

From the Editors

What's in a Name?

Some years ago, Isabel de Madariaga made the argument that in 18th-century Russian usage the term *samoderzhets* -- autocrat -- was used as the precise counterpart to the French *souverain*. Contrary to received wisdom, it did not connote a specifically Russian notion of despotism, she concluded, but confirmed that Russia was part of the European mainstream.

Language matters. It requires no elaboration that entire ideologies are bound up with how we spell Kyiv/Kiev or Vilna/Vilnius. But area studies also encourage us to "go native" linguistically in other ways, whether by using italicized foreign words for allegedly untranslatable concepts (such as *narod*) or by creating neologisms that few outside our professional community would recognize -- such as writing "the organs" when we are talking not about body parts but about the Soviet secret police.

Laziness aside, we seem to do this for two reasons, one scholarly, the other literary. The scholarly reason is that some expressions are indeed technical terms without English counterparts (e.g., *zemstvo*), while others have shades of meaning not easily captured by a single English word (say, *chinovnik*); however, dealing with such challenges is what translation is all about. The literary reason is that we want to preserve the atmosphere of the original, its otherness, as in those movies where the foreign characters speak to each other in accented English. Thus, we write "tsar" even when "emperor" would be more accurate, we sometimes use "GULag" (Main Administration of the Camps) to mean "prison camp," and by adopting the regime euphemisms "organs" and "purges," we try to evoke the horrifyingly surreal atmosphere of the 1930s. With this approach we also sidestep emotionally exhausting debates about terminology (Holocaust? Shoah? Judaeocide?) by using vocabulary seemingly created by history itself, thereby allowing us to focus more on the substance of our debates.

That is all as it should be. The trouble, however, is that even so we continually have to translate, translation requires interpretation, and *not* translating is also a form of interpretation. We all know and teach that Peter I temporarily shared the throne with his half-brother Ivan. But why call them "Peter and Ivan," not "Pëtr and Ivan" or "Peter and John"? Because the Russian regime's ideologists later suggested, and Westerners agreed, that Ivan had belonged to that alien, Muscovite Russia, while his half-brother was already a European, one of "us." Using the original Russian name stresses "otherness," while the translated form conveys familiarity. Both styles have their virtues, but thus juxtaposing them is an interpretive statement that we should make only if we mean it. That the issue of vocabulary and interpretation is equally urgent for more recent periods is apparent from the continued use (even if in quotation marks) of "deviationists," "kulaks," "bourgeois specialists," and so forth.

The consequences of using our subjects' language extend to broader questions of historical interpretation. Two essays in this issue ask why the Soviets did so little to disrupt the Holocaust. They focus on the leadership's military and political considerations, but readers may also wonder how *the Soviets* -- in other words, the disciples of Marx, the regime of Bukharin and Khrushchev and Gorbachev -- could have remained indifferent to so ghastly a crime. But pose the question

differently -- "Why didn't *the Stalinists* feel for the victims of a murderous police state?" -- and it answers itself; after all, no one wonders how the Nazis could sleep at night despite knowing about Stalinist atrocities.

The comparison with Germany is instructive in other ways as well. The histories of the German Right and the Russian/Soviet Left run remarkably parallel: common pan-European ideological roots in the revolutionary era after 1789; emergence as protest movements during the modernization crisis of the 1880s and the 1890s, followed by attempts to integrate them into semi-constitutional monarchical polities; wartime radicalization and mass mobilization, followed by a first seizure of power in 1916-17 (by Ludendorff and the Bolsheviks); a temporary "retreat" and abortive liberal interlude until the mid-1920s; and then, renewed radicalization leading to a dictatorship by the most violent hardliners, with uneven support from moderate elements. Even the outcome of World War II ultimately affected only the timing of the two movements' liberal *perestroika* -- hastening it in Germany, perhaps delaying it in Russia -- but the general trend line still points in the same direction.

Despite these similarities, we generally conceptualize the two cases differently, treating 1917-91 in Russian history as a more or less unified period while breaking up German history into distinct eras. There are good, substantive reasons for this; besides, we do pay attention to the ruptures and continuities in both. Yet it matters that the umbrella term "Soviet" (or "communist") embraces everyone from Lenin to Gorbachev, while no similarly convenient political label unites Hitler with Ludendorff and Adenauer. This is ultimately a legacy of the historical actors' own self-representation: while the Russian/Soviet Left stressed its continuity over time, the German Right did not. What this means for us, however, is that every time we speak (for example) of the war between "Soviet" Russia and "Nazi" Germany, our very choice of adjectives lends credence to the protagonists' self-representation, whether we intend it or not.

The celebrated "linguistic turn" has reminded us that words can be self-realizing, and anyway people have long known that *nomen est omen*. Thus the distinction between "Peter" and "Ivan" reflects a genuine break in historical continuity; how the "totalitarian" legacy was handled differed substantively, not just rhetorically, in 1950s Bonn and Moscow; and, to return to our initial example, *samoderzhets* by 1900 clearly did not mean to Nicholas II what "sovereign" meant to his West European relatives. We therefore ignore the historical actors' language at our peril. The same imaginative universe of the past that created that language, however, also engendered the clichés about Russia and Eurasia that we usually decry. If we make that language our own, we run the risk of perpetuating those same clichés in the minds of our students, colleagues, and readers.