the sociological approach where the sociologist moves from the whole to the separate elements of the world-wide system.¹⁷⁰

According to Porshnev's latest belief, history is a holistic process that embraces the entire existence of human kind, "from its beginning in pre-historic times until our times." Moreover, "history considers the whole of social life in its social relations, ideology, politics, culture, war, peace, linguistics, psychology, briefly, all human activities must be embraced in their interrelations."¹⁷¹ The beginnings of this universal, in the largest sense, approach to history were laid by Marx and, according to Porshnev, constituted a no less important discovery of Marx than his theory of the political economy of capitalism.¹⁷²

Thus far, Porshnev argues, world history was written in terms of history of different states and their internal and external politics. Historians wrote histories of different powers, sometimes histories of their relations to one another, or even of their relations to the population, but not the history that embraced all these aspects. In order to accomplish this task, historical process should be broken up into very narrow time periods, and the history of all countries in their interrelations and the diversity of their internal developments, should be written. Porshnev calls this method "synchronic history."

Having said all this, we can elaborate the thought that along with the history of one country, another form of history is justified, that of the synchronic history of different countries in their interrelations and their contradictions. This history will not be the history of external politics and international relations, although these aspects will be included in it as well.¹⁷³

The number of synchronic histories that should be written cannot be determined with accuracy. But what is clear, is that with the emergence of capitalism, with its all-

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 48

¹⁷⁰ B.F. Porshnev, *Francija, Anglijskaja revolutsia i evropejskaja politika v seredine 17 veka* (Moscow: Nauka, 1970), 9

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 15

¹⁷² Ibid., 16. Porshnev elaborated this thesis in his monograph *Marx-Historian* (Moscow, 1968)

¹⁷³ Ibid., 20

embracing commercial activities, history truly became world-wide and can be written only in terms of different types of interrelations between peoples and states. The important step in the direction of developing the synchronic method is studying regional history:

One of the eminent examples of regional history is Braudel's book *Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*. This regional image is much closer to the objective reality than an abstractionist image of a separate country. However, no region, the Mediterranean, for example, has rigid borders that separate it from the other regions. Thus, this isolation is also artificial...This artificiality can be overcome only with the use of horizontal sections of world history.¹⁷⁴

The other step in the direction of the establishing of the synchronic method is the wide application of comparative history, and this can be achieved only by the means of the broad co-operation of specialists.¹⁷⁵ We can see clearly that Porshnev accepted the principles of the Annales School, elaborated by Braudel.

Another methodological problem that emerges before the historian trying to write synchronic history, is the problem of chronological limits of horizontal sections in the mass of world history. The choice of those synchronic sections should be made according to irreversible changes.

Revolutions can be classified as such "irreversible" changes. Even if the previous order after a revolution was restored, the changes that incited this revolution and that were inflicted by it on other parts of the world, became irreversible.¹⁷⁶ That is why, the idea of world-wide revolution is justified.

In this monograph, Porshnev studies roughly the same period of time (between 1620 and 1653) as in *Les soulèvements populaires*. The year 1653, is "the date that ends the period of Thirty Years' War, the English Revolution, the end of the Fronde:

My choice was predefined by the fact that this period is situated on the border of the Middle Ages and Modern Times, in other words, I can call this period an introduction to the history of the international relations of Modern Times."¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 24

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 24

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 28

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 29

These chronological limits coincide with the period of "The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century." This is the time of irreversible changes, such as the English Revolution, the Thirty Years' War, and the Fronde that echoed in different parts of the world, including Russia:

Indeed, the greatest lacuna left by the historiography of this period, in my opinion, is the artificial isolation of Russia from the rest of Europe, along with the isolation of "Eastern Studies", covering the history of the peoples of Asia, from traditional World History, or Western History.¹⁷⁸

The central event in the chain of these irreversible changes is the English Revolution, and its importance is greatly emphasised by the fact that this event was situated at "the threshold of Modern Times," completing, according to Porshnev, a three-hundred years cycle of transition from the Medieval Ages to Modernity.¹⁷⁹ The notion of the English Revolution marking the transition to Modern Times¹⁸⁰ is also that of the adherents of the theory of Seventeenth-Century Crisis, who considered the English Revolution as a central event in a series of upheavals that marked the transition to Modernity throughout Europe. Porshnev, however, seemed to be persistent in his disagreement with the methodology adopted by Western historians elaborating the theory of the Crisis. His conviction that the Crisis lay in the political and social, and not the economic, spheres remained unshakable with the passing of the years. Emphasizing the significance of the Thirty Years' War in the dramatic events of European political and social life, he seems more to criticize the notion of the Crisis, as formulated in the Western historiography, than to agree with it:

We are going to consider here not the problem of the «general European crisis of the XVII century» as presented in the world, particularly, the English, historiography of the last decades, but only the question of social and political crises and revolutionary movements in different European countries from 1640 until 1653, and their link with international politics. Concerning the above-mentioned broad notion of the General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century, it seems that the debate took an unpromising direction. The discussion began, as I well remember, from the reaction of English Marxist historians to the question of the simultaneity of the

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 31

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 33

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 42

English bourgeois revolution of the seventeenth century with different events of political and social struggle in different countries of Europe during the last period of the Thirty Years' War, as raised in the Soviet Manual of "Modern History" for Universities. (*Modern History. Manual for History Departments of Universities*, Vol. 1, 1640-1789, under the redaction of B.F. Porshnev.) We meant to say, that this almost general aggravation of social-political contradictions could be explained precisely by the fact that the Thirty Years' War had in a sense a general European character, and in particular contributed everywhere to the exhaustion of the sources of taxation, finance, and exchange. Nevertheless, the English historian Hobsbawm directed his studies not towards this realistic connection, but to the abstract characteristic of the European economy of the XVII century, that supposedly went through an inevitable economic crisis. As a reaction to this far-fetched concept, there appeared the even more artificial fantasy of the English historian Trevor-Roper, who found the seeds of the European Crisis of the seventeenth century in the problem of an all-European bureaucratization of the governmental apparatus. Naturally, this unfounded improvisation brought about a series of refutations and new hypotheses (Aston's edition of articles, "Crisis in Europe".) However, the participants in the discussion avoided almost altogether the decisive and real historical fact – of all-European War. This war could be called all-European with sufficient foundation, even if only some of the countries participated in it openly, and the rest – secretly (thanks to the fact that the war was fought by armies of mercenaries, in other words by a state's gold and silver, far from the state's frontiers.)¹⁸¹

The Thirty Years' War itself was not a war for national borders, but a punitive expedition of the Habsburgs' Empire against the rebelling German peasants. This punitive task was consequently extended to everything that was "progressive" and revolutionary, beginning with the Dutch revolt and finishing with European absolutist States, such as England and France, whose politics were ideologically and socially less conservative than the politics of the Empire.¹⁸²

According to Porshnev, the revolutionary events of the year 1648, which broke out almost simultaneously in different parts of the world, cannot be separated from one another even if the historians cannot find a satisfactory explanation of how they were actually related. His conviction originated from the usual source: Marx's idea that "the great social upheaval of 1648 was far from being a national English event, but was all-

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 34

¹⁸² Ibid., 50

European...." Porshnev links this all-embracing expression of popular wrath to the aggravation of "internal antagonisms inherent in feudal society."¹⁸³ Consequently, all these revolutionary movements bore similar characteristics, related to the struggle with the oppressive "feudal-absolutist state." These characteristics were inherent in such seemingly different revolutionary movements as the Fronde and the English Revolution.¹⁸⁴ The struggle against the exploitative and oppressive character of the "feudal-absolutist state" was their common trait.¹⁸⁵ Thus the theory of the social and political Crisis of the Seventeenth Century finds in Porshnev's last works not only its empirical, but also its methodological justification.

However, there are a few questionable points concerning the position of the Soviet School towards the Crisis theory. First of them is the chronological question. The Soviet School officially recognized as the turning point from feudalism to capitalism the end of the eighteenth, and not the seventeenth century. In so far as Soviet historical science in the nineteen-fifties and nineteen-sixties was concerned, the time of the culmination of the discussion of the Crisis, we can not speak of other than official positions for the Soviet historians. The accepted Party line dominated over Soviet historical science. As Konstantin Shtepa puts it:

...Soviet historical scholarship here, as in other cases, served as a tool of Party policy.¹⁸⁶

Porshnev, in his later work, held that the transition from feudalism to capitalism took place in the seventeenth century.

In relation to the dynamics of the official versus personal opinions that set in motion the development of Soviet historiography, it is not without interest to trace the origins of the transformation to which the so-called "official line" in the ideological policies of the Party was itself subjected. The changes of the theoretical basis of research, that the Soviet School underwent, are very visible even over such a short period as fifteen years between the end of the nineteen-forties and the middle of the nineteen-sixties.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 47

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 48

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 99

¹⁸⁶ K.F. Shtepa, *Russian Historians and the Soviet State*, 187

Porshnev's view of peasantry as the essential revolutionary force of the feudal age, which was fiercely criticized at the time of the appearance in 1948, of his *Les soulèvements populaires*, had acquired legitimacy in 1964. The main historical journal in the Soviet Union, *Voprosy istorii* (Questions of History), that was, of course, rigorously implementing the official Party line, recognized that one of the main tasks of the Soviet historical school in the nineteen-sixties was the "elaboration of the research on peasantry as the most important battle force of revolution."¹⁸⁷

It is important to note, however, that with all this critique of his work from the orthodox theorists that could have led to serious consequences, given the political situation in the Soviet Union, Porshnev's scientific career was successful. He was known as one of the leading scholars of the Early Modern Period in the Soviet Union as well as abroad. As was mentioned above, Porshnev occupied an important position as head of the Department of Modern History of Europe at the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences. Thus, for almost ten years (1957-1966) he practically determined the main line of the Soviet historical research in this field. Porshnev was the editor, and also the author, of several chapters of the textbook for University students, *Modern History (1640-1789)*, Vol. 1 (Moscow, 1951), that was re-edited three times (3rd edition, 1964.)

It is possible, to some extent, to compare the role of Porshnev in the Soviet research on Early Modern Europe in the late 1950's early 1960's, with that of Braudel in France. Taking into consideration Soviet conditions, Porshnev's influence was less explicit and applied solely to the field of the Modern History of Europe. One of the characteristic traits of the Soviet historical school was the dispersion of research into narrow special fields, such as Russian history before the Revolution, History of the Communist Party, History of the Soviet Union and its republics, and so on.

Another parallel that can be drawn between Porshnev and Braudel, is that Porshnev also wrote on subjects adjacent to the historical disciplines. These were such works as *Beginnings of Human History: Problems of Paleo-Psychology* (Moscow, 1974); *Principles of Social-Ethnical Psychology* (Moscow, 1964); *Counter-Position as an Element of Ethnical Self-Identity* (Moscow, 1973); *Social Psychology and History*

¹⁸⁷ "Report of A.V. Ado of his Research Trip to France", *Voprosy istorii*, No. 7 (1964),

(Moscow, 1966); *Lenin and Problems of Social Psychology* (Moscow, 1969); *History of Socialist Doctrines* (Moscow, 1962). Porshnev was a co-editor of *Materials of the Commission for the Studies of the Snow-Man* (Moscow, 1958). As was mentioned above, Porshnev acquired a degree of Doctor of Philosophy; he was also a member of the Sociology Institute.

IV

Alexandra Lublinskaya, a historian known in the West for her work *French Absolutism: the Crucial Phase, 1620-1629* (published in English in 1968) held a more indecisive opinion on the existence of the Seventeenth-Century Crisis than Porshnev. Her views changed considerably after the publication, in 1959, of her first major work on seventeenth-century France, *France at the Beginning of the Seventeenth Century (1610-1620)*. Lublinskaya also allowed herself much more freedom with respect to the "orthodox" Marxist theoretical framework. While dealing with such questions as the admittedly exploitative character of the Absolutist State, or the existence of class antagonism, she represented French society as more or less "non-class", and, in her last work, agreed with Mousnier on the validity of his term "société d'ordres." Moreover, even in her earlier work the exposition of the factual material does not always coincide with the Marxist theoretical framework to which she herself alludes.¹⁸⁸ It can be concluded that the political changes that the Soviet Union underwent in the three decades after the Second World War influenced greatly the development of Soviet historiography. Lublinskaya's work reflects a gradual "thaw" in the censorship over Soviet historical writing.

Alexandra Dmitrievna Lublinskaya (1902-1980), professor and doctor of historical sciences, graduated from Petrograd University (Leningrad State University) in 1922. For twenty-seven years she worked at the Leningrad State Public Library (Saltykov-Shedrin), primarily in the department of manuscripts. This determined her interest, and shaped her expertise, in non-published documents on French history, which constituted a part of the famous collections of the Leningrad State Public Library. Lublinskaya published a number of documents on French history of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These publications are considered as the main achievement of Lublinskaya's career.¹⁸⁹ Among them were the documents from P. Dubrowsky's collection, a part of which, comprising the documents from the archives of Chancellor

¹⁸⁸ A.D. Lublinskaya, *Frantsia pri Richelieu. Francuzskii absolutizm v 1630-1640* (Leningrad, 1982), 95-96

¹⁸⁹ "Alexandra Dmitrievna Lublinskaya. Obituary", *Voprosy istorii*, No. 4 (1980), 188

Séguier (Chancellor of France since 1635), Porshnev had used in his work on popular uprisings.¹⁹⁰

From 1946 until 1958, Lublinskaya taught at the Leningrad State University, where she subsequently occupied the position of head of the sub-faculty on the Middle Ages at the History Department. For a few years after 1957, she was Chair of French studies at the Leningrad Institute of History (at the Academy of Sciences.) It is important to note that Lublinskaya was recognized as a scholar studying the Middle Ages, as Porshnev was recognized as a specialist on Modernity, although they wrote on the same period of French history. There was a very slight chronological split, with Lublinskaya's work starting with the period of the minority of Louis XIII and the Fronde, and Porshnev's examining the period of the reign of Louis XIII and the government of Richelieu, as well as the Fronde. The differences in interpreting the same epoch as late Medieval (Lublinskaya) or early Modern (Porshnev) could have evolved from career considerations. But there were surely also conceptual differences that underlay this division of chairs between the two historians.

Lublinskaya's main works are: *Frantsiya v nachale XVII veka (1610-1620 gg.)* (*France at the Beginning of the Seventeenth Century [1610-1620]*), published in 1959, *French Absolutism: the Crucial Phase, 1620-1629*, published in Russian in 1965 and in English in 1968, and the work published posthumously in Leningrad in 1982, *Frantsia pri Richelieu. Francuzskii absolutism v 1630-1640* (*France under Richelieu. French Absolutism, 1630-1642*).

Lublinskaya's first big monograph on early seventeenth-century French history, *Frantsiya v nachale XVII veka (1610-1620 gg.)* (*France at the Beginning of the Seventeenth Century (1610-1620)*) was published in Leningrad in 1959, more than a decade after Mousnier's *La vénalité des offices* and Porshnev's *Les soulèvements populaires*. Of note is that while the monograph appeared at the time when the discussion of the seventeenth-century Crisis had reached its apogee, five years after the publication of Mousnier's *Les XVIe et XVIIe siècles*, it does not deal with the question of the Crisis in

¹⁹⁰ B.F. Porshnev, *Narodnye vosstania vo Frantsii pered Frondoi (1623-1648)*, 11

any way. The analysis of the economic and social nature of absolutism is placed in the context of the political history of the regency of Marie de Medicis (1610-1617). Western historiography of the time approached the question as a part of the more general problem of the Crisis that the absolutist states (such as France, England, Spain, and even Russia) supposedly suffered in the seventeenth century. It seems that the main task of the author, in compliance with the historiographical tradition of political history, was to re-establish continuity between the politics of the regent Marie de Medicis, that had apparently been wrongly interpreted as pro-Hispanic, and the state-building politics of Henry IV. The first years of the reign of Louis XIII are considered in the same way, as part of the successive national politics of the French Absolutist state.

According to Porshnev, as opposed to Lublinskaya, the period of the regency of Marie de Medicis can be characterized as a retreat from French national policies in favor of aristocratic interests:

It is characteristic that to this period of pro-Habsburg foreign policy of England and France corresponded the period of the domination in these countries of the most reactionary elements of the feudal class. The absolutism of James I, Stuart, compared to that of Tudors, is marked by feudal traits; the policies of the Court were fully determined by the feudal aristocracy. In France, the regency of Marie de Medicis embodied the power of aristocracy and the attempt to liquidate absolutism as it was developed under Henri IV.¹⁹¹

The introductory chapter of Lublinskaya's monograph is dedicated to the general analysis of the social and economic situation in France at the beginning of the seventeenth century; it also includes the analysis of the nature of the French absolutist state. The declared goal of Lublinskaya's monograph was to try and fit her conclusions about the social basis, politics, and goals of French absolutism into the Marxist framework. Accordingly, as the starting point of her study she evaluates the progress of capitalist relationships in early seventeenth-century France on the basis of progress in the

¹⁹¹ B.F.Porshnev, *Tridtsatiletniaa voina i vstuplenie v nee Shvetsii i Moskovskogo gosudarstva*, 49

expropriation of the peasantry.¹⁹² But the validity of this approach can be doubted, because, as was pointed out by Wallerstein, Marx's method is not all-embracing:

For Marx, these processes are incidental, illustrating merely the genesis of capital, its first appearance in the world; they are, as it were, travails by which the capitalist mode of production emerges from a feudal society.¹⁹³

Lublinskaya begins her analysis of the French absolutist state with an overview of the labor laws that maintained the wages of workers at the minimal level, prohibited workers' unions, and coerced mendicants to labor for the bourgeoisie or the government. Her conclusion is that this regulation that favored the process of initial accumulation of capital and the development of the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie, was applied in France no less extensively than in England.¹⁹⁴ Accordingly, she concludes that the state of development of capitalist trends in the French economy was not less impressive than in England of the same period. Lublinskaya thinks that the perception of the state's role, formulated by Marx as "concentrated and organized social coercion in the process of accelerated transformation of the feudal mode of production into the capitalist mode of production," can be as fully applied to France of this period as to England.¹⁹⁵

According to her, the formation of substantial capital in "non-productive" spheres of economic activity, such as commerce and usury, that was characteristic of sixteenth-seventeenth century France, was the trait that distinguished the French from the English way of the development of capitalism. Lublinskaya states that this form of capital accumulation "was characteristic of France as of many other countries."¹⁹⁶ It can be added here that this form of initial accumulation of capital was particular to the countries of developed absolutism, such as France, Spain, and Russia, where the loans to the State and State-regulated commerce became more profitable than capital investment in industry. Whether or not this fact expressed the "feudal" or "capitalist" character of the

¹⁹² Marx elaborated this methodology for evaluating the degree of capitalist development in early seventeenth-century England. In his *Capital*, Marx analyses the transformation of the English peasants into proletariat as a result of the process of expropriation of their land.

¹⁹³ I. Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World-Economy*, 8

¹⁹⁴ The analysis of the state of the English economy of the same period is derived from Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, 741

¹⁹⁵ A.D. Lublinskaya, *Frantsiya v nachale XVII veka (1610-1620 gg.)*, 38

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 34

Absolutist State remains, in my opinion, to be clarified, as will be shown in the Conclusion.

In her monograph, however, Lublinskaya states that at the beginning of the seventeenth century France was a country with weakened feudal relationships of production that were largely replaced by absolutist regulation:

There is no doubt that in the fourteenth-fifteenth century the weakening of the seigniorial regime was more than compensated for by the growing pressure on the peasantry on the part of the royal fisc.¹⁹⁷

What kind of relationships of production was such absolutist regulation promoting? This is the main question tackled by Lublinskaya in her study.

Following the Western School, Lublinskaya admits that the feudal regime was weakened and replaced by an absolutist regime as early as the fourteenth-fifteenth centuries. She also admits that along with the remnants of feudalism there existed in France strong capitalist trends coupled with forms of exploitation particular to absolutism. This double or even triple (because of the persistence of feudal dues) exploitation of peasants incited in them a never seen before resistance, in the form of almost constant popular uprisings. This thesis is familiar to us from Porshnev's work and represents one of the main elaborations of the Soviet Marxist theory on which both historians agree. As Lublinskaya puts it:

The French way of expropriation of the peasantry was aggravated by heavy exploitation, combining feudal forms with forms transitory to capitalism that, coupled with huge State taxes, exhausted the peasant economy and incited a spirit of malcontent and revolutionary protest against the very basis of the existing order.¹⁹⁸

However, opposing Porshnev's conclusions, Lublinskaya implies that the popular revolts were specifically and solely directed against this novel (to the peasants) institution of State taxes. In this respect, it is important to clarify just how Lublinskaya sees absolutism. Was it a political structure that supported the old, failing feudal order, or was this political form destined to facilitate the establishment of the new capitalist rule? The

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 19

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 22-23

point of view that absolutism corresponded to the mixed, predominantly feudal, mode of production was an accepted official line of the Soviet historical school, substantiated by Porshnev in his famous monograph. The theory that absolutism politically expressed the strengthening of the new bourgeois economy and represented the prototype of a modern, "non-class", state, had for a long time been promoted by the non-Marxist school. What was Lublinskaya's genuine conviction? The clearest answer to this question can be seen in a series of conclusions about absolutism made in this case study, along with additional views presented by Lublinskaya in her later work.

In her last work on French absolutism, *France under Richelieu* (published in 1982), Lublinskaya quotes Marx's definition of the absolutist state:

The State was formed in the course of the class-struggle, that is why it was formed in order to restrain the antagonism of these classes. Then, according to the general rule, it represented the hegemony of the most powerful, economically dominant class, that with the help of the State became also politically dominant...As an exemption we can consider the periods when antagonist classes reached such an equilibrium of forces that the State power obtained temporarily a certain independence in relation to both antagonist classes, as an institution seemingly arbitrating between them. Such an institution was the absolutist monarchy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that maintained balance between the antagonistic nobility and bourgeoisie....¹⁹⁹

Following Marx's definition, absolutism represented a form of government that corresponded to a mixed relationship of production marked by equally expressed feudal and capitalist trends.²⁰⁰ However, Lublinskaya, trying to fit her factual material and conclusions into this theoretical framework, represents the absolutist monarchy as expressing the interests of both the nobility and bourgeoisie. Unfortunately, her orthodox theoretical conclusions remain suspended in the air, unconnected to the factual side of her work.

With respect to the financial-economic relationship between the bourgeoisie and the French Absolutist State, Lublinskaya identifies three forms of State subsidizing by the

¹⁹⁹ A.D. Lublinskaya, *Frantsia pri Richelieu. Francuzskii absolutism v 1630-1640* (Leningrad, 1982), 218. Quotation from Marx and Engels, *Sochinenia*, Vol. 21, 171-172

²⁰⁰ Wallerstein's remark, about the weakness of Marx's concept of a society transitional from capitalism to feudalism, was referred to earlier. See p.10

bourgeoisie. The State received financial support from the bourgeoisie in the form of rents, offices, and loans. Accordingly, Lublinskaya differentiates three bourgeois groups that financed the State and whose interests - on the assumption of the Marxist notion that there is an economic basis to every political action - the State represented. These were respectively: the city bourgeoisie, that is the city-merchants and entrepreneurs who profited from state rents; the functionaries, who purchased offices and credited the State with different payments and dues in return for the right to exercise their office, and, finally, the financiers, who took advantage, manifestly and shamelessly, of their direct loans to the State.²⁰¹

It can be concluded that the relationship between the bourgeoisie and the State constituted the economic basis of its power and determined its politics. There is no evidence, however, in Lublinskaya's exposition of any economic or financial relationship between the State and the nobility, which seems to imply that the Absolutist State was primarily bourgeois in nature. Yet Lublinskaya downplays this inference, in order to corroborate Marx's argument in favor of the double nature of the Absolutist State, by stating that the State defended the interests of the nobles with more zeal, and more generously, than those of the bourgeoisie:

Compared to the annual pensions and donations to the nobility that constituted 2-2.5 million *livres*, the average annual subsidies of 100-150 thousand *livres* to manufacturers represented a miserable pittance.²⁰²

It can be argued that in order to accurately conclude how much money in total the bourgeoisie received from the government annually, one should add wages to the functionaries and the sum paid by the government as interest on rents and loans. The data that can be used to corroborate this assumption can be extracted from Lublinskaya's later work. Considering the expenses component of the budgets for 1630-1640's in her *France under Richelieu*, Lublinskaya gives the following numbers: the pensions for 1630, constituted 3,067 *livres*, whereas the cash payments, which comprised the payments of interest on different rents and loans issued by the government, constituted 8,637 *livres*. In 1640, these numbers were respectively 3,312 *livres* (pensions) and 51,498 *livres* (cash

²⁰¹ Ibid., 40-41

²⁰² Ibid., 43

payments).²⁰³ It seems that, compared to these sums, the pensions distributed to the nobility would, in turn, seem a "miserable pittance."

Here again the same fundamental question of the nature of the Absolutist State resurfaces. Despite the evidence supporting the primary importance of the bourgeoisie for the existence of absolutism, the conclusion, which comes quite unexpectedly in Lublinskaya's reasoning, is that the essential character of absolutism was feudal! (In her later work her convictions changed.) The basis for the assumption of the dominant role of the nobility and bourgeoisie is provided by Lublinskaya's analysis of the social and economic role of functionaries, "la noblesse de robe":

In feudal-absolutist France at the beginning of the seventeenth century, parliaments, that were constituted of "la noblesse de robe", represented the interests of the nobility, guarded by the nobiliary State. The State channeled its governing function against the dependent and exploited population. Together with the army and the Church they ["la noblesse de robe"] insured the class dictatorship of the nobility.²⁰⁴

Writing on the "new nobility" as constituted by functionaries and non-functionaries, Lublinskaya separates her analysis of this social group into a special chapter entitled "Functionaries":

It is also important to underline that high functionaries did not judicially constitute the Third Estate and did not participate in the Estates General. At the time of its ascension in the sixteenth century, they formed a distinctive "quatrième état" (that disappeared in the seventeenth century.) At the time of its power, starting at the beginning of the seventeenth century, they put themselves - as the quintessence of State power - above all the estates.²⁰⁵

It can be articulated here that functionaries, in Lublinskaya's view, could not be considered a part of the bourgeoisie, but rather of the new nobility. Her opinion on this matter does not coincide with either that accepted in French historiography (from Thierry to Mousnier and Pagès) or in Soviet historiography (Porshnev), according to which the socially distinctive group of functionaries, or "la noblesse de robe", constituted a part of

²⁰³ A.D. Lublinskaya, *Frantsia pri Richelieu. Francuzskii absolutism v 1630-1640 gg.*, 80

²⁰⁴ A.D. Lublinskaya, *Frantsiya v nachale XVII veka (1610-1620 gg.)*, 70

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 70

the "bourgeoisie", even if "ennobled." In her later work *French Absolutism*, Lublinskaya summarizes her theoretical conclusions as follows:

I have already examined this point of view in detail, stressing the 'etatist' nature of Mousnier's conception and the illegitimacy of identifying the *noblesse de robe* with the bourgeoisie.²⁰⁶

Lublinskaya bases her assumption of the distinctness of this social group ("noblesse de robe") on the fact that at some point in time they formed a so-called "quatrième état" of servants of the state. This phenomenon was particular to absolutism, according to Lublinskaya. Thus, the "quatrième état" constituted "the new nobility" in Lublinskaya's terms.²⁰⁷ Pagès, Porshnev, and Mousnier call them "ennobled bourgeoisie," thus reflecting their social origin and the origin of the capital that they invested in their offices. Regardless of their official title or the way of life they led, it seems more reasonable to recognize that, socially speaking, they were bourgeois. By mingling this group with the nobility, Lublinskaya achieved two goals. First, she found a group that, according to her, constituted the social basis of absolutism as a distinctive political and social institution. And, second, she substantiated Marx's notion that the nobility supported absolutism, a point Lublinskaya would have difficulties proving in the absence of her elaboration of the "noblesse de robe."

It is only natural that Lublinskaya's theory is biased. The following quotation can be considered as the confirmation of the bourgeois nature of State functionaries:

Thus, first and foremost, offices represented the profitable form of placement of monetary resources. But not only this reason explained the long and intensive (almost until the end of the seventeenth century) outflow of capital from commerce and industry into this non-productive sphere. Offices, particularly high offices, were valued because of tax privileges related to them.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ A.D. Lublinskaya, *French Absolutism: the Crucial Phase, 1620-1629*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 29

²⁰⁷ That is, the "quatrième état" could not be called "noble" by "blood" in the traditional sense of this word. The term "noblesse d'épée", or nobles by blood, implied that "blood" and courage were the main contributions of this social group to the public interest ("le bien public".) Functionaries, were not truly noble, they were "ennobled" for as long as they exercised their function, directed to the achievement of common weal.

²⁰⁸ A.D. Lublinskaya, *Frantsiya v nachale XVII veka (1610-1620 gg.)*, 63

Here Lublinskaya corroborates Porshnev's conclusions on the desire of the bourgeoisie to move on to the privileged class of nobles in order to enjoy tax benefits, which she will refute in her later work. However, Porshnev seems much more consistent and logical in his conclusions than Lublinskaya. The strong point of his work is that the factual material falls easily into place, as opposed to Lublinskaya.

Firstly, Lublinskaya concludes, the political program of the "noblesse de robe" at the beginning of the seventeenth century coincided, in general, with the program of absolutist monarchy. They accumulated wealth, power and strength at the expense of the feudal aristocracy and nobility of sword, as a result of the development of absolutism and because of it. Secondly, the "new nobility", especially the functionaries, were the creation of an epoch of "initial accumulation" or "economic expansion", in the period of the intense growth of centralization. This group embodied the power of new capital and new forms of exploitation. In this respect, it is necessary to note the hatred of the peasants towards this group of exploiters in particular, who did not respect the old customary traditions of the nobility, which offered peasants some protection. Oddly, the final conclusion of Lublinskaya's book implies exactly the opposite:

The class nature of absolutism remained unchanged during the whole time of its existence: absolutism represented but the last stage of the feudal state, that is, it was a form of state power that did not allow the bourgeoisie political power. Reflecting in its interior, as well as exterior, politics the interest of a developing and strengthening bourgeoisie, absolutism at all stages of its existence still could not relate to the latter in a consistent way.²⁰⁹

It is clear that bourgeois development brought absolutism to life, that in the period 1610-1620, absolutism supported the bourgeoisie and functionaries, who comprised a group of so-called "noblesse de robe", and that absolutism relied on these groups for support. But it is not at all clear how absolutism, taking into consideration all the above, could have remained a feudal state.

In 1965, Lublinskaya's *French Absolutism: the Crucial Phase, 1620-1629*, was published. This monograph was very different from the previous one because of its theoretical uniformity and strong analysis of economic and social, as opposed to mostly

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 292

political, seventeenth-century trends. It is possible that Lublinskaya's position as head of a group working on the study of French History at the Leningrad Branch of the Institute of History at the Academy of Sciences (a post she occupied after 1957) facilitated the more profound economic, social, and philosophical analysis presented by her. As previously mentioned, a group studying French history at the Institute of History at the Academy of Sciences was created in 1956. This group comprised a hundred and twenty specialists of French history. Its members worked in research and education in major cities of the Soviet Union (Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Erevan, Tbilissi, Odessa, Ljvov.) Most of the scholars, for obvious reasons, worked in Moscow. The Leningrad Branch was the second in the number of specialists; it comprised twenty members.²¹⁰ It is this group that Lublinskaya directed for a few years after 1957. The main goals of the group were formulated in terms of cooperation of specialists in different fields of French history, expansion of contacts with French historians, and publication of archival materials and rare bibliographical studies.²¹¹ It is evident from Lublinskaya's monograph that this collective work bore some fruit. It is worth mentioning that in 1957-1966, Porshnev was Chair of the Department of Modern European History at the Institute of History in Moscow, and that the two historians obviously were in close scientific contact, since their work dealt with basically the same period of French history. Porshnev was also Lublinskaya's superior, which might have contributed to the adoption of some of his views by her.

Lublinskaya now reformulates her perception of the Absolutist State in terms that are very close to Porshnev's. She considers the first third of the seventeenth century as a period when absolutism established itself firmly by overcoming the decentralizing tendencies that were expressed by the feudal aristocracy. This theory of consistent national absolutist politics, as they were directed by Henri IV, the regency of Marie de Medicis, and the reign of Louis XIII, was elaborated by her in the earlier work. Echoes of Porshnev's concept of the decisive role of peasant struggle and of the role of the

²¹⁰ "Group for Research in French History", *Voprosy istorii*, No. 5 (1957), 204

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 204-205

bourgeoisie in supporting, to a certain extent, this struggle, are quite explicit in Lublinskaya's book:

By the end of the first third of the seventeenth century these reactionary pretensions, together with other obstacles, mostly of a political nature, had been overcome. The progressive forces in France - the bourgeoisie and the masses of the people - had played a decisive role in this by supporting the absolute monarchy in its struggle against the *grandeurs* and against separatist tendencies. They had proved, even at that time, strong enough to turn the scale in favour of economic and political progress.²¹²

However, the concept of the General Crisis is criticized by Lublinskaya and considered as useful only insofar as it helps to understand the interconnections of distinctive historical processes unfolding in different countries:

Many of these conceptions are dubious and even quite unacceptable - in the first place the very idea of "general crisis" and "general revolution" - but they are interesting in that they try to penetrate deeply into the essence of events, to track down some sort of fundamental causes of those processes of outstanding importance which were common to all the countries of Europe.²¹³

The introductory chapter of the book is fully dedicated to the critical analysis of the notion of the Seventeenth-Century General Crisis. Lublinskaya offers her critique of the Crisis theory on the basis of an analysis of the works of its most famous adherents: Mousnier, Hobsbawm and Trevor-Roper.

Mousnier's *Les XVIe et le XVIIe siècles. Les progrès de la civilisation européenne et le déclin de l'Orient* is characterized as "one of the earliest and at the same time most many-sided and complete statements of this conception of a general crisis in the development of the Western European countries in the seventeenth century."²¹⁴ Lublinskaya criticizes however, the key assumption made by Mousnier, that capitalist development in Europe reached its peak in the sixteenth century and was in decline in the seventeenth. According to Mousnier, the sixteenth century was characterized by the intensive development of commerce and industry, the rise of prices, the high rate of employment and so on. Briefly, the sixteenth century was the "Phase A", the economic

²¹² A. D. Lublinskaya, *French Absolutism: the Crucial Phase, 1620-1629*, 2

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 4

boom of the *longue-durée* economic development. And the seventeenth century, on the contrary, was the "Phase B", characterized by trans-European economic distress and the contraction of capitalism, or what Mousnier calls "un ralentissement de l'essor économique spontané et de l'essor du capitalisme."²¹⁵ Firstly, Lublinskaya expressed her reservations as to the existence of the seventeenth-century crisis in general, and of the existence of a capitalist economy, in a strict sense of this word, in seventeenth-century Europe, in particular:

One cannot deny the great part played by merchants' capital in the sixteenth century; everything connected with it leaps to the eye when one first surveys the period. The material contained in the sources – or at least, in those which have been used by historians up to now – also focuses attention on merchants' capital. But in the course of Mousnier's argument a sort of shifting of emphasis occurs, both on the economic and on the historical level. He is inclined to see in the brilliant prosperity of trade, banking and the rest the growth of capitalism in general, and, correspondingly, he sees the decline of trade and the contraction in the scale of credit operations as the decline of capitalism. He expresses this shift of historical emphasis by attributing an all-European, international character to capitalism in the sixteenth century (at least down to 1560) which later on appears to have been lost through the national mercantilist policies of the separate states.²¹⁶

Lublinskaya does not contest the general assumption, inherent in Western historiography, that capitalism slowly but surely invaded European society in the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries. But she does not agree that this process was unfolding at the same pace in all West-European countries, and even less does she think that the seventeenth century saw a contraction of this development,²¹⁷ at least not in England and Holland.²¹⁸

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 6

²¹⁵ R. Mousnier, *Les XVIe et XVIIe siècles: La grande mutation intellectuelle de l'humanité, l'avènement de la science moderne et l'expansion de l'Europe*, 168

²¹⁶ A.D. Lublinskaya, *French Absolutism: the Crucial Phase, 1620-1629*, 7

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 13

²¹⁸ In the foreword to Lublinskaya's book, however, John Elliott refers to the work by Prof. Supple on seventeenth-century English economic history, *Commercial Crisis and Change in England, 1600-1642* (Cambridge, 1959), that contests the development of capitalist economy in England of this period, as well as the capitalist character of the English Revolution.

Secondly, Lublinskaya does not agree with Mousnier's methodology of blaming economic factors that could be relevant to a developed capitalist economy, for the occurrence of the Crisis in seventeenth-century Europe. Mousnier makes a parallel, in the first place, between the decline in imports of precious metals from Spanish America and the fall of prices.²¹⁹ He also notes that the price fluctuations were possibly caused by particularly unfavorable climatic conditions and sharp demographic fluctuations.²²⁰

Lublinskaya argues this point on the ground of fundamental differences in her and Mousnier's outlooks on seventeenth-century society. Lublinskaya considers this society as primarily feudal and agricultural, while Mousnier's assumptions (that the fall in prices adversely affected the development of the European economy) can be applied to a capitalist society in the strict sense of this word, that is the society that had a developed market economy:

There are no grounds for attributing the high prices for foodstuffs in the seventeenth century only to such causes as harvest-failure or a large influx of precious metals. Such explanations could be relevant to a society with developed capitalist production, in which commodity economy embraced all branches. The nobility and bourgeoisie of the seventeenth century, however, were far from being as dependent on the market for provisions as they were to be later on, even in the eighteenth century. Rent in kind, tithes and payments in kind under *métayage*, played a considerable part in the seventeenth century, making a substantial section of the landowners first and foremost direct consumers of the products of their estates and only in the second place, and to a certain extent, sellers, not buyers, of these products. For this reason the effect of harvest-failures (provided these were not too frequent and did not involve an extensive area) on the productive life of the cities could not be so direct, rapid and prolonged as to disturb it profoundly.²²¹

According to Lublinskaya, Mousnier's theory has quite a few weak points from the factual standpoint. The low prices at the beginning of the century did not affect the growth of industry and commerce in France and Spain, and did not occur at all in Holland or England:

²¹⁹ R. Mousnier, *Les XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles*, 167

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 169

²²¹ A.D. Lublinskaya, *French Absolutism: the Crucial Phase, 1620-1629*, 12

It is more important to analyse Mousnier's conclusion about the catastrophic situation of the European economy in the seventeenth century. True, one must, of course, exclude England and Holland from this conclusion, so that the *only* country, among those already advancing along the road of capitalist development, to which the conclusion applies, is France...For the moment I note that in all the other countries of Europe, that is, over the greater part of the continent, the seventeenth century either was, or was not, a difficult time for economic development for different reasons in each case, and this was not connected with the development of capitalism in these countries. There are no grounds for extending the thesis about a crisis of capitalism to the whole of seventeenth-century Europe. The general notion of an economic crisis (that is, not necessarily a crisis of capitalist development) is put forward by Mousnier in too sweeping, too summary a form.²²²

Moreover, the rise or fall of prices in the seventeenth century, as opposed to the sixteenth, was not related to the influx of precious metals. Lublinskaya promotes the view that the seventeenth century was characterized by "an *independent* movements of prices, *not* dependent on the influx of gold and silver."²²³ And Mousnier's theory that seventeenth-century economic life was characterized by unusually acute price fluctuations is simply wrong.

Lublinskaya states that the Crisis, in Mousnier's words, is the all-European decline of capitalism related to the fall of prices and the decline of population. However, the decline of prices in France did not slow the development of capitalism, but, on the contrary, triggered it:

It is also obvious that both the periods of particularly low prices (1600-1615 and 1660-1680) were at the same time periods of marked boom and growth of capitalism in those countries where one can in general talk of such a phenomenon in the seventeenth century, namely, England, France and Holland. It is notable that for France, moreover, these were the *only* periods of comparatively rapid capitalist development in the seventeenth century. These considerations must be given attention when we draw up the balance sheet of the history of France in the seventeenth century... The largest number of new manufactories appeared in France precisely in the times of Henry IV and of Colbert, that is, in the low-price periods already mentioned. This means that the view that the tempo of production declined when prices were low is groundless....²²⁴

²²² Ibid., 16

²²³ Ibid., 12-15

²²⁴ Ibid., 15

As to the decline of population in this period, this assumption can be made only theoretically, because of an almost complete lack of statistical data.

Dismissing as erroneous Mousnier's analysis of the European economy on the basis of price movements or demographic shifts, Lublinskaya states that these particular phenomena can be more characteristic of social and political, and not of economic crisis. She asserts that the decline of population and the fall in prices, that is usually attributed to the decline of the Spanish colonial Empire, was caused primarily by the Thirty Years' War:

It seems to me that one can only formulate a theory about economic development in the seventeenth century if one analyses not just the economic life but the whole complex of social and economic relations and political struggle. For this reason I will first examine the theory of social and political crisis developed in Mousnier's book.²²⁵

Mousnier considers political and social reasons for possible price fluctuations, like the Thirty Years' War or the politics of absolutist monarchs, as of secondary importance. He states that "les causes de ces variations ne sont pas les guerres."²²⁶ However, according to Lublinskaya, the only condition explaining the existence of a Crisis, and that could be considered seriously was the unusually long and devastating hostilities that affected the whole of Europe throughout the seventeenth century. This political crisis found its expression in the first all-European war, that in turn affected social and economic life.

Here again is the echo of Porshnev's theory of the existence of a permanent political and social crisis, that shook the foundations of feudal-absolutist France for almost two centuries (until the French Revolution of 1789.) Lublinskaya agrees with Porshnev on the primary importance of the political crisis and class struggle for the development of European society. This political and social crisis affected seventeenth-century European countries by exhausting their economic resources. In its turn, general exhaustion of economies, due to unusually long hostilities, led to over-taxation that

²²⁵ Ibid., 16

²²⁶ R. Mousnier, *Les XVIe et XVIIe siècles*, 168

completed the vicious circle of social, political, and economic troubles. This theory of the Soviet School, elaborated by Porshnev, sounds plausible, but the deviations from Marxism, of which it was accused, are permanently built into it.

According to Lublinskaya, the crisis in the social sphere of European life expressed itself most explicitly in the increasing exploitation of peasants by landlords and the State:

Antagonism increased between the lords, who were owners of fiefs, whether they were from the old nobility, officials, merchants or financiers, and the peasants, in spite of their community of interests and their tenurial ties. The lords lived on the peasants' labour, receiving rent and dues from them, in addition to which, part of the state taxes paid by the peasantry found its way to the lords in the form of pensions, salaries and the like.²²⁷

This theory was never accepted by Mousnier, declaring that the peasant revolts did not bear a revolutionary character destined to change the fundamental principles of the State order. They were simply manifestations of malcontent, due to temporary aggravations, largely incited by the nobility. Lublinskaya reproaches Mousnier for denying the class character of the Absolutist State and the existence of exploitation and class struggle:

Revolts were especially numerous between 1630 and 1659. They cannot, however, according to Mousnier, be described as a war of the poor against the rich.²²⁸

In this work, as opposed to the subsequent book, Lublinskaya clearly articulates her theory of the class character of absolutism. Absolutism was (here she follows the hard line of Marxism) a political institution that was destined to maintain the balance between the two main, economically dominant classes, bourgeoisie and nobility. Even though she is acknowledging the progressive and bourgeois character of absolutism that is inherent in Mousnier's theory, the notion that absolutism was a nobiliary state prevails in her presentation:

There can be no doubt about the centralizing function of absolutism, which followed the progressive line of development for French state-building to take in that period. But by this activity it was not forwarding

²²⁷ A.D. Lublinskaya, *French Absolutism: the Crucial Phase, 1620-1629*, 17

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 19

the unity and equality of all classes, as Mousnier supposes. It rested on severe exploitation of the mass of the people, and on a scarcely more restrained use of the accumulated wealth of bourgeoisie, to which at the same time it offered in exchange, however, the many benefits of mercantilism, aid against the workers, and so on, not to mention the fact that centralization itself was first and foremost of benefit to the bourgeoisie. In relation to both groups of the nobility the policy of absolutism aimed at defending their basic class interest, that is their property. The absolute monarchy did not meet the openly reactionary demands of the *noblesse d'épée*, and in many cases it directly opposed them - but this is still a long way from 'egalitarianism'.²²⁹

It is easy to agree with Lublinskaya that the whole concept of the Crisis looks a little rough in the panoramic exposition of Europe that Mousnier presents in his *Les XVIe et XVIIe siècles*. But one should not forget that this work was only the first statement of the Crisis theory. However, Lublinskaya is right in saying that, regarded closely and with detailed analysis given to every particular country at every particular point in time, the theory starts to fade away:

In summing up the crisis theory as a whole, it must be emphasized that, in the process of analyzing Mousnier's argument, the crisis, strictly speaking, has evaporated. What has been made clear is the following: of the three countries studied in the book- England, Holland and France – the first two are exceptions. In the first half of the seventeenth century they experienced not an economic crisis but, on the contrary, an economic boom – an intense development of industrial and commercial capitalism which determined the character of the class struggle, and the revolution in England. As for France (whose history is central to Mousnier's book both as a source of detailed analysis and as a case study of the developments taking place in Europe as a whole), it must be recognized that in this country the 'economic crisis' in the first half of the seventeenth century remains unexamined, since facts are lacking on the development of production, its increase or decline. In other words, the existence of an economic crisis is not established concretely, but inferred from events which are defined as social and political crises.²³⁰

Criticizing Hobsbawm's article "The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century",²³¹ Lublinskaya acknowledges that his theory of "close interconnections between the

²²⁹ Ibid., 26

²³⁰ Ibid., 27-28

²³¹ Although E.J. Hobsbawm is a Marxist, he remains a "bourgeois" historian for the representatives of the Soviet School. This self-identity as "proletarian" historians evolved,

development of the separate European countries, has both breadth and originality."²³² But, starting with the analysis of the disrupted balance in the European economy of the seventeenth century that manifested itself in the Crisis, in the course of the argument Hobsbawm limits the scope of his study to consideration of the conditions for the development of capitalism and industrial revolution in European countries. These conditions, necessary for the development of capitalism, were created, he argues, in the process of overcoming the Crisis. According to Hobsbawm, the Crisis manifested itself, first of all, in the stagnation or decline of population almost everywhere in Western Europe. And as he based his theory of economic decline on the decrease of demand, the population factor became its crucial point:

Capitalism, in his view, developed slowly and passed through a phase of acute crisis in the seventeenth century because it was not possible to ensure a growing effective demand, and there was therefore no stimulus to expanding the scale of capitalist production. So as to leave no doubt that he finds the basic cause of the crisis in the sphere of demand, Hobsbawm specifically adds that there were no insuperable obstacles in the sphere of technique to the development of capitalism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries....²³³

The only problem with the theory that the decrease in demand was provoked by the fall in population is that a decline of population cannot really be proven to have happened in seventeenth-century Europe. Accurate statistical reports on the European population began to appear only at the end of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.²³⁴

Lublinskaya considers Hobsbawm's theory as erroneous because her Western colleague traces the causes of the Crisis first and foremost in the sphere of demand. To Lublinskaya, the only historically established facts witnessing the decline in demand are the decline of the Baltic and Levant trade in the seventeenth century. As for the causes

probably, from the social origins of the historians, formed by Soviet Universities in the nineteen-twenties, and was reinforced by Stalin's repression against the Russian intelligentsia. See on this K.F. Shtepa, *Russian Historians and the Soviet State*, 231-239

²³² A.D. Lublinskaya, *French Absolutism: the Crucial Phase, 1620-1629*, 41

²³³ *Ibid.*, 42-44

²³⁴ Carlo M. Cipolla, *Before the Industrial Revolution: European Society and Economy 1000-1700* (London: Methuen, 1976), 3

for this decline, contrary to Hobsbawm's Marxism, Lublinskaya sees them in the political, and not the economic, sphere.

Hobsbawm's objections to the possibility of political (on which Lublinskaya insists²³⁵), instead of economic, reasons for the emergence of the Crisis, are indeed expressed rather superficially. He notes that, although there was "some distortion of price movements by the Thirty Years' War,"²³⁶ its effects could not have seriously influenced the population or the production of seventeenth-century Europe because of its local character and, in comparison with the later wars, its moderate destructiveness:

We now know that (other things being equal) the losses of population, production and capital equipment of even twentieth century wars, whose destructive capacities are much greater, can be made good within a matter of twenty to twenty-five years. If they were not in the seventeenth century, it was because wars aggravated already existing tendencies of crisis.²³⁷

These assumptions can be argued against by recourse to the literature dealing specifically with the Thirty Years' War, as well as by keeping in mind the evidence on how these hostilities affected the taxation policies of European absolutist states.²³⁸

As Lublinskaya remarks, the evidence in favor of a Crisis, except for the decline of the Mediterranean and the Baltic trade, does not stand up to criticism. The whole theory is elaborated on the basis of false premises concerning the decline in demand and supply of industrial goods in Europe, Asia and America. This theory cannot be scientifically proven because of the lack of data on population as well as on

²³⁵ A.D. Lublinskaya, *French Absolutism: the Crucial Phase, 1620-1629*, 47, 48, 50, 52

²³⁶ E.J. Hobsbawm, "The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century" in *Crisis in Europe 1560 – 1660, Essays from Past and Present*, ed. Trevor Aston, 13

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 14

²³⁸ On taxation and its effect on the general economic and social situation in European countries see also R. Mousnier, *Fureurs Paysannes: Les paysans dans les revoltes du XVIIe siècle (France, Russie, Chine)*; J.H. Elliott, "The Decline of Spain" in *Crisis in Europe 1560 – 1660, Essays from Past and Present*, ed. Trevor Aston, and "Revolution and Continuity in Early Modern Europe" in *The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century*, eds. Geoffrey Parker and Lesley M. Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1978)

production.²³⁹ Hobsbawm himself admits plainly: "What happened to *production*? We simply do not know."²⁴⁰

The same is true for the development of colonies. Hobsbawm sees the seventeenth century as a turning point from State monopoly on colonial trade towards "the foundation of plantation colonies which produced without systematic restriction of output, and of European colonies of settlement. The middle of the seventeenth century, here again, marks a turning point."²⁴¹ According to Lublinskaya, the factual material at the disposal of historians is not sufficient for establishing the crisis in colonial trade, as well as the precise date of the formation of plantation colonies. She states, however, that there are works that contradict Hobsbawm's conclusions about the crisis of colonial trade in the seventeenth century. There is also some material that proves that plantation colonies (in Brazil, for example) had developed already in the sixteenth century.²⁴²

Moreover, Lublinskaya suggests that Hobsbawm's views on the "putting-out" industry that replaced guilds²⁴³, as a result of the Crisis, are more applicable to industrially developed society than to seventeenth-century Europe. So it is irrelevant to look for the causes of slow development in the means of production in the so-called Crisis of the seventeenth century. This society was simply not ready for the Industrial Revolution, and no crisis or its resolution could have influenced these objective economic conditions.²⁴⁴

Lublinskaya criticizes Hobsbawm's main theoretical elaboration that the conditions for Industrial Revolution, such as concentration of capital and "strengthening of dispersed manufacture at the expense of craft production,"²⁴⁵ were created as a result of the Crisis:

Let us consider these general ideas. It is possible to agree with some of them, others - and, indeed, the author's conception as a whole - give rise to

²³⁹ A.D. Lublinskaya, *French Absolutism: the Crucial Phase, 1620-1629*, 41

²⁴⁰ E.J. Hobsbawm, "The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century" in *Crisis in Europe 1560 - 1660, Essays from Past and Present*, ed. Trevor Aston, 9

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 50

²⁴² A.D. Lublinskaya, *op.cit.*, 51-52

²⁴³ E.J. Hobsbawm, *op. cit.*, 37-39

²⁴⁴ A.D. Lublinskaya, *op. cit.*, 56

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 57

objections. In the first place, why must these phenomena be regarded as *consequences* of the crisis? Even if we adopt Hobsbawm's view that there was a many-sided economic crisis in the seventeenth century, any connection between this and economic concentration seems doubtful. If we take into account that the only unquestionable fact is the crisis of demand for West-European industrial products on the Baltic market, such a connection seems unfounded and brought into the argument rather speculatively.²⁴⁶

The undeniable fact, confirmed by Cipolla, Braudel, Lublinskaya and others, is that there occurred in the seventeenth century a change in the role of the Mediterranean in the world's commercial and political life. The once-powerful Mediterranean states, such as Venice, Spain, and Turkey "irreversibly declined." The balance of economic and political influence shifted from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic. But, as Lublinskaya remarks, this fact by itself does not mean that this "local crisis" equally affected other parts of Europe, or even all the countries of the same area. Lublinskaya notes that the state of the Portuguese economy, for example, can hardly be defined as in crisis. "Figures are given to testify to the prosperity of trade between Portugal and America during that century...."²⁴⁷

The theory of the "second enserfment" in Eastern Europe as a result of the General Crisis, raised strong objections from Lublinskaya. Hobsbawm promoted the view that the transition to large serf estates in Eastern Europe was stimulated by the growth of demand for Eastern grain in Western Europe. Lublinskaya thinks that it is formulated erroneously with respect to the concept of the Crisis, as well as with respect to the historic reality altogether. Lublinskaya notes that Hobsbawm's sources²⁴⁸ are long out-dated. According to her, it has been proven that the transition to a serf economy in Eastern Europe began much earlier than the seventeenth century, and that it was due primarily to the internal development of the Eastern-European countries, and not to the requirements of export to Western Europe:

These notions of Hobsbawm's seem to have no foundation. He supports them with references taken principally from Rutkowski's works of the

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 58

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 52

²⁴⁸ Lublinskaya mentions E. Jensen, *Danish Agriculture* (Copenhagen, 1937); J. Rutkowski, *Histoire Economique de la Pologne avant les partages* (Paris, 1927)

1920s, which are very much out of date now, and their conclusions doubted. An extensive body of writing has now been devoted to the problem of the 'second enserfment', and it is seen to be much more complicated. In any case it is clear that the intensification of serfdom began a good deal earlier than when exports of landlords' grain had assumed appreciable dimensions. The strengthening of the lords' manorial economy was primarily related to the needs of the internal market, that is, it was first and foremost a result of the internal development of the countries of Eastern Europe.²⁴⁹

Lublinskaya points to a theoretical bias in Hobsbawm's reasoning that the time limits of the second enserfment coincided with the period of the General Crisis. According to her, there would be no impulse for the second enserfment if it was indeed initiated, as it was in Hobsbawm's view, by the increasing demand, in the time of the Crisis, for Eastern grain in exchange for the industrial produce from the West.²⁵⁰

In her conclusion, she stresses once again the importance of the Thirty Years' War with regard to the changes in the seventeenth-century European economy:

It seems to me that at the basis of the whole conception of a European crisis there lies, as the only reliable set of facts, the decline of the Baltic and Levant trades.

This raises the question of a different set of causes of the crisis from those discussed in Hobsbawm's article. Should the shrinkage in trade in the Baltic and Mediterranean areas be ascribed to the first all-European war, known as the Thirty Years' War, and the other wars which took place in different parts of Europe between the 1650s and 1670s? This question must arise, and, foreseeing it, Hobsbawm presents his objections...I have already criticized similar views expressed by Mousnier, and shall return later to considering the question of the influence of war on the state of the economy in the seventeenth century. I think that Hobsbawm's arguments are unconvincing. A certain tendency to anachronism and preconceived opinion is characteristic of them, as of Mousnier's....²⁵¹

Trevor-Roper's theory of the conflict between "Country" and "Court",²⁵² that underlies his perception of the Seventeenth-Century Crisis, was also dismissed by Lublinskaya as historically unfounded and reactionary. She states that Trevor-Roper's

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 48

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 60

²⁵¹ Ibid., 42-43

idea concerning the outcome of the seventeenth-century revolutions that swept away the "most overgrown, most rigid court of all", the English Court, is not supported by factual material.²⁵³ The French Court of the beginning of the seventeenth-century, that served, in Trevor-Roper's presentation, as an example of successful state reforms that prevented a serious revolution (the Fronde is considered as a "relatively small revolution"²⁵⁴) was according to Lublinskaya, much more "overgrown" with respect to its bureaucracy than the English Court.²⁵⁵ The "conservatism" of Trevor-Roper's theory expressed itself in the general premise of his work that was meant to show that wise state politics could have prevented the revolutions that petrified seventeenth-century societies. Not only did this theory imply the over-simplification of the economic and social structure of the *ancien régime*,²⁵⁶ but it also went counter to the facts of concrete historical reality in England, Spain, and France, that were considered in Trevor-Roper's article:

In my view, the theory in question, which is both reactionary and of no value for historical work, is an attempt to 'create' a number of revolutions in order to 'destroy' them all. I say all, because, as he [Trevor-Roper] presents it, even the English Revolution turns out to be a miserable and momentary consequence of some curious stupidity on the part of the early Stuarts. Revolutions, it seems, are quite unnecessary and - if one knows how to foresee them and paralyze them by means of reforms and adequate political flexibility - they are not to be feared, because the great majority of them will fail.²⁵⁷

In 1982, Lublinskaya's monograph *France under Richelieu. French Absolutism in 1630-1642*, was posthumously published. The work was completed in 1977, and, according to the editor, published without modifications. The book is striking for its openly expressed hostility towards many theoretical conceptions elaborated in Lublinskaya's earlier work. If *French Absolutism: the Crucial Phase*, was a monograph that fitted smoothly into the Marxist framework, Lublinskaya's last book can be

²⁵² H.R. Trevor-Roper, "General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century" in *Crisis in Europe 1560-1660. Essays from Past and Present*, ed. Trevor Aston, 80-84

²⁵³ A.D. Lublinskaya, *French Absolutism: the Crucial Phase, 1620-1629*, 90

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 89

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 99

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 96

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 101

characterized as an eulogy to the much criticized "bourgeois" concept. In addition, this new adherence to notions foreign to Soviet historiography came in large part as a denial of Lublinskaya's own earlier work, as well as that of her late colleague, Porshnev. One of the characteristic traits of this monograph is the constant, fervent criticizing of Porshnev's more than thirty-five-year-old work on peasant uprisings. Lublinskaya's monograph is marked by constant attempts to discredit Porshnev's conclusions and the empirical value of his work.

The general impression that one gets from this book is that Lublinskaya - on almost all the crucial questions regarding the character of French absolutism, its historical function and the causes of popular uprisings - supports Mousnier's points of view. She even forgets her previous statement, made in *French Absolutism: the Crucial Phase*, that there was no Crisis, at least in terms of economic recession in seventeenth-century France, and notes that the recession may or may not have occurred:

Not only once had we to underline that at the beginning of 1630 the economic situation was particularly unfavourable. It is not as important to know whether or not the economic depression had its effects on it, or if it even occurred, as it is to single out very simple factors: several consequent years of harvest failures that were accompanied by several years of epidemics.²⁵⁸

The general concept of the work is that French absolutism, which developed in its main lines in the sixteenth century (Lublinskaya still cannot accept without reservations the Western periodization, that absolutism saw the light in the fifteenth century during the reign of Louis XI) represented economically the interests of a developing bourgeoisie. Lublinskaya bases her analysis of absolutist politics on a detailed overview of State budgets, particularly their revenue components.²⁵⁹

The main revenues of the State were extracted from "la taille" (a direct State tax paid by all of the population, except for the nobility and Church), indirect taxes, "parties casuelles" (revenues from the sale of offices and loans from financiers), and "extraordinary revenues", that is, State loans, creation of new offices, and so on.²⁶⁰ The

²⁵⁸ A.D. Lublinskaya, *Frantsia pri Richelieu. Francuzskii absolutism v 1630-1640*, 211

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 38

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 71

"taille", a traditional tax on land, constituted in most cases the biggest part of the State revenues. By analyzing the nature of this tax, in order to determine whether it was feudal rent or not, Lublinskaya draws conclusions about the social nature of the absolutist state.

As we already know, Porshnev regarded "la taille" as feudal rent that was collected by the State and redistributed among nobles in the form of pensions and donations. For Lublinskaya, this tax is a "direct State tax", so the State for her does not bear a feudal character. It can be concluded that she too, now considered absolutism as a prototype of the modern state:

To what extent can we call "la taille" a centralized feudal rent and not a State tax? It represented in part the traditional annual subsidy of the cities, it was a tax on the purely municipal types of activities (commerce, crafts, manufactories) and not a land rent. But even for the residual, small part of it, the definition of it as a "feudal rent" is hardly appropriate, at least not in the epoch of a centralized state, and particularly not in the epoch of the emergence of capitalism and of absolutist monarchy... In order to characterize a tax as a feudal rent (in this case collected by the State), it is necessary to consider this tax as a part of revenues that a feudally dependent peasant extracted from his allotment... Consequently, "la taille" represented in this epoch a direct State tax that was collected from owners of land in the North, privileged land excluded, and from all landowners, without any exception, in the South.²⁶¹

The difference between Lublinskaya's opinion expressed in this work and her earlier statements is clear. She does not apply the term "feudal-absolutist" state to seventeenth-century France anymore and relates the emergence of absolutism to the emergence of capitalism. Lublinskaya affirms that seventeenth-century society did not bear a feudal character.

Politically, absolutism exercised its power through a new social group, a new bureaucratic nobility, or bureaucratic aristocracy, "la noblesse de robe" or "la noblesse de plume", a notion that is not new in Lublinskaya's work.²⁶²

As opposed to Mousnier's opinion (in this book, this is one of the rare cases when she does not agree with Mousnier), Lublinskaya states that the term "class society" can, nevertheless, be applied to seventeenth-century France:

²⁶¹ Ibid., 46-47

²⁶² Ibid., 58

The position of Prof. Mousnier acquired even greater certainty. He does not think it possible to apply to seventeenth-century society the notions of "classes" and "class struggle." According to him this was a society with a multi-level "vertical", as opposed to "horizontal", class-division hierarchy, in which in the territorial unit, the traditional (but with time more complicated) estates (ordres) coexisted... By eliminating classes completely from seventeenth-century French society and by stating that this society was divided only into estates, every one of which had, or did not have, its judicial rights, Mousnier practically restores the structure of society as it was perceived by seventeenth-century contemporaries, who divided their society into estates according to their functions and privileges.²⁶³

Lublinskaya disagrees with Mousnier's uncritical acceptance of the accounts of contemporaries and elaboration of the historical perception of the epoch on this basis. This critique has its roots in *French Absolutism: the Crucial Phase*.²⁶⁴ She thinks that class struggle was present in seventeenth-century France and found its expression in the numerous uprisings. As opposed to Mousnier's theory, Lublinskaya thinks that peasants and urban workers acted in the uprisings independently from nobles and defended mostly their own livelihood. In agreement with Mousnier, however, she states that the seventeenth-century uprisings had as their main cause the tightening of imposition by the Absolutist State. Malcontent, directed solely against royal taxation, was aggravated by war conditions, as well as by a series of natural disasters. In no way were these uprisings directed against any feudal or seigniorial regime, because, as such, this regime did not represent any considerable power. At this point, Lublinskaya introduces her analysis of the Soviet historiography on the question of popular uprisings in seventeenth-century France. She recognizes the contribution made by Soviet historians to elucidating the question:

They (popular movements) were unfolding in a difficult situation, because French society of the transition from feudalism to capitalism was very specific...Political events, first and foremost the war, left their imprint...Only in the works of the Soviet historians was this theme deeply

²⁶³ Ibid., 207-208

²⁶⁴ G.M. Littlejohn, "An Introduction to Lublinskaya", *Economy and Society*, No. 1 (1972), 62

developed, initiating a lively discussion that has lasted until the present time.²⁶⁵

Speaking of the Soviet historians, Lublinskaya praises first and foremost her teacher, V.V. Birucovitch, to whom her *France at the Beginning of the Seventeenth Century*, was dedicated. Birucovitch wrote an article on the subject of peasant uprisings in 1624-1634,²⁶⁶ that Lublinskaya considers as fundamental to the study of the period. The significance of Porshnev's study, on the contrary, is openly downplayed by Lublinskaya, and some of her statements with regard to the work of her colleague are clearly unfounded:

The treatment of absolutism by B.F. Porshnev (in his work on popular movements) is fully based on his concept of the Fronde as a failed bourgeois revolution. Because the main forces in the first stage of the Fronde were parliaments (in Paris and later in the provinces), the high functionaries were defined as bourgeois, with a number of conditions. In the XVII century the French bourgeoisie, according to Porshnev, strove for privileges, using for the achievement of this goal the means that deprived it of its class character...The concept of B.F. Porshnev is full of contradictions. He completely excludes from his study the real, commercial and industrial, bourgeoisie, on the balancing of which against the nobility is based a certain independence of absolutism. At the same time the "feudal bourgeoisie" forms a union with the nobility, and together they represent the basis of the absolutist monarchy, but this bourgeoisie is able to lead the Fronde as a bourgeois revolution, even if unsuccessful...B.F. Porshnev did not do independent research on the history of nobility and bourgeoisie in the seventeenth century, although some of the works were published already in the last pre-war and first war years. He used mainly the old (beginning with Thierry) concepts of the bourgeois historians, that high functionaries represented a special group of bourgeois: the social origins of this group determined the definition of its class function in sixteenth-seventeenth centuries France....²⁶⁷

Lublinskaya still sustains the Marxist concept of the existence of a transitional phase from feudalism to capitalism, that was politically characterized by absolutism. She also persists in her conviction that functionaries assimilated with the nobility, and not the

²⁶⁵ A.D. Lublinskaya, *Frantsia pri Richelieu. Francuzskii absolutism v 1630-1640*, 122

²⁶⁶ Birucovitch V.V., "Popular movements in France in 1624-1634", *Trudy Voenno-Politicheskoy Akademii Krasnoi Armii*, Vol. IV (Moscow, 1940), 223-279

²⁶⁷ A.D. Lublinskaya, *op.cit.*, 220-221

bourgeoisie. She also implies that Porshnev constructed his analysis of the "reactionary" role of the bourgeoisie on the basis of a confused perception of the social role of the "noblesse de robe."

Yet, as was shown earlier, Porshnev, on the contrary, promulgated the view that all political power in seventeenth-century France was in the hands of the nobility, and that the government functionaries, who happened to be of bourgeois origin, executed the will of the dominant class, the feudal nobility.

After discrediting Porshnev's theoretical elaboration, Lublinskaya takes on the factual material that was made public thirty-five years before the appearance of her work. She criticizes Porshnev's conclusions about the feudal character of absolutism that, according to her, he had erroneously deduced on the basis of analysis of the State expenses.²⁶⁸

It is obvious that Porshnev's theories of the hierarchical structure of budget expenses, based on erroneous calculations, are wrong. He assumes that the first place in the expenses was taken by the maintenance of huge State apparatus (46.1 %, in fact - 30.8 %). The second place in the expenses occupied measures for attracting the bourgeoisie to the side of absolutism (15.4%, in fact not reflected in the budget) The third place was taken by the redistribution among the nobility of the centralized rent (court and pensions 14.6%, in fact 22.2%; but the expenses of the Court could not be ascribed exclusively to the redistributing of feudal rent among the nobility.) Finally, in last place, were the expenses necessary for the defense of national borders, that is, the army and navy (7.7%, in fact 47%).²⁶⁹

By the same token, Lublinskaya criticizes Porshnev's theory that the main function of the State was the suppression of popular movements.²⁷⁰

The concept of the bourgeois character of the Absolutist State, that was always quite explicit behind Lublinskaya's "Marxist" definition, now emerges quite clearly. Lublinskaya even supports the Crisis theory of the "bourgeois" historians that she had criticized earlier on all possible grounds:

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 106-107

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 108

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 116

Never seen before because of its force and durability, the Crisis can be explained by the complex of social and economic processes that affected the life of all groups of French society. But in the aspect that interests us here, it was first and foremost the crisis of the old nobility and the conversion of a part of the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie to Calvinism. Both of these trends were dangerous for absolutism. The nobility constituted an army of feudal aristocracy (Huguenots and Catholics to the same degree.) The Huguenot bourgeoisie of the big ocean ports desired to get by without expensive monarchy and to enrich itself at its own risk, like the Dutch and Flemish bourgeoisie.

Thus, towards the end of the external war and the beginning of the internal war, we can not speak of any balance of classes. All the economic development of the first half of the sixteenth century was accomplished to the profit of one class, the bourgeoisie, and in its field of activities, commerce and industry. The old nobiliar class suffered only losses, which it tried to cover by the old method of aristocratic mutiny.²⁷¹

Although Lublinskaya admits that Porshnev did not continue his study of popular uprisings and did not have recourse to the materials available to her and contemporary historians, in her critique she presents Porshnev's theory as almost purposely misleading.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 236

V

To summarize the discussion of the Seventeenth-Century Crisis presented in this essay, I will define the problems tackled by contemporary historians as follows:

- 1) What type of society are we dealing with in the seventeenth century, feudal or capitalist, and can the Marxist periodization of a transitional phase from feudalism to capitalism apply to it?
- 2) What were the reasons for popular uprisings in the seventeenth century and against whom were they directed? What was the character of the English Revolution?
- 3) Whose interests did the Absolutist monarchy express, or was it a "non-class" governmental structure, the prototype of modern government?
- 4) What was the role of the Thirty Years' War in the Crisis?
- 5) Did the Crisis really occur in the seventeenth century, or is this a largely descriptive term used by contemporary historians who do not think that the term "Le Grand Siècle" is appropriate for defining this period?

To answer the question about the reality of the Seventeenth-Century Crisis resolutely does not seem, in my opinion, possible at the present state of research. Although the notion of the Seventeenth-Century Crisis is quite firmly established in today's historiography, it involves such complex issues as feudal society, absolutism, modernity, universal revolution, industrial revolution, the "transitional" form of society, and so on. The problem of clearly understanding such complex historical categories, let alone their supposed interrelations, lies in their large application. All these notions and categories applied to historical reality can acquire value only as a result of the detailed factual analysis of every issue in each given country and at quite specific periods of time.

There is also quite a difference in opinion about the causes and consequences of the Seventeenth-Century Crisis. As was shown in this essay, the Western Marxist historians E.J. Hobsbawm and Ch. Hill saw in the Crisis the transition from feudalism to capitalism and outlined the differences in economic development, of England in particular, at the beginning and the end of the seventeenth century. However, this

economic theory remained generally unsubstantiated, because of the lack of factual evidence that could be used by historians to support it.

The two Soviet Marxist historians, Porshnev and Lublinskaya, whose opinions on the Crisis initially differed, but who, in the long run, both agreed on the reality of the Crisis, did not, however, touch upon its economic causes. They argued that the Crisis lay in the social and political spheres and was provoked by the Thirty Years' War and related to its strains on the fiscal policies of the Absolutist State. The main disagreement between them remained in defining the character of the Absolutist State. For Porshnev it was feudal, a fact that contributed to the development of a Crisis between this conservative political structure and developing social factors. For Lublinskaya, the absolutist state represented a more or less "non-class", "national" political structure, and the Crisis was caused by a series of political accidents, in which the main place was attributed to the Thirty Years' War.

Western historians who focused mainly on the political and social aspects of the Crisis, Mousnier and Trevor-Roper, did not think of the Thirty Years' War as a factor of considerable importance in the occurrence of the Crisis. For Mousnier, the Crisis consisted in the political struggle of the upper estates of the French political pyramid, the "noblesse d'épée" and the "noblesse de robe," that resulted in the victory of neither and in the establishment of an autocratic monarchy under Louis XIV. It was still a Crisis in the ecological, economic, and intellectual spheres:

the use of the word 'crisis' for the seventeenth century would be less justified if we considered only its political and social aspects. A great crisis of ideas and feeling, a revolution in the manner of thinking and of understanding the Universe, almost an intellectual mutation took place at that time in Europe. It marks the end of Aristotelianism, the triumph of quantitative rationalism....²⁷²

For Trevor-Roper, the Crisis expressed itself in the malcontent of Society with wasteful politics of the State and found its resolution either in violent revolutions, such as

²⁷² R. Mousnier, "Trevor-Roper's General Crisis': Symposium", *Crisis in Europe 1560-1660, Essays from Past and Present*, ed. Trevor Aston, 103,104

the English Revolution, or in more-or-less peaceful "mercantilist" State reforms of the French type.

Niels Steensgaard summarises the discussion which, by the time he wrote his article "The Seventeenth-century Crisis,"²⁷³ was almost thirty years old, by asserting that while the existence of the Crisis is a recognized fact, the only thing about which the historians cannot agree is precisely its causes:

This is undoubtedly correct: the crisis has been an undisputed fact among those historians who are occupied with early modern Europe; it has become the hallmark of the seventeenth century in the same way as the Renaissance and the Reformation characterize the sixteenth century. But agreement does not lie very deep; historians are agreed about the existence of the crisis, but not about its character. Since it first became recognized in the middle of the 1950s, the term 'seventeenth-century crisis' has been employed in at least four different senses.²⁷⁴

As was mentioned before, almost all of the historians who agreed on the existence of the Crisis considered as a key necessity, the study of the role of nascent absolutist states. Steensgaard too, argues that the emergence of absolutist states in seventeenth-century Europe is crucial to the Crisis.²⁷⁵ For some historians, Trevor-Roper among them, the establishment of absolutism was the cause of the Crisis; for some, like E.J. Hobsbawm, absolutism was a tool for overcoming it. For others, like Porshnev, absolutism was a new variation of an old feudal form of exploitation. But everyone agreed that the question of the character and role of absolutism in the seventeenth century was one of utmost importance.

J. H. Elliott, considering Spain under Olivares, also attached a great importance to the establishment of the Absolutist State in Spain.²⁷⁶ For him, the war expenses of Spain pushed this country, led by an absolutist court, towards an economic catastrophe. There were two reasons for the economic disaster that Spain suffered in the seventeenth century

²⁷³ Niels Steensgaard, "The Seventeenth-century Crisis" in *The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century*, eds. Geoffrey Parker and Leslie M. Smith (London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 26-56

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 26

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 48

²⁷⁶ J.H. Elliott, "Trevor-Roper's 'General Crisis' Symposium" in *Crisis in Europe (1560-1660)*, ed. Trevor Aston, 104-110

and from which it never completely recovered: primarily, the fact that an abnormally large part of the State budget, paid for with tax income, was “devoted to military and naval expenditure,”²⁷⁷ and secondly, that not enough money was invested in the productive sectors of the economy, because it was more profitable to invest in State rents, offices, and loans:

In fact, we are driven back again to the appallingly expensive foreign policy of the sixteenth-century rulers of Spain – a foreign policy which led to heavy taxes falling on the most productive members of the community, and to the creation of a vast national debt, in which it was easy and profitable to invest.²⁷⁸

Lublinskaya, in her analysis of the French economy during absolutism, came to similar conclusions about the character of seventeenth-century French economic activities.²⁷⁹ It can be added, that this form of initial accumulation of capital (through State rents, venality, and loans) singled out by Elliott, was particular to the countries of developed absolutism, such as France, Spain, and Russia, where loans to the State and State-regulated commerce became more profitable than capital investment in industry. Whether or not this economic activity expressed a still-feudal or a nascent capitalist character remains to be clarified. Wallerstein's critical view of the Marxist concept of the Absolutist State as corresponding to the period of transition from feudalism to capitalism²⁸⁰ explains why so much confusion surrounded this question in Marxist historiography.

The question of causation of the Crisis remains in dispute. Indeed, unlike other historians, who concentrated their attention on the question of absolutism's role in the economic, political, and social life of society, Geoffrey Parker and Lesley M. Smith, in their introduction to *The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century*, put forward a quite original theory of the demographic and economic crisis. For them, it was a phenomenon caused by weakened solar activity:

First, the detailed drawings of the early astronomers – some of them daily compilations – reveal the sun rotating in a significantly different way in

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 106

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 107

²⁷⁹ See pp.72, 75

²⁸⁰ See p.10

the mid- seventeenth century. Second, measurements of the radioactive isotope of carbon, carbon-14, deposited in past centuries reveals a notable aberration between 1650 and 1750 : there was an enormous increase in ¹⁴C deposits, indicating an abundance of carbon in the earth's atmosphere, a circumstance normally associated with a reduction in solar energy.²⁸¹

In Parker and Smith's terms this demographic, and consequent economic, collapse was a "truly 'general crisis'" for the whole of Europe, and even Asia. But, the political upheavals that accompanied this economic hardship were not at all related to ongoing demographic and economic changes. In their view, the old question of absolutism and its policies resurfaces. The European States of the seventeenth century were directed towards changing the political status quo existing in Europe. And these short-sighted and greedy expansionist politics caused social unrest:

The same is true of all the major political crises of western Europe in these years: the Fronde, the revolts of Portugal, Catalonia and the British Isles, the confrontations in Holland and Sweden. In each of them, the cause is to be sought not in the social structure and economic situation of the populations at large, but in the innovative policies of their governments, especially in the fields of finance and religion...At the back of all the major revolts of our period lay a consciousness that governments were trying to change the status quo.²⁸²

But all these upheavals were separate, and only accidentally simultaneous, revolts that had no real inter-relatedness.

There was no way in which a 'revolutionary spirit' could connect the revolts in England, France, Austria, Naples, Moscovy and the Ukraine, except that the extreme events in one area made those elsewhere seem more serious.²⁸³

In brief, there was no social or political Crisis in Europe, according to these authors. And they are not alone in their denial of linkages between quite different events. Strong objections to the Crisis theory were also heard from the field of economic history.

²⁸¹ Geoffrey Parker and Leslie M. Smith, "Introduction" in *The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century*, 7

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 14,15

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 20

Ivo Schöffer presents a few objections to the Crisis theory.²⁸⁴ The first objection is that the sixteenth century cannot be defined unreservedly as a phase of economic expansion, while the seventeenth century cannot, following Simiand, be boldly characterized as an age of economic depression. There existed, according to Schöffer, a very fragile balance between areas of economic development and contraction, as well as between prosperity and misery, in the seventeenth, just as in the sixteenth, century.²⁸⁵

In addition, the example of Holland, which prospered up until the end of the seventeenth century, shows that the Crisis was not as general as its adherents presented it. There existed, as always, economic fluctuations that favored economic development in some countries to the detriment of others. Generally speaking, the seventeenth century was, according to Schöffer, a period of rather stable economy:

Within a process of general stabilization there was a shifting of gravity which brought new countries new profits.²⁸⁶

In political life, all the struggle and unrest is seen by Schöffer as a quite normal trend that was manifest during the whole period of pre-modern and early-modern history, and which was on the decline in the seventeenth century:

I do not deny that great suffering was caused by all these shifts and strife, and if that has to be called 'crisis' I have no objection, but it is then rather the permanent crisis of the *ancien regime* that is seen slightly to diminish precisely during the seventeenth century.²⁸⁷

Carlo Cipolla, in the introduction to the *Fontana Economic History of Europe*,²⁸⁸ also raises doubts as to the existence of a General Crisis. For him, any crisis in any country is compensated for, and partly caused by, a "golden age" in another one:

If the sixteenth century is to be considered as a period of general well-being and the seventeenth century as a century of constant crises, this

²⁸⁴ Ivo Schöffer, "Did Holland's Golden Age Coincide with a Period of Crisis" in *The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century*, eds. Geoffrey Parker and Leslie M. Smith, 83-109

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 92

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 98

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 105

²⁸⁸ Carlo M. Cipolla, "Introduction" in *The Fontana Economic History of Europe, The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, Vol. 2 (Sussex: Harvester Press/Barnes & Noble, 1977)

makes it the harder to perceive and to understand one of the chief facts in the history of Europe during the two centuries in question. The disasters suffered by the Southern Low Countries were the launching pad for the golden age of the Northern. The fact that the seventeenth century was a century of crises in Spain and Italy but a period of expansion in the Northern Low Countries and for England, brought about the decay of the whole Mediterranean world and moved the economic centre of gravity from the Mediterranean to the North Sea.²⁸⁹

The Soviet historian Alexandra Lublinskaya offered a well-founded critique of the "General Crisis" theory in her monograph *French Absolutism: the Crucial Phase, 1620-1629*, but as was established in this paper, her position was not consistent. In her last monograph, *France under Richelieu*, she refers to the Crisis as an accepted category for describing the seventeenth-century French reality. In this respect, as I have attempted to show, Lublinskaya's position was strongly influenced by Mousnier. As Lublinskaya affirms, Soviet historians were very well aware of the work of their Western colleagues, and expected the same to be true with respect to their work.²⁹⁰ It is clear that scholarly and personal means for such communication between historians were highly developed in the period after the Second World War:

It was also shown in this thesis that the interaction between the Western and Soviet Schools went both ways. Mousnier's *Fureurs paysannes*, a monograph dealing with the "General Crisis" (which, he argued, expressed itself in "simultaneous" revolutions all over the world) was written as a response to Porshnev's *Les soulèvements populaires*. Both Porshnev and Mousnier dealt extensively with the question of absolutism and its policies. Although, as opposed to Mousnier or the later Lublinskaya, Porshnev does not consider absolutism a "non-class" form of government, he also approaches the question of its national, as well as social, policies. It can not be said that Porshnev accepted the view, promoted by Mousnier, Elliott, Steensgaard and others, that the national policies of absolutism, directed to the creation of national states and fulfilling the interests of a nation as a whole, were characteristic of the Modern Age. Porshnev had put together all the links of his theory of the Absolutist State as a defender of the feudal

²⁸⁹ C. Cipolla, op.cit., 12-13

²⁹⁰ A.D. Lublinskaya, *French Absolutism: the Crucial Phase*, 85

regime in his final works, *Moscovy and Sweden in the Thirty Years' War, 1630-1635* and *France, the English Revolution and European Politics at the Middle of the Seventeenth Century*. For Porshnev, absolutism remained feudal, a fact expressed in a number of inter-related dynamics: French absolutism's repressive politics against the popular movements caused by feudal oppression; the admission of the bourgeoisie into the administrative apparatus in order to insure its support in the suppression of popular movements; the Absolutist State playing the role of an arbitrator between the individual interests of the nobles, and its external politics that favoured the interests of the nobles as a class. All these factors spoke, for Porshnev, to his conviction that absolutism was a final form of the feudal state. Yet, somehow, this state was also characteristic of the Modern Age. This confusion might have been caused by an evident, if paradoxical, fact that even though Soviet "Marxists" Porshnev and Lublinskaya studied seventeenth-century French history from the standpoint of historical materialism, they did not preoccupy themselves very much with research in economic history.

Yet, it seems that, at least in part, the existence and nature of the Seventeenth-Century Crisis comes down to the purely economic question of the character of the production relationships (as formulated in Marx's works) that underlay the economic life of European countries. Of course, the economic issues should not overshadow political or social problems, but all of these aspects should be considered in close interrelation. This approach to the Seventeenth-Century Crisis was defined in the course of the First International Colloquium on *Failed Transitions to Modern Industrial Society: Renaissance Italy and Seventeenth Century Holland*, held in Montreal in 1974:

A first set of polarities concerns the nature of transition itself. One approach tends to view transition as essentially an economic process: driven by economic mechanisms and forces...The other, more "total" approach, while not neglecting economics, stresses socio-political and cultural dimensions as well, to make the point that what is at issue is the transition of an entire society, with state policy, political conflicts, and changing class relationships as an integral part of the process.²⁹¹

²⁹¹ Frederick Krantz & Paul M. Hohenberg, "Introduction" in *Failed Transitions to Modern Industrial Society: Renaissance Italy and Seventeenth Century Holland*, eds. Frederick Krantz & Paul M. Hohenberg (Montréal: Interuniversity Centre, 1975), 2

I support this point of view, that in order to justify the existence of the Seventeenth-Century Crisis, the phenomenon has to be analyzed in its entirety. Not only must the interrelations of economic, social, political, and intellectual processes, that were unfolding in seventeenth-century Europe, be established, but it must also be shown with clarity that all these complex factors constituted parts of a coherent historical development.

In so far as the present discussion goes, the only firmly established fact is that there was a political and social crisis affecting seventeenth-century absolutist states. This crisis expressed itself in social unrest, caused mainly by over-taxation, and in a disastrous external situation, embodied in the first all-European conflict, the Thirty Years' War. Here the Soviet historians, Porshnev and Lublinskaya, made an important contribution to elaborating the concept.

However, general political and social crises cannot yet be firmly considered as part of an outbreak of General Crisis affecting the whole of European society. It has to be proven that the underlying causes of seventeenth-century political and social troubles were inherent in the very functioning of the society, and that they provoked its breakdown, not the accidental consequences of regional political decisions.

The main difficulty in establishing the empirical reality of such a structural breakdown of the "old" system, or the "ancien régime", lay in the lack of substantial factual evidence pertaining to the economic aspects of seventeenth-century life. And with this important link missing, it seems to me impossible to attain any far-reaching certainty about the nature of this epoch.

In the end, I accept the notion of the Seventeenth-Century Crisis as useful in terms of providing a general framework against which further historical studies of this period can be compared. But insofar as historical categories go, the "Seventeenth-Century Crisis" remains, in my view, a largely descriptive term that cannot be applied unreservedly in the historical analysis of seventeenth-century reality.

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