



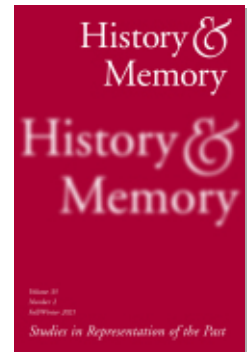
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in Russia

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The Antirevolutionary Commemoration

The Centenary of 1917 in Russia

MATTHEW RENDLE AND ANNA LIVELY

The Russian state's commemoration of the centenary of the Russian Revolution was not marked by any national events and there were few official pronouncements. Yet this article argues that the Kremlin did not simply avoid the centenary but drew several important "lessons" from 1917, from the violence and tragedy of revolution to the importance of unity for future prosperity. While these "lessons" did not constitute a single official line, they did provide an overall framing for debates on the centenary and were echoed to varying degrees in conferences, newspapers, exhibitions, television and online projects at national and regional levels.

Keywords: Russia; revolution; 1917; memory; history; centenary; Vladimir Putin

Since taking power in 2000, Vladimir Putin has attempted to transform Russia, aiming to consign the political frailty, economic instability, social turmoil and loss of cultural identity evident through the 1990s to the "dustbin of history," to paraphrase Trotsky, in favor of rebuilding a strong state, establishing social order, reasserting Russia's international interests against "Western" interference and creating a shared, patriotic identity.¹ These ambitions have faced challenges, not least from "color" revolutions in neighboring former Soviet states since 2003, political protests within Russia, most obviously in 2011–12, and the reemergence of revolution in Ukraine in 2014 and the subsequent conflict over Crimea. These events and others have prompted various "preventive counterrevolutionary" policies and reinforced an increasingly authoritarian, patriotic and anti-Western agenda.²

An integral part of these broader changes has been a parallel transformation in how Russia's history is understood and utilized. Through speeches, committees, memory laws, commemorative events, educational programs and other such methods, Putin's Kremlin has sought to forge a "usable" past that will reinforce its political objectives.³ By emphasizing continuity across Russia's "thousand-year history" and through stressing certain elements, whether the role of strong leaders and states in the past or particular military victories, this version of the past reinforces the Kremlin's political agenda of pursuing a politics of pride. In this view, Russia's history, properly narrated, should provide positive reasons to be patriotic and should serve alongside current actions (in Syria, Ukraine or elsewhere) to restore a sense of nation and meaning to people's lives amid the widespread feeling that Russia had lost its way after the collapse of the Soviet Union.⁴ Nowhere is this more evident than in the "historical parks" entitled "Russia, My History" that have emerged in various Russian cities in recent years, championing a statist, anti-Western, overly positive and often factually inaccurate interpretation of Russia's history.⁵

Some historical events, such as the Great Patriotic War (1941–45), are easy to fit into a usable narrative, with the belief that Russia triumphed against the odds uniting otherwise disparate elements of society. As a consequence, the Soviet-era adulation of the war has been expanded further under Putin.⁶ Other events, however, are more problematic, such as World War I and the terror of the 1930s.⁷ The Russian Revolution also fits into this category as it sits uneasily within the metanarrative of Russian history above. A revolution featuring a collapse in state authority and a violent civil war is hardly congenial to a message of continuity and stability, particularly given that Russian society is divided over the history of 1917.⁸ Indeed, the entire concept of revolution is problematic for the Kremlin. After the "color" revolutions, the Arab Spring and the "Maidan" revolution in Ukraine, Putin has portrayed revolution as the result of outside (usually "Western") interference rather than popular discontent, promoting chaos and instability over order and evolution.⁹

Public unity on 1917 broke down in the 1990s and commemorating the October Revolution became an opportunity to express nostalgia for the Soviet past, to mourn the victims or simply enjoy a public holiday. After 2000, Putin's Kremlin considered 1917 through, to quote Genadii Bordiugov, a "project of anti-memory" and encouraged a sense of

public “forgetting,” moving the public holiday forward to November 4 to celebrate the “expulsion” of the Poles from Moscow in 1612 and, more recently, commemorating the march of soldiers from Red Square to fight in 1941 on the original holiday on November 7.¹⁰ While the revolution could never be truly “forgotten,” some Russian commentators suggested it had “disappeared from historical memory” amidst official silence.¹¹

Yet as the centenary approached, was it possible for the Kremlin to ignore the revolution? Looking ahead in 2014, Putin admitted it was not: 1917 was of “great national significance,” and it required “deep, professional, comprehensive assessment” regardless of whether it was seen as the “Great October Socialist Revolution” or “the October coup.”¹² A year earlier, state-sponsored plans for a new outline of Russian history for schools already indicated a shift in approach; while still describing the revolutionary period as one of “great upheaval,” they talked about 1917 in terms of the “Great Russian Revolution.”¹³ One of those involved, A. O. Chubar’ian, director of the Institute of World History at the Russian Academy of Sciences, admitted that the authors sought to find “consensus” between all sides through stressing the significance of the revolution—good or bad—and confirming that 1917 was as important globally as the “Great” French Revolution.¹⁴ But could this reconfiguration of 1917 come together into a coherent and usable narrative? At the very least, it seemed increasingly important that the Kremlin clarified its views amid claims that Putin’s opponents hoped to use the memory of 1917 to spark renewed social unrest. It also needed to prevent the verbal and physical conflicts over memories of the revolution that had occurred in some localities from emerging onto the national stage.¹⁵

Now that the centenary has passed, it is possible to assess the Kremlin’s efforts. Generally, commentators have been unimpressed. Numerous articles, editorials and blogs concur that preparations for the centenary were started late, with no national commemorative events and few official pronouncements—the Kremlin was accused of “smothering,” “obscuring,” “fudging” or “forgetting” 1917.¹⁶ On the surface, it seems the Kremlin failed, perhaps predictably given the problems outlined above, to forge a unifying message and fit 1917 into a usable past. Yet most commentators did notice that what was said about the revolution consistently reduced its complexities to several important “lessons” (*uroki*)—from the violence and tragedy of revolution to the importance of reconciliation and unity

for Russia's prosperity. There seems to be an assumption, therefore, that a patriotic and unifying message must be conveyed through "traditional" positive commemorative practices, such as the annual marches, events and holidays surrounding the Great Patriotic War and "Victory Day" every May.

This article instead analyzes a broader range of commemorative activities in Russia in 2017 than most other commentaries, from state-funded activities and major exhibitions to unofficial press discussions and online projects, to argue that the Kremlin—persistently but often indirectly—promoted an overarching framework for understanding 1917 during 2017. This framework was not positive since revolution equals turmoil and tragedy, but in this sense the Kremlin accepted 1917 as a "negative event" that resulted in loss, failure and contested memories, and sought to identify unifying elements.¹⁷ The more revolution is remembered as something abnormal and divisive, the more normative behavior lies in social cohesion. Commemorating revolution became, in essence, a counterrevolutionary tool. The ability of this approach to create a synergy between the Kremlin's framework and popular sentiments, whether the desire to commemorate the victims of revolution or fears that further unrest would cause economic instability, increased the effectiveness of these "lessons" and strengthened the wider "antirevolutionary consensus" across Russian society that has been evident in recent years.¹⁸ Discourse surrounding the "lessons" of the revolution is nothing new and it has been used since 1917 to promote a range of political agendas, both in Russia and elsewhere, yet the Kremlin's adoption of the language of "lessons" became much more explicit during 2017. In this sense, the centenary was an opportunity as well as a threat: the revolution could, in James Richter's words, be "tamed," and its memory made harmless, by avoiding potentially contentious public commemorations and instead focusing on those "lessons" that fitted within the Kremlin's broader metanarrative for Russia's history.¹⁹

Of course, the "Kremlin" is not a unified entity. Those who dismiss any sense of an "official" line on the centenary tend to focus on Putin himself, who did remain relatively silent throughout the year. But understanding the "Kremlin" more broadly to include his advisors, ministers and others in official positions reveals a much more proactive approach to the centenary. To be sure, there were differences of opinion and emphasis, and there was no single "official" line, but there were repeated "signals" from these individuals that together constituted a mutually agreeable framework.²⁰

Through state-sponsored and funded institutions, publications, exhibitions and projects, speeches by prominent politicians and coverage in the national media, the Kremlin promoted an antirevolutionary framing of the revolution. And through the center's dispensation of political patronage and state funding and its formal control over many forms of media, along with informal compliance and self-censorship, this framework was reiterated across Russia by local politicians and in local media. This steering from above did not prevent considerable local initiative and agency in interpreting the centenary, and there was greater diversity of opinion on social media and in independent publications. Yet there appeared to be few public disagreements over the Kremlin's core "lessons" on the dangers of instability. These lessons may have been broad, but this meant that they proved sufficiently flexible to establish a degree of unity around the main interpretations of 1917. More generally, the Kremlin's approach highlights the importance of negative commemoration, whereby politically problematic events of the past can be recast by states as lessons or warnings for the future.

ESTABLISHING THE "LESSONS" OF 1917

The first sign of the Kremlin's framework emerged in the proposals for schools, mentioned above, which were led by Sergei Naryshkin, then chair of the State Duma and the Russian Historical Society, a patriotic, state-funded organ established in 2012.²¹ This framework was consolidated during a conference held in the Museum of Contemporary History in Moscow in May 2015. Entitled "100 Years of the Great Russian Revolution: Understanding in the Name of Consolidation," it involved the Minister of Culture, Vladimir Medinskii, as well as Naryshkin and others from the society.²² In his keynote speech, Medinskii admitted it was impossible to ignore the global significance of 1917 and described the "tragic schism of society" into opposing sides where no one was right or wrong—both sides acted patriotically for their country as they saw it. The "lessons" of history are to understand the causes and consequences of such conflicts. The centenary, he argued, provided an opportunity for working out a united position on the revolution. He outlined five "theses" to aid national reconciliation: recognizing continuity from the Russian Empire through

the USSR to the present;²³ awareness of the tragedy of social divisions caused by the revolution and civil war; respect for heroes on both sides who defended their ideals and were not guilty of mass repression and war crimes; condemnation of terror as a political tool; and awareness of the folly of relying on foreign “allies” to help with internal struggles.²⁴ He proposed building a new memorial to reconciliation in Crimea as a “visible and powerful symbol” at the place where the civil war was officially concluded (and significant since 2014 as a symbol of Russia’s current strength).²⁵ The subsequent speeches at the conference by professional historians tended to be less polemical and more focused on academic debates surrounding 1917, but none of these carefully selected figures disagreed openly with Medinskii.

The conference offered a way to navigate through the available options. While 1917 was a tragedy—a “negative event”—and could not be celebrated like the Great Patriotic War, it remained a “great” revolution and a major contribution to world history, which could fit into the Kremlin’s new “usable” past if it served to inspire national reconciliation and unity. Putin reinforced this key message in his annual address to the Federal Assembly on December 1, 2016. He acknowledged the imminent centenary and suggested that knowledge of the suffering experienced during the revolution would serve as “history’s lesson” for the importance of reconciliation, “strengthening the social, political and civil concord” achieved subsequently. He condemned dragging anger into the present, noting that all families had suffered tragedies irrespective of which side their ancestors had taken, and reminded listeners that “we [Russians] are a single people, a united people, and we have only one Russia.”²⁶

This narrative tapped into a broader “antirevolutionary consensus” in Russia that cuts across many of Putin’s supporters and opponents. Interviews conducted in 2014–15 revealed popular belief that, first, the pre-1914 period was a period of stability, security and economic growth when Russia was on a path to “normality,” and, second, the October Revolution (and to a lesser extent February) was a disastrous “rupture” in this path caused by a lack of strong leadership and traitorous revolutionaries from abroad. This reinforced an emotional sense of victimhood and desire for stability.²⁷ At the very least, this narrative marked a suitably tactful approach for Putin and for the Kremlin. Although popular knowledge of the revolution has been decreasing steadily, especially among the young,

opinion polls agree that people remain divided on whether the outcomes of 1917 were positive or not.²⁸ There was, therefore, a good chance that the majority of Russians could agree with a narrative that portrayed 1917 as both significant and tragic, even if particular groups disagreed over how to interpret specific elements.

As 2017 approached, what remained unclear was exactly *how* these “lessons” would be conveyed during the centennial year itself. It was only on December 19, 2016, that Putin established an organizing committee to oversee commemorations for the centenary under the auspices of the Russian Historical Society.²⁹ As one scholar noted perceptively, this short, seemingly bland decree reflected at least two important choices.³⁰ First, the decree devolved responsibility for the commemorations from the government to this committee (with the state retaining a role as a financier and facilitator). Putin had chaired a similar committee for the seventieth anniversary of the victory in the Great Patriotic War in 2015, so this reflected the lesser prominence of 1917 and the Kremlin’s desire to retain distance from the revolution. Second, following the narrative discussed above, the February and October Revolutions were merged into one revolution, which also served as a preemptive strike against those who might wish to ascribe different values to each revolution—liberalism and socialism respectively—and see one as more desirable than the other. The decree omitted the adjective “great” when talking about the revolution, but this was less a condemnation of its use and more the authorities erring on the side of caution by adopting neutral terminology.

Leading figures in the society met on December 27 and decided to invite scientific, cultural and public figures to serve on the committee. The chair of the society, Naryshkin, by then promoted to director of the Foreign Intelligence Service, unsurprisingly endorsed the Kremlin’s framework. Medinskii, who was present, promised the Ministry of Culture’s support, whilst the Kremlin’s representative, Pavel Zen’kovich, head of the Department of Public Projects, also pledged support with the caveat that the Kremlin saw this as a “historical” event that should not be “politicized.”³¹ All commemorations are political, of course, but this demand again reflected the Kremlin’s careful approach to 1917.

The committee ended up consisting of at least sixty-three individuals with a range of political views, including state officials with responsibilities for cultural and educational activities, leading cultural figures (direc-

tors of museums, libraries, archives and educational bodies), numerous media figures, some professional historians, and representatives from the Orthodox Church.³² It held its first meeting on January 23, 2017, only a month before the centenary of the February Revolution. This meeting produced an impressive list of 118 “events,” including exhibitions; publishing and educational projects; conferences, roundtables and research projects across Russia; memorial events; multimedia, television and cinema projects; events outside of Russia; and events organized by the regional branches of the Society. An additional list of twenty-eight regional events was also published.³³

Given the late formation of the committee, most events had already been organized by other bodies, often museums and archives, and were now given a seal of approval. Nevertheless, this remains an extensive list, particularly given that newspapers and other sources reveal that many more exhibitions occurred than were listed (particularly across Russia’s regions). Notable in their absence, however, were any kind of “national” or “official” commemorative events. This has been seen as the Kremlin “outsourcing” the commemorations to avoid taking a direct stance on 1917, or as the Kremlin “taming” the revolution by pushing it out of the public sphere into less contested spaces like conferences or museums.³⁴ However, this could also be seen not as simply evasion but as part of a deliberate strategy by the Kremlin to use fewer “traditional,” state-organized forms of commemoration to disseminate the “lessons” of 1917. The closest commitment to such an event in this first meeting came when Iurii Petrov, director of the Institute of History at the Academy of Sciences, restated support for Medinskii’s plan for a memorial in the Crimea, declaring it would be one of the most significant symbols of the centenary, particularly as it was scheduled to be unveiled on November 4, 2017—the Day of National Unity.³⁵

This first meeting provided a strong reiteration of the Kremlin’s framework.³⁶ The tone was set by Naryshkin’s opening speech stressing the “colossal price of revolution and the value of stability.” Subsequent speakers referred regularly to the “Great Russian Revolution” as they discussed an uneasy mix of historical and political priorities. Some raised research questions; others talked explicitly of the “lessons” of 1917; others still warned that the revolution could be used by Russia’s enemies as a weapon and echoed Putin’s call for internal reconciliation and unity. Taken

together, the committee was clear, and in agreement with the conference in 2015, that the portrayal of 1917 should have a purpose. When asked later to summarize this, Chubar'ian, also deputy chairman of the society, responded bluntly that the lesson was “simple”: revolution was not the best means of resolving social conflict as it leads only to violence and death.³⁷

FRAMING THE REVOLUTION

The first opportunity to put the Kremlin's framing of 1917 into practice came with the centenary of the February Revolution. The organizing committee sponsored a “day of memory” on February 18 organized by the Orthodox Church, whose title “In Memory of the Victims. February. Tragedy. 1917” and location in the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow (built to commemorate the military glory of the tsars, destroyed by Stalin and rebuilt under Yeltsin) were clearly symbolic. The day started with a conference, followed by the opening of an exhibition commemorating believers who perished during the revolutionary period. The star speaker was Medinskii again, joined by attendees from various domestic and foreign organizations, including prominent representatives from the tsarist nobility and the Church—clear nods to the spirit of reconciliation.³⁸

The role played by the Church was a notable feature of February's commemorations. As well as the conference, Patriarch Kirill prayed for the victims on the anniversary of Nicholas's abdication, talked of an “internal war” and blamed the intelligentsia for the revolution, arguing that political upheaval was fostered by elites who failed to consider the concerns of ordinary Russians. There was too much conflict and blood, and Russia needed unity.³⁹ The Church—with some justification given its fate after 1917—views all revolutions negatively; in recent years a consistent narrative has emerged in Church circles that blames the February Revolution on Western liberal (and secular) ideas, sees the October Revolution as its inevitable consequence, and preaches against revolution.⁴⁰ Although more anti-Soviet and pro-monarchist than the Kremlin, these differences rarely lead to any serious divisions. Indeed, there was considerable collaboration between the Church, the authorities and other organizations in local commemorations of the centenary.⁴¹

Medinskii's speech, as intended, was widely publicized in the media and served in lieu of an official statement by the Kremlin. While Putin never endorsed Medinskii's views explicitly, the use of similar language and tropes in his own speeches suggests his views are close to Medinskii's, even if he is more likely to stress the positives of the Soviet experience. Putin managed to pass through 2017 without attending any events directly related to the centenary and without saying more on 1917 than he had done previously. Beyond a few asides in speeches and interviews, his most direct references came during other commemorative events. On May 4, Putin unveiled a monument to Grand Duke Sergei near the Kremlin, continuing the rehabilitation of imperial figures that has been underway since 1991, and on May 25 he spoke at the consecration of a new cathedral at the Sretenskii monastery in Moscow. At both, he condemned violence and argued that people must learn the "lessons" of revolution—civic peace was fragile and the scars of divisions were hard to heal. Patriotism and unity were paramount.⁴²

The Kremlin's narrative on the centenary did not focus on any single commemorative event but was disseminated through numerous conferences, interviews and publications throughout 2017. Prominent members of the organizing committee, usually Naryshkin or Petrov, alongside national and local officials, opened and participated in many of these conferences. One in Samara in April 2017, for instance, was opened by a deputy of the State Duma, who called for a nonpolitical appraisal of events and highlighted the need for patriotism. The chairman of Samara's Provincial Duma then stressed the need to recall the "lessons" of the "tragic" events of 1917 to prevent internal conflicts, followed by a speech by Petrov.⁴³ A month later, Naryshkin briefly introduced a conference in St. Petersburg.⁴⁴ Later in the year, Grigorii Karasin, deputy minister of foreign affairs, quoted Putin verbatim at a conference in Moscow, talking of a "tragic" period and drawing "lessons" from the centenary.⁴⁵ His superior, Sergei Lavrov, talked elsewhere of prosperity through unity.⁴⁶

The Kremlin's framework managed to permeate many academic centennial ventures, nationally and locally, sponsored by the organizing committee or reliant on state funding. Sometimes just in the opening introductions, sometimes in the tone, the key "lessons" found space in otherwise thought-provoking and academically rigorous conferences and publications, and in the newspaper reports on these events. These

“lessons” were pervasive yet fairly unobtrusive. Professional historians like Petrov easily merged Kremlin-endorsed terminology and academic concerns, stressing “lessons” while still appreciating the complexity of events. Likewise, regional events, such as in Riazan’, involved collaboration between academics, educational bodies, church historical societies and local government, all agreeing on the “huge significance” of the revolution.⁴⁷

National publications sponsored by the organizing committee used a similar framing. One example, directed towards schoolchildren, was a downloadable book by Aleksandr Shubin seeking to provide an “objective” account of the “Great Russian Revolution” by answering ten obvious questions, from why there was a revolution in 1917 and whether February was spontaneous or a plot, to whether Lenin was a foreign agent and when the revolution finished. Whilst there was nothing too objectionable—academically—with much of the discussion, the framing of the narrative around “plots,” “revolts,” “foreign agents” and so on was likely to reinforce negative views of the revolution among readers.⁴⁸ The rhetoric of “foreign agents,” of course, linked to the Kremlin’s wider political narrative about the threat of foreign intervention and ideas, which could divide and weaken Russian society.⁴⁹ The academic publications sponsored by the committee were more circumspect, but often included forewords or introductions expressing the negative lessons of 1917, usually by Petrov or prominent committee members.⁵⁰

This general framework—tragedy, stability, unity—was sufficiently inoffensive not only to encompass much academic debate but also to find a degree of crossover between groups from across the political spectrum. The Kremlin, for instance, might not share the more extreme views in its own ruling conservative party, United Russia, such as Vitalii Milonov’s attempts to have the February Revolution declared officially a “day of national tragedy.”⁵¹ Nor does it share the preoccupation of more extreme nationalists with the unadulterated adulation of the former monarchy.⁵² But there were few important disagreements with conservatives over the core “lessons” of 1917. There was slightly more tension with liberals, such as Grigorii Iavlinskii, a leader of the Yabloko party, who see much to applaud in the February Revolution before the Bolsheviks seized power in a coup and led Russia down a “dead end.”⁵³ Yet in a conference organized by the party in March 2017, Iavlinskii supported the idea of reconciliation, even if he hoped for a restructuring of the Russian state in the future.⁵⁴

Further left, also in March, a conference of socialists sponsored by the party Just Russia saw its chairman, Sergei Mironov, promote socialist ideals that conflicted with Putin's Russia, while still concurring with the Kremlin's view that the "Great Russian Revolution" had brought positives and negatives.⁵⁵ All these parties share a patriotic desire to defend Russia, a belief in a strong state and a preference for reform over revolution—this much was also evident in their leaders' later statements to the State Duma on the anniversary of the October Revolution.⁵⁶

The main group with a more ambiguous relationship to the Kremlin's framing of 1917 was the Communist Party. For its leader, Gennadii Zyuganov, the revolution (meaning October) heralded positive change, from educational advances to industrial and scientific development. He called for an official commemoration of the October Revolution and the party created its own committee to organize a celebration. He railed against the many "anti-Soviet myths" circulating in Russia, such as Bolshevik responsibility for the civil war. On the contrary, he argued, the party had upheld national values, saving Russia from the weak states of Tsarist Russia and the Provisional Government. Here, though, Zyuganov inadvertently reinforced the Kremlin's emphasis on the importance of a strong state and the tragedy of a divisive civil war. Similarly, his desire to historicize the Soviet period, placing its achievements within the thousand-year history of the Russian state, echoed Putin's views, as did his attacks on "Russo-phobes" even if not those on "Anti-Soviets."⁵⁷ Where Communists part with the Kremlin is in their assessment of the exploitation of the Russian people under the current system (although Putin is not mentioned by name), their belief that communism is simply in "temporary retreat" and, ultimately, in their call for a new October Revolution.⁵⁸ Even then, Communists remain patriotic and anti-Western. Their call for a new October has rarely implied a call for a new armed revolution, rather a peaceful transition inspired by the ideals of October.

The Kremlin, therefore, tapped into the same "antirevolutionary consensus" among politicians in 2017 as it did in wider society, and the core "lessons" raised few arguments as the year progressed, even if there remained plenty of disagreements on interpreting the various elements of the revolutionary process. Responses to the centenary of the October Revolution further demonstrated the lack of serious political discord over 1917. October always enjoyed far more prominence in Russia than its

predecessor in February as the date of the birth of the Soviet state. Yet the Kremlin essentially ignored the date. One spokesman, presumably responding to rumors, denied the Kremlin was canceling its commemorations, declaring nothing had been planned in the first place and questioning what there was to commemorate.⁵⁹ Another spokesman later noted that the date was a “routine working day” for Putin.⁶⁰ Putin, it seemed, had said everything that he intended. A fortnight earlier, he had talked again of the “lessons” of 1917 and its “ambiguous” results, urging evolution over revolution.⁶¹ Only a week before, he had spoken at the unveiling of a prominent memorial, the thirty-meter long “Wall of Grief” in central Moscow, dedicated to victims of Soviet repression. Ostensibly nothing to do with the centenary, this event nevertheless enabled Putin to reinforce his message of reconciliation and unity.⁶²

The only group who marked the centenary of October officially was the Communist Party who alleged the Kremlin was seeking deliberately to “silence” the issue, distracting the population to such an extent that the majority of people were apparently not even aware of the centenary. Defiantly, the Communists coordinated a gala reception and a march in Revolution Square attended by several thousand people from over eighty countries, some holding up posters of Lenin and Stalin. A few days earlier, four thousand gathered in a concert hall in St. Petersburg, while local branches of the party organized events in towns across Russia.⁶³

This lack of serious discord did not mean that everything went to plan for the Kremlin. The most prominent casualty was Medinskii’s proposal for a memorial in Crimea, which became mired in local opposition from all sides of the political spectrum—a rare example of disagreements erupting onto a public stage—as well as legal and funding disputes, and only materialized in 2021.⁶⁴ Instead, Putin visited Crimea later than planned in November to unveil a statue of Alexander III, portrayed as a patriotic “peacemaker” who had maintained internal and external stability whilst fostering economic growth.⁶⁵ As with the other memorials completed in 2017, this was a symbolic choice which said much about the state’s approach to the revolution, yet it was hardly the event that Medinskii had planned.

DISCUSSING THE REVOLUTION

Throughout 2017, the Russian press echoed the Kremlin's framing of the revolution in a wide variety of forms, including opinion pieces, interviews with politicians and historians, reviews of local and national commemorative events and exhibitions, and historical-interest articles.⁶⁶ This was hardly surprising given that the Kremlin exercises influence on the Russian press through the state ownership of many media outlets and the granting of subsidies. The Russian media, it has been suggested, is difficult to characterize because of its "duality," encompassing both market-driven forces and more paternalistic state intervention, and discussions about the centenary inevitably reflected these complex dynamics between the Kremlin and the press.⁶⁷

In all, the centenary received extensive media attention and most publications agreed on the need for greater public understanding of the revolution.⁶⁸ The anniversaries of the February and October Revolutions received separate press attention, but there was also discussion of whether the revolution should be treated as a single event, a key facet of the Kremlin's approach.⁶⁹ The idea of moving towards a more "objective" approach to 1917 was echoed across many publications, alongside the danger of Russia going round in "circles" if it did not pay attention to its past.⁷⁰ *Vechernii Sankt-Peterburg* suggested how the history of 1917 mattered not just to Russia, but to the whole world, declaring how the entire twentieth century was "a response to the Russian Revolution."⁷¹ This framing of 1917 emphasized the international significance of Russian history and endorsed Putin's call for Russian people to be proud of their past. Others evoked anti-Western sentiments, suggesting that the revolution illustrated the Russian people's historic struggle for "fairness" in contrast to the social inequality and acquisitiveness of Western societies.⁷² Here, the centenary served as a vehicle for articulating Russian identity and Russia's need to follow its own path, rather than being influenced by the "West."

In some cases, the Kremlin's "lessons" were conveyed directly as publications reported on events sponsored by the organizing committee or quoted from Putin and senior officials. *Vecherniaia Moskva* reported on the first meeting of the committee on January 23, 2017, quoting Naryshkin on how apparently "the history of the Russian Revolution is gradually ceasing to divide and cause conflict between our citizens, and we need to

support this trend.”⁷³ Other articles advertised events organized by the committee, alleging high levels of national and international interest.⁷⁴ The media also provided a platform for those leading the commemorative activities, such as Medinskii. Writing in *Argumenty i fakty*, he emphasized the cultural outputs of the centenary, such as in theater and cinema, as well as the key “lesson” of the revolution about preventing “internal conflicts” from spiraling into violence.⁷⁵ At times, leading officials did not even have to write or be reported on directly as articles on commemorative events conveyed the Kremlin’s narrative: an organizer of a conference on “The Great Revolution in Regional Perspective” at Tula State University, for instance, described how the conference shared Putin’s aim to consolidate “social, political and civic consciousness” through the commemoration of 1917.⁷⁶ Elsewhere, there were traces of indirect influence in terms of the frameworks and language used.⁷⁷

Efforts to fit 1917 into a “usable” past were also seen at a local level. Regional newspapers examined the relationship between national and local histories, such as by exploring how news of the revolution had spread from Petrograd to Russia’s regions and comparing regional experiences of 1917.⁷⁸ There were creative attempts to engage people in the centenary, particularly the younger generation, and to consolidate national and regional identities. *Zabaikal’skii rabochii*, for example, reported on an event called “My History: 1917–2017” held in Chita, the name echoing that of the “Russia, My History” parks. The event encouraged historical awareness, involving teams of young people competing in historical games and answering quick-fire questions about Chita’s revolutionary history.⁷⁹ Other newspapers reported on centennial walking tours, film screenings and performances on 1917. Many of these events had the self-proclaimed aim of understanding the revolution as it “actually was,” recovering the experiences of those who had lived through it.⁸⁰ Participants were encouraged to imagine what life was like for people one hundred years ago, explore their hopes and dreams, and how they were affected by the revolution.⁸¹ Newspapers often reprinted revolutionary sources, including diaries and newspaper extracts from 1917.⁸² *Orenburzh’e* asked “does your family remember the events of 1917?,” promoting a sense of personal connection.⁸³ On the surface, this focus on the impact of the revolution on different regions and on daily life had the advantage of seeming more “objective” and less didactic. Many of these reports, though, still situated

these activities within the same framework as the Kremlin by documenting the extent of local disruption and the human costs.

Ultimately, there was a shared language over the “lessons” of 1917 in much of the press coverage, both regional and national. Headlines used the term, while many articles described how the centenary provided an opportunity to reflect on Russia’s historical mistakes and to ensure that a similar revolutionary occurrence would not happen again.⁸⁴ One commentator even described the need for a “vaccination” against revolutions.⁸⁵ There were differences in interpretation, of course, and the lessons looked slightly different depending on the publication and political perspective of the commentator. *Trud* (Labor), for example, reporting on a trade union meeting, argued that 1917 proved the need for social and economic reforms.⁸⁶ Others focused on lessons about violence and political strategy.⁸⁷ Nonetheless, the key lessons about avoiding a repeat of the revolution and promoting stability permeated much of the coverage.

The malleability of the language used by the Kremlin to discuss the centenary again emerged as a major strength of their approach since any divisions over the revolution could be masked by this shared rhetoric about learning “lessons” and avoiding the mistakes of the past. The amount of serious engagement with the complexities of the revolutionary period and its legacies was limited in many cases and much of the media supported the “antirevolutionary consensus.” Emotive language was employed to describe the consequences of the revolution, such as “unprecedented cataclysm” and “terrifying national catastrophe.”⁸⁸ Many commentators were quick to condemn revolutionary violence and its impact, particularly where it suited local agendas: *Dagestanskaia Pravda* emphasized how “violent methods,” such as wars, coups and revolutions, were ineffective in terms of solving social problems.⁸⁹ Some compared the revolutionary period to the turbulence of the 1990s, while others referred to “Stalinist repression” as further evidence of the danger of extreme, violent tactics.⁹⁰

Condemning the revolutionary methods used in 1917 did not always mean wholesale opposition to the revolution’s legacy. Just as Putin has publicly acknowledged some of the strengths of the Soviet Union, some commentators praised how 1917 led to the formation of a “new great country.”⁹¹ Indeed, this question of how to assess the outcomes of the revolution was probably the most obvious area of division and controversy in the press. Just as Chubar’ian and others condemned the “tragic”

consequences of the “Great” Russian Revolution, the press struggled with similar tensions.

Given these tensions, it is unsurprising that some criticism of the Kremlin’s approach emerged. Writing in the independent online publication *Republic (Slon)* in February 2017, Andrei Arkhangel’skii asked “why the Kremlin is avoiding an ethical evaluation of 1917.”⁹² He noted how many Russian radio stations, such as the state-run station Vesti FM, were asking listeners to decide for themselves whether the revolution was a “catastrophe or triumph.” He saw this as symptomatic of the state media’s problematic approach to the centenary, which used a supposedly democratic (decide for yourself) strategy to evade difficult but ethically important questions about the past, such as society’s relationship to violence. Others criticized the commemorations for their ineffectiveness. Viacheslav Kostikov in *Argumenty i fakty* argued that “calls for national reconciliation” had largely failed and that “society remained split.”⁹³ Sergei Shelin, writing in *Republic (Slon)* again on October 16, 2017, suggested that most Russians were simply disengaged during the centenary and paid little attention to the history of 1917.⁹⁴ A minority of commentators used the centenary to discuss contemporary Russian and global politics, also adopting a less consensual and more politically sensitive approach. Some considered whether there were any parallels in the challenges facing the world in 1917 and 2017, such as in terms of global crises and inequality; others examined the role of revolution in twentieth-century history, looking at the centenary through a more theoretical lens.⁹⁵

The centenary, then, did—as the Kremlin feared—encourage some reflection on the direction and nature of contemporary politics, even if few thought revolution was possible in Russia in 2017. Overwhelmingly, though, the media’s interpretation of 1917 echoed that of the Kremlin. This may reflect the Kremlin’s influence over the Russian press, as it was certainly true that the most critical articles tended to come from the small independent press. Elsewhere, some journalists may have been inclined to exercise forms of self-censorship, wary of crossing unspoken political lines.⁹⁶ Either way, the relatively small amount of critical press was dwarfed by the amount of acceptable coverage. In the regional press, there was local agency and some variation in approaches to the centenary. Local organizations and newspapers worked hard to connect the centenary to a sense of place and to articulate the contemporary relevance of the revo-

lution, such as through educational initiatives. However, most regional interpretations fitted comfortably within the Kremlin's wider framework and reinforced the need for reconciliation and unity, and there was an important antirevolutionary thread linking national and local coverage throughout the press.

EXHIBITING THE REVOLUTION

Many Russians probably only passively engaged with these articles on 1917, if they read them at all. The organizing committee hoped for more active engagement and, with this in mind, it paid particular attention to exhibitions. The committee's second meeting on September 15, 2017, emphasized exhibitions when surveying its achievements since its formation, as did Naryshkin during an interview on the eve of the centenary of the October Revolution.⁹⁷ Exhibitions, it was hoped, provided not only a more accessible way of increasing awareness of the revolution but an opportunity to immerse visitors in the revolutionary experience and thereby to shape their views of 1917 and of revolutions more generally.⁹⁸

Exhibitions stood on the edge of the Kremlin's framework. The directors of major museums were committee members, as were the directors of the major archives (which had their own exhibition halls), while any sizable event required state funding. Thus, there were practical reasons for following the signals from above. Yet, many directors and curators also professed the need for objectivity and involved historians keen to retain control over how the revolution was portrayed. These tensions were not always acknowledged. A member of the State Museum of Political History in St. Petersburg, for instance, saw no contradiction in arguing their exhibition had to be objective and nonpolitical while also conveying the great "tragedy" and "bloody price" of revolution.⁹⁹ Others were explicit: a curator in Ul'ianovsk was clear that the aim was to stress the benefits of reform over revolution, to disabuse any "romantic" notions of revolution and to realize that reform was a more "humane" path.¹⁰⁰

Exhibitions, moreover, faced the usual challenges. The need to attract an audience posed dilemmas over how to convey complex subjects in accessible ways, particularly to an audience with either a diminishing knowledge of events or, in the case of older generations, long-held assump-

tions about the revolution. Thematic approaches conveyed complexity, but chronology aided basic understanding. As with local centenary commemorations, directors and curators were keen particularly to engage young people—the most important group for the future, but with the least knowledge of the period. Institutions worked largely with their own holdings, which often prioritized particular groups and materials, usually official documents, newspapers or posters from the Bolsheviks. Finally, complications emerged between the national narrative and local events, particularly in areas held by the Bolsheviks' opponents or where revolts did not fit into neat political divisions.¹⁰¹

The committee's plan included a range of exhibitions, from traditional topics such as Nicholas II, Lenin and politics, to those reflecting newer avenues of research, such as women, revolutionary language and print culture. All the major museums, archives and libraries in Moscow and St. Petersburg held exhibitions as well as the historical museums in regional towns.¹⁰² Those based on specific holdings, such as the survey of revolutionary art presented by the Tret'iakov Gallery (Moscow), the exhibition on the tsarist family in the imperial palaces at Tsarskoe selo (outside St. Petersburg), or on Lenin in the Federal Archive Agency (Moscow), could avoid some of the need to present an objective overview, although none of these exhibitions challenged the "antirevolutionary consensus."¹⁰³

The more interesting exhibitions for the purpose of this article were those that addressed the whole revolution. If there was a "flagship" exhibition, it was the one held in the State Museum of Contemporary History in Moscow (formerly the Museum of the Revolution). This exhibition was unusual in many ways—it enjoyed greater resources than most museums, was extremely widely publicized and, because of its location, catered for both domestic and foreign audiences, as reflected in the bilingual (Russian and English) signs and catalogue. Both directors, Irina Velikanova and Andrei Sorokin, were members of the organizing committee, whilst Medinskii attended its opening ceremony. Medinskii and Sorokin, in particular, used the occasion to promote the Kremlin's narrative of 1917.¹⁰⁴

Various elements made the tone clear from the start. Its title—*Kod revoliutsii* (The Code of Revolution)—was enigmatic, suggesting uncertainty and mystery. Velikanova noted that the code referred to the numbers "1917" and that visitors were meant to reflect on the radical change they signified for the whole world.¹⁰⁵ Sorokin was less neutral, talking of the

many negatives of the revolutions and how the exhibition explored the development of a “crisis” into a “national catastrophe.”¹⁰⁶ From the start of the exhibition, visitors were guided in their interpretation of events as they passed through a hole in the wall into a hall filled with background noises and swirling clouds above, creating an unsettling atmosphere, especially the noises, some activated unexpectedly by sensors.¹⁰⁷ The questions posed by the placard at the entrance (reprinted in the catalogue) shaped the agenda, declaring that the exhibition wanted to ask why revolutions start, whether there are alternatives, whether revolution is ever predestined, and whether contemporary society could draw any “lessons” from history.

The exhibition conveyed some positive elements of revolution—most obviously, universal suffrage and the freedoms symbolized by the printing press and the end of censorship—yet the negative “lessons” of 1917 crept in alongside the unsettling environment. One example included a quote from a French economist stating that if trends seen across Europe before 1912 had continued, then Russia would have been the dominant European power by 1950—politically, economically and financially. The February Revolution, far from realizing dreams, had brought boundless “chaos.” Other quotations included the émigré sociologist Pitirim Sorokin on the “demonic” faces of protestors, Lenin connecting revolution to violence (with a statue of a screaming, aggressive Lenin) and his socialist opponent Viktor Chernov equating revolution to blood.¹⁰⁸ Cabinets entitled “secret drawers,” containing further exhibits, reinforced the secrecy and plots implied by the exhibition’s title.

Overall, this exhibition was broadly representative of all those trying to cover the entire period, such as that at the State Museum of Political History in St. Petersburg.¹⁰⁹ All conducted a delicate balancing act, seeking to give voice to the “dreams” of the revolution whilst retaining the message that revolution brought uncertainty, fear, turmoil and death. The State Historical Museum on Red Square was unusual in explicitly embracing these “dreams,” entitling their exhibition *The Energy of Dreams*. Its director, Aleksei Levykin (on the organizing committee), noted how the revolution became a “bloody” civil war and “destroyed” a thousand years of Russian history, but also argued it formed the prologue to a period of “grandiose” changes in the economy, society and culture driven by the hopes of millions of Russians for a better and fairer life. No one emerged unscathed in this simultaneously “great” and “tragic” period.¹¹⁰ Large

sections of the exhibition were devoted to the 1920s–30s, including electrification, mechanization, medical developments, literacy campaigns and other such advances. This did not necessarily contradict the Kremlin’s framework as Putin has often praised the achievements of the Soviet state, but most exhibitions were far clearer in their message that the dreams of the revolution were not worth such a bloody and traumatic means of fulfilling them.¹¹¹

Other exhibitions from Moscow to Vladivostok rarely departed from this carefully balanced narrative.¹¹² In Ekaterinburg’s history museum, an artist’s banner “2017” was accompanied by a question asking whether the revolution had accomplished good or evil, with the design placing greater emphasis on the latter.¹¹³ The exhibition in Tiumen’s historical museum was entitled *In the Fire of Revolution* and included a blunt placard on the “consequences” of civil war, including loss of population, destruction of the educated classes, reduced economic production, poverty, hunger and the growth of child homelessness. Irkutsk’s historical museum placed a framed quote of Putin’s comments on the revolution from his December 2016 speech at the entrance alongside a quote from Patriarch Kirill of the Orthodox Church talking of the “great crime” of the revolution.

If anything, regional museums placed an even greater emphasis on engaging the public. Reflecting on their efforts later, those involved stressed the need to provide everything from school lessons and tours (and games and quizzes) to public lectures and radio presentations, alongside the actual exhibition and related publications. Ekaterinburg provided a quiz for visitors based on the various personalities (representing different social groups) who featured in the exhibition, which consisted of questions that visitors had to answer as they progressed around the exhibits. Those in Novosibirsk organized revolutionary-themed tours around the city, an exhibition in the city’s metro and a day of live audiovisual, theatrical and musical performances.¹¹⁴

All tried to immerse visitors in 1917 in various ways, either—as in Irkutsk—by hanging banners and slogans on the walls, recreating billboards, pasting adverts, posters and newspapers on walls, and having mannequins in contemporary clothes, or—as in Ekaterinburg and Moscow—by harnessing technology, such as providing electronic documents and video clips in the exhibit hall or through additional materials or exhibitions online. Through this, they tried to convey the atmosphere of the revolution.

Ekaterinburg included a prison door, shaky text, numerous machine guns and deliberately blurred the photos of the murdered royal family next to the biographies of their killers, all of which reminded viewers of the ever-present uncertainty, disorder and violence. A torn photo of two brothers in Irkutsk had a similar effect, emphasizing how the revolution split up families through displacement, death or differing political affiliations.

It is impossible to gauge the reactions of visitors without a systematic study. Many published reviews were purely descriptive, but more perceptive reviewers picked up on these techniques and messages, thereby reinforcing their impact. One reporter admitted to feeling a sense of “impending doom” after visiting *The Code of Revolution*. Another referred to the menacing paintings of Bolsheviks on display at the *Someone 1917* exhibition in the Tret’iakov Gallery as signaling an imminent “national catastrophe.” One reviewer appreciated the immersive experience and revolutionary atmosphere created in Irkutsk, not least through the banners on the walls, and similar comments emerged from Kazan’.¹¹⁵

Many of those behind exhibitions clearly aimed to share more of the complexities of 1917 than the Kremlin, wishing to facilitate education and recognizing (to a greater or lesser extent) the dreams of revolution as well as its costs. None, however, challenged the Kremlin’s framework substantially and, like the press coverage, most supported and promoted the “antirevolutionary consensus.” Even the most positive views of 1917 as a creative process did not seek to portray revolution as an attractive option but merely cast it as contributing positively as well as negatively, thereby conforming at least to the Kremlin’s desire to fit 1917 into a broader, positive account of the entirety of Russia’s history.

RECREATING THE REVOLUTION

On balance, the Kremlin was on safe ground with the vast majority of the activities discussed so far; indeed, it is hardly surprising that the committee’s plan of events was dominated by conferences, publications and exhibitions. With many key figures co-opted onto the committee, with the state controlling vital sources of funding, and with traditional media outlets already largely subservient to state concerns, it was relatively easy to predict conformity. Realistically, however, conferences, the press, print

publications, and exhibitions were not going to reach as many people as they once did.

The committee's original schedule had a "multimedia" section with a handful of activities, from online and digitized resources to television documentaries and films. Of these activities, the least controversial, least innovative and thus probably least successful in gaining a wider audience was simply putting resources online. Most exhibitions established an online presence, whilst some exhibitions were only available virtually. The Russian News Agency, TASS, represented on the committee, united with the Museum of Contemporary History to produce an interactive website containing descriptions of events, images and excerpts from contemporary accounts.¹¹⁶ Shubin's book, discussed above, was only available online and it was joined by a range of other online resources, including newly digitized sources as part of projects from major archives and libraries.

Documentaries and films could reach a larger audience and, with this in mind, several directors of television channels and media companies, producers and writers were part of the committee. To commemorate the February Revolution, the pro-state channel NTV produced a "cycle" of historical documentaries, mixing archival footage, recreated scenes and "talking heads" to create a dramatic, day-by-day portrayal of events.¹¹⁷ This and other documentaries tended to revolve around themes sympathetic to the Kremlin's framework: a positive picture of imperial Russia and the role of "dark" forces, foreign intervention, lawlessness, violence, and victims. Discussions of the October Revolution adopted an even more antirevolutionary tone, portraying the Bolsheviks as traitors, cruel and morally depraved. Documentaries mixed fact and fiction, original footage and recreated scenes, with uninformed viewers struggling to distinguish between the two and informed viewers complaining of falsification.¹¹⁸

Konstantin Ernst, a committee member and director of the state-run Channel 1, believed Russians had little enthusiasm for major commemorative events, noting that various pilot trials had produced little audience response. Nevertheless, he felt his channel should do something and devoted most effort to producing a major series centered on Trotsky, using well-known actors and lavish sets. His interest, though, was less in conveying any sense of historical truth and more in providing an entertaining drama based on a figure marginalized in the USSR. The overriding impression, according to reviewers, was one where Trotsky's "savage"

actions during the civil war and the general prevalence of violence overshadow his ideas. For one historian, Trotsky was the perfect “anti-hero” for the Kremlin—charismatic but prone to violence, unpatriotic and with dubious links to foreigners.¹¹⁹ A similar impression emerged from a major series on another state-owned channel Rossiia-1, whose deputy director was also on the committee. “Demon of the Revolution” was more like a “spy thriller” than a historical drama, portraying Lenin wrestling with his conscience as the “Demon,” a German agent Alexander Parvus, offers him the money needed to seize power.¹²⁰ Both, then, manipulated historical individuals and events to produce dramatic serials that garnered a great deal of publicity, but perpetuated myths over facts and stressed key themes—ambition, violence, plots, power—in ways that fitted neatly into the Kremlin’s narrative.¹²¹

The glaring absence in the committee’s schedule was a more proactive agenda for the internet, particularly social media. Not only are many more people seeking information about the past online, but it is becoming another “site of memory,” with people’s engagement with the past taking various forms, from blogs to online-only commemorations.¹²² Putin’s opponents made strategic use of the centenary online, not least to predict (or hope) that 2017 would prompt a renewed revolution in Russia. There was little the state could do about such discourse and, indeed, it seemed unconcerned: such dissent posed little threat to either the state or to its attempts to navigate the centenary successfully unless it coalesced around particular sites or projects or started to translate into real-world action. The latter was largely absent beyond some more general protests and, despite the relative freedom of the internet, the major projects that emerged did not clearly contest the Kremlin’s narrative.¹²³ Social media also offered valuable opportunities for state supporters to promote active engagement with the past. It had the potential, in particular, to create an illusion of the real-time unfolding of events, with the public participating through posts or engaging through comments, likes or reposting/retweeting, thereby creating the most interactive forum for “acting out” or “reliving” the revolution.¹²⁴

One such project emerged from the state-funded media corporation, Russia Today (RT), whose chief editor, Margarita Simon’ian, was on the committee, even if it was not on the list of approved projects and targeted primarily—as does RT—an audience outside of Russia. RT cre-

ated a multifaceted website, including a timeline, quiz, encyclopedia and documentary footage of events alongside two bigger initiatives.¹²⁵ The first was #1917Live, which saw over ninety Twitter accounts established to imagine how key political and cultural figures would have tweeted in response to the unfolding events of 1917. It encouraged people to set up their own accounts (preferably of nonfictional characters, but fiction was permissible if acted in the spirit of the revolution). The result was a series of tweets that charted familiar events and focused on the practical and emotional responses of characters. These were supported by a second initiative, Video 360°, eight short films that recreated imagined scenes involving famous and “ordinary” Russians, aiming to get people actively “engaged” with the historical drama and make it “interesting” to the new generation.¹²⁶

#1917Live ended up generating over 275,000 tweets, gaining over 250,000 followers and over 75 million impressions across several social media platforms, winning several international awards for its innovative approach. Observers have commented on how it engaged participants by encouraging them to identify with the characters and their experiences of revolution. In doing this, participants interweaved the past, present and future; as the past became live on their screens, they linked it to present events and future hopes, noting the prevalence of “fake news” in 1917 or hopes for change in 2017.¹²⁷ Yet, in the context of this article, two aspects stand out. First, the RT-generated content, from an otherwise infamously political broadcaster, is curiously apolitical, not obviously pushing the Kremlin’s narrative, something that probably aided its attractiveness to participants. Second, encouraging a multitude of views from all participants resulted in a cacophony of voices, mixing the banal and polemical with the informed and insightful, which may not have actively promoted the Kremlin’s narrative but did not provide a coherent challenge to it either.¹²⁸

The same was true of a more “independent,” organized and, in some respects, larger-scale version of this project coordinated by Mikhail Zygar’, a former reporter and independent television editor, and the author of a well-known book critical of Putin’s regime. Entitled “1917: Free History,” it ran from late 2016 to early 2018 and drew on the work of historians, journalists and computer specialists to recreate the lives of Russians in 1917 as if they were posting on social media.¹²⁹ Using diaries, letters and other documents, Zygar’ and his team imagined how over 1,500 people

(mainly key political and cultural figures, but also “ordinary” people) would have reacted in “real-time” to events occurring exactly a hundred years ago. It was less “democratic” than #1917Live as viewers could not establish their own characters and the quotations were restricted to the character’s own views (taken from the original documents). Nonetheless, viewers could follow individuals, trace events chronologically, track themes and plot events on an interactive map of Petrograd. Explicitly targeting the young, internet-savvy generation and aiming to “popularize” history, Zygar’ wanted to immerse them in the revolution, following their “heroes” day-by-day, and increasing their knowledge accordingly.¹³⁰

Zygar’ also had a political agenda. He understood why 1917 is problematic for the Kremlin and, critical of Putin’s authoritarianism, he emphasized the achievements of the February Revolution—progressive policies, universal suffrage, the emergence of civil society, an aversion to violence—and dismissed the conspiracy theories utilized to portray revolutions negatively. He admitted that a comparable revolution seemed unlikely in 2017 but argued that most Russians felt the Tsarist Empire was stable prior to its demise.¹³¹ He never stated an aim to inspire revolution, but he wanted people to see that, as he noted in a talk, history is a “rehearsal” for the present and the characters of the past are no different from us. People face similar challenges now as they did during 1917.¹³² More fundamentally in his view, history has been written by the winners, Russia’s leaders, and belief in the unimportance of people in Russian history has weakened support for democracy: realizing that people can make history and that there are alternative paths could change people’s mindsets.

The end result was mixed, though, despite high levels of public interaction through comments, sharing and likes, mostly within Russia.¹³³ The emphasis on “real-time” responses removed any overarching analysis and there were fewer from “ordinary” Russians, undermining the argument that people played a central role. Indeed, decontextualization left the sense of everyone being buffeted by events and lacking agency. Amid speeding events, chaotic responses and frequent accounts of unrest and violence, it was hard to read this version of the revolution as a positive experience. And, of course, the ultimate outcome of February—the October Revolution—was never intended to be portrayed positively. The comments, like #1917Live, quickly morphed into a clamor of multiple voices that defied a single interpretation.

CONCLUSION

On January 18, 2018, the organizing committee met for the last time. The centenary was over and almost two thousand events had taken place across Russia. The committee's activities may have been completed, Naryshkin declared, but the discussion of the "Great Russian Revolution" was not closed.¹³⁴ Indeed, a couple of months later, an official exhibition marking the centenary of the civil war opened in the Museum of Contemporary History in Moscow that struggled with many of the same issues that its predecessor, *The Code of Revolution*, had done the previous year.¹³⁵

Yet there is little evidence that anything had really changed. Statistics suggested that mentions of the revolution in public discourse increased 2.35 times in 2017 from 2016, but that the country remained just as divided over the legacy of 1917 at the end of 2017 as it had been at the beginning.¹³⁶ Few of those interviewed during one research project had any expectations of the centenary year or felt that unity could be achieved, and there is little sense that any progress has been made towards Medinskii's stated goal of reconciliation. Such a goal, it has been noted, relies on society being ready for reconciliation, but Russians remain too divided over key issues and figures, unable to separate 1917 from broader arguments about the communist past, and hold views that are usually deeply rooted in their political convictions.¹³⁷

Nevertheless, this did not mean that the centenary commemorations were unsuccessful from the Kremlin's point of view. Its worst-case scenario—renewed revolutionary unrest—never looked likely: 92 percent of respondents in one poll declared that a new revolution in Russia was simply inadmissible.¹³⁸ Yet the Kremlin did more in 2017 than simply "forget" 1917 or avoid further revolution. It strengthened the "antirevolutionary consensus" through a broad framework for understanding 1917 based on uncontentious "lessons"—the tragedy of division and violence, the need for greater unity and for patriotic pride about the past—that could appeal across the political spectrum, whilst permitting space for differing interpretations on specific elements of 1917. By delegating responsibility to a committee, Putin distanced himself from the centenary and made it harder to attack him personally for seeming too positive or too critical about the revolution, whilst retaining some direct and indirect influence over public discourse. Given the vastness of Russia and its regional

diversity, moreover, it made little sense for the Kremlin to try to dictate a single “official line” on the centenary or impose repercussions for those deviating from it. Such an approach would have been both unfeasible and politically risky—potentially drawing attention to alternative views and making them appear more attractive.

A less direct strategy was a better option. Tensions around the centenary were rarely addressed directly or resolved. Instead, they were glossed over through broad rhetoric about unity. While this approach is unlikely to encourage lasting reconciliation, it did, in the short term at least, minimize the influence of dissenting voices and provide some coherence to debates over the centenary. Local and national commemorations were connected through a fairly loose commemorative framework, and through the organizing committee, creating a veneer of shared understanding and consensus, despite continued divisions over many aspects of the revolution. For the Kremlin, the revolution was never going to exert the same positive unifying power as the historical memory of World War II. However, by mobilizing 1917 as a negative event with lessons to learn, it came closer to forming part of the Kremlin’s “usable” past and posed less of a threat than it could have done.

All this reinforces the need for a broad approach to studying the relationship between states and commemoration. Not only “positive” but also “negative” events can be transformed into a unifying message, even if their commemorative power remains weaker than events that are widely accepted to be national triumphs. Similarly, the prevalence of less traditional commemorative practices, particularly online, can pose challenges for states and create platforms for opposing narratives. Yet, as 2017 in Russia demonstrated, the multitude of voices emerging from this new, fluid and multimedia commemorative landscape rarely coalesces around a single alternative narrative. This diversity can be turned to the advantage of the state, making it easier to avoid providing definitive interpretations of problematic events and serving as a safety valve for competing voices and pressures. While the long-term viability of this “negative” and indirect commemorative strategy remains to be seen, it was surprisingly effective for the Kremlin during 2017. Far from avoiding or “forgetting” 1917, the Kremlin promoted a broad framework for understanding 1917, which emphasized core antirevolutionary “lessons” and allowed for some regional and political variation. This strategy helped to mask, if not heal,

the ongoing divisions over the Russian Revolution and the politics of memory in Russia.

NOTES

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1. For a useful analysis of "Putinism," see Brian Taylor, *The Code of Putinism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 9–41.

2. Robert Horvath, *Putin's "Preventive Counter-Revolution": Post-Soviet Authoritarianism and the Spectre of Velvet Revolution* (London: Routledge, 2013); Richard Sakwa, *Russia against the West: The Post-Cold War Crisis of World Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

3. A lot has been written on the attempts to create a "usable" past; for recent surveys in English, see Nikolay Koposov, *Memory Laws, Memory Wars: The Politics of the Past in Europe and Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Olga Malinova, "Constructing the 'Usable Past': The Evolution of the Official Historical Narrative in Post-Soviet Russia," in Niklas Bernsand and Barbara Törnquist-Plewa, eds., *Cultural and Political Imaginaries in Putin's Russia* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 85–104; and Anton Weiss-Wendt, *Putin's Russia and the Falsification of History: Reasserting Control over the Past* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).

4. Shaun Walker, *The Long Hangover: Putin's New Russia and the Ghosts of the Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 4–20.

5. See <https://myhistorypark.ru/about/> (all links last accessed on April 1, 2021); Marlene Laruelle, "Commemorating 1917 in Russia: Ambivalent State History Policy and the Church's Conquest of the History Market," *Europe-Asia Studies* 71, no. 2 (2019): 260–64.

6. Mark Edele, "Fighting Russia's Memory Wars: Vladimir Putin and the Codification of World War II," *History & Memory* 29, no. 2 (2017): 90–124; Weiss-Wendt, *Putin's Russia*, esp. 83–119, 185–222.

7. Karen Petrone, “The Great War and the Civil War in Russian Memory,” in Murray Frame, Boris Kolonitskii, Steven Marks and Melissa Stockdale, eds., *Russian Culture in War and Revolution, 1914–22. Book 2. Political Culture, Identities, Mentalities and Memory* (Bloomington, IN: Slavica, 2014), 259–72; Todd Nelson, *Bringing Stalin Back In: Memory Politics and the Creation of a Useable Past in Putin’s Russia* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2019); James Ryan, “Reckoning with the Past: Stalin and Stalinism in Putin’s Russia,” in James Ryan and Susan Grant, eds., *Revisioning Stalin and Stalinism: Complexities, Contradictions and Controversies* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), 157–72.

8. The contested memories surrounding the civil war are explored in Marlene Laruelle and Margarita Karnysheva, *Memory Politics and the Russian Civil War: Reds Versus Whites* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021).

9. Taylor, *Code of Putinism*, 25; Matthew Rendle and Anna Lively, “Inspiring a ‘Fourth Revolution’? The Modern Revolutionary Tradition and the Problems Surrounding the Commemoration of 1917 in 2017 in Russia,” *Historical Research* 90, no. 247 (2017): 230–49.

10. Gennadii Bordiugov, “Rossiiskaia revoliutsiia v stoletnem prostranstve pamiati” [The centenary of the Russian Revolution in spaces of memory], in Gennadii Bordiugov, ed., *Revoliutsiia-100: Rekonstruktsiia iubeleiia* [Revolution–100: Reconstruction of the anniversary] (Moscow: AIRO-XXI, 2017), 90. See also Ol’ga Malinova, “Neudobnyi iubilei: Itogi pereosmysleniia ‘mifa osnovaniia’ SSSR v ofitsial’nom istoricheskim narrative RF” [An inconvenient anniversary: The results of rethinking the “founding myth” of the USSR in the official historical narrative of the RF], *Politicheskaiia nauka*, no. 3 (2017): 13–40; Mariya Omelicheva, “A New Russian Holiday Has More Behind It Than National Unity: The Political Functions of Historical Commemorations,” *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 63, no. 3 (2017): 430–42;

11. P. Akopov, “Krasno-belaia Rossia: Revoliutsiia 1917 goda ischezla iz istoricheskoi pamiati” [Red-white Russia: The Revolution of 1917 has disappeared from historical memory], *Kurskaia Pravda*, September 21, 2017; L. Lur’c, “Molchanie-1917: Istorik Lev Lur’c o griadushchem iubilee revoliutsii” [Silence-1917: Historian Lev Lur’c on the coming of the anniversary of the revolution], *Delovoi Peterburg*, August 25, 2017.

12. See comments at meetings on January 16, 2014, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20071>; and November 5, 2014, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46951>.

13. “Kontseptsii novogo uchebno-metodicheskogo kompleksa po otechestvennoi istorii” [The conception of a new education-methodological complex on national history], 39–42, <http://www.kommersant.ru/docs/2013/standart.pdf>.

14. “Vazhno tol’ko ne politizirovat’ istoriiu, i togda mesto v nei naidetsia vsemu’: Akademik Aleksandr Chubar’ian o proekte istoriko-kul’turnogo standarta” [“It is only important not to politicize history, and then everything will find a place in it”: Academician Aleksandr Chubar’ian on designing a historical-cultural framework], *Kommersant*, October 31, 2013, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2332034>.

15. Bartłomiej Gajos, “(R)evolutionary memory in Tambov (1991–2017),” in Łukasz Adamski and Bartłomiej Gajos, eds., *Circles of the Russian Revolution: Internal and International Consequences of the Year 1917 in Russia* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 242–69.

16. Some commentators, of course, have produced more sophisticated analyses. As well as those mentioned elsewhere, see James Ryan, “The Politics of National History: Russia’s Ruling Elite and the Centenary of 1917,” *Revolutionary Russia* 31, no. 1 (2018): 24–45; and Stephan Rindlisbacher, “Into Historical Limbo: The Legacy of the October Revolution in Russia,” in Thomas Telios, Dieter Thomä and Ulrich Schmid, eds., *The Russian Revolution as Ideal and Practice: Failures, Legacies and the Future of Revolution* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 207–23.

17. Hiro Saito, “From Collective Memory to Commemoration,” in John Hall, Laura Grindstaff and Ming-Cheng Lo, eds., *Handbook of Cultural Sociology* (London: Routledge, 2010), 632.

18. Boris Kolonitskii and Mariia Matskevich, “Desakralizatsiia revoliutsii i antirevoliutsionnyi konsensus v sovremennoi Rossii: Iubilei 2017 goda i ego politicheskoe ispol’zovanie/neispol’zovanie” [The desacralization of the revolution and the antirevolutionary consensus in contemporary Russia: The anniversary of 2017 and its political use/uselessness], *Mir Rossii*, no. 4 (2018): 78–101.

19. James Richter, “Taming the Revolution: The Politics of Memory One Hundred Years after October,” *History & Memory* 31, no. 2 (2019): 45–77.

20. On using “signals,” see Anna Arutunyan, *The Putin Mystique: Inside Russia’s Power Cult* (London: Skyscraper Publications, 2014), 275.

21. Ol’ga Malinova, “Ofitsial’nyi istoricheskii narrativ kak element politiki identichnosti v Rossii: Ot 1990-kh k 2010-m godam” [Official historical narrative as an element of the politics of identity in Russia: From the 1990s to 2010], *Polis: Politicheskie issledovaniia*, no. 6 (2016): 152–53.

22. The key speeches are reprinted in *100 let Velikoi rossiiskoi revoliutsii: Osmyslenie vo imia konsolidatsii. Materialy kruglogo stola, sostoiavshegosia 20 Maia 2015g.* [One hundred years of the Russian Revolution: Reflection in the name of consolidation. Materials of a roundtable held on May 20, 2015] (Moscow: GTsMSIR, 2016).

23. Here, Medinskii echoes Putin who often stresses Russia’s “centuries” of history, as, in his inauguration speech on May 7, 2018, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/57416>.

24. This linked into the broader “anti-Western” narrative promoted by the Kremlin.

25. *100 let Velikoi rossiiskoi revoliutsii*, 9–13. This was reprinted in a collection of his speeches and interviews, which provides a broader sense of his views on history; Vladimir Medinskii, *Kul'turnaia politika i natsional'naiia ideia* [Cultural policy and the national idea] (Moscow: Knizhnyi mir, 2017). For an assessment of Medinskii, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Celebrating (or Not) The Russian Revolution,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 52, no. 4 (2017): esp. 827–29.

26. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53379>.

27. Matthew Blackburn, “Myths in the Russian Collective Memory: The ‘Golden Era’ of Pre-Revolutionary Russia and the ‘Disaster of 1917,’” *Scando-Slavica* 64, no. 1 (2018): 31–46.

28. See, for example, two polls conducted in early 2017, <https://www.levada.ru/en/2017/02/28/the-february-revolution-of-1917/> and <https://www.levada.ru/en/2017/04/21/the-october-revolution/>.

29. See the decree at <https://historyrussia.org/images/documents/0001201612200017.pdf>. For a summary of the society’s views, see Igor Torbakov, “Celebrating Red October: A Story of the Ten Anniversaries of the Russian Revolution, 1927–2017,” *Scando-Slavica* 64, no. 1 (2018): 25–26.

30. Olga Malinova, “The Embarrassing Centenary: Reinterpretation of the 1917 Revolution in the Official Historical Narrative of Post-Soviet Russia (1991–2017),” *Nationalities Papers* 46, no. 2 (2018): 273.

31. <https://historyrussia.org/proekty/100-letie-revolutsii-1917-goda/s-enaryshkin-yubilej-revolutsii-1917-goda-neobkhodim-dlya-izvlecheniya-urokov.html>; N. Rozhkova, “100-letie Oktiabr’skoi revoliutsii otmetiat vne politiki” [The centenary of the Russian Revolution will be celebrated outside of politics], *Izvestiia*, December 28, 2016.

32. See a list of sixty-three members at <https://historyrussia.org/images/documents/sostavorgkomitet.pdf>. Some people seem to have spoken who are not on this list so it is probably a draft version.

33. <https://historyrussia.org/proekty/100-letie-revolutsii-1917-goda.html>.

34. Laruelle, “Commemorating 1917,” 258; Richter, “Taming the Revolution,” 48.

35. <https://historyrussia.org/polemika/tribuna/vystuplenie-yu-a-petrovana-zasedanii-orgkomiteta-po-podgotovke-i-provedeniyu-meropriyatij-posvyashchennykh-100-letiyu-revolutsii-1917-goda-v-rossii.html>.

36. See the survey of the speeches at the meeting, with links to the full text, <https://historyrussia.org/proekty/100-letie-revolutsii-1917-goda/pervoe-zasedanie-organizatsionnogo-komiteta-po-podgotovke-i-provedeniyu-meropriyatij-posvyashchennykh-100-letiyu-revolutsii-1917-goda.html>.

37. https://ria.ru/revolution_opinion/20170201/1486787308.html.
38. “Pamiat’ pogibshikh: Fevral’. Tragediia. 1917 god” [In memory of the victims: February. Tragedy. 1917], *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, January 20, 2017; <https://historyrussia.org/proekty/100-letie-revolutsii-1917-goda/ne-dopustit-razdeleniia-nauchnaya-konferentsiia-fevral-tragediia-uroki-istorii-1917.html>.
39. <http://www.pravmir.com/100th-anniversary-emperors-abdication-patriarch-prays-victims-revolution-civil-war/> and <http://www.interfax.ru/russia/555912>.
40. For the Church’s views, see the resolutions from a conference of clergy and believers in January 2017, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/4792900.html>. See also Sergei Antonenko, “Obraz revoliutsii 1917 goda v konfessional’nom pole smyslov” [The image of the revolution of 1917 in confessional thought], in Bordiugov, ed., *Revoliutsiia-100*, 204–44; Olga Malinova, “A Quiet Jubilee: Practices of the Political Commemoration of the 1917 Revolution(s) in Russia,” in Adamski and Gajos, eds., *Circles of the Russian Revolution*, 228–35; and Margarete Zimmermann, “Never Again! Remembering October 1917 in the Contemporary Russian Orthodox Church,” *Scando-Slavica* 64, no. 1 (2018): 95–106.
41. For example, V. Vdoviak, “Pravoslavnyi brein-ring” [Orthodox Brain-ring], *Zabaikal’skii rabochii* [Chita], February 9, 2017; Z. Naranova, “O sobytiakh 1917 goda o prebyvanii relikvii v Kalmykii” [On the events of 1917 and the presence of relics in Kalmykia], *Kalmykiiia segodnia* [Elista], March 8, 2017.
42. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/54447> and <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/54573>.
43. *Pamiat’ o proshlom—2017: VI istoriko-arkhivnyi forum, posviashchennyi 100-letiiu revoliutsii 1917g. v Rossii. Velikaia Rossiiskaia revoliutsiia: Istoriiia i sovremennost’*. (Samara, 18–20 apreliia 2017 g.) [Memory of the past—2017: VI historical-archival forum dedicated to the centenary of the 1917 revolution in Russia. The Great Russian Revolution: Then and Now] (Samara: Nauchno-tekhnicheskii tsentr, 2017), 3–10.
44. *Revoliutsiia 1917 goda v Rossii: Sobytiia i kontseptsii, posledstviia i pamiat’*. *Materialy mezhdunarodnyi nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii, Sankt-Peterburg, 11–12 maia 2017 g.* [The Revolution of 1917 in Russia: Events and concepts, consequences and memory. Materials of an international scientific-practical conference] (St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 2017), 11.
45. “Torzhestvennoe otkrytie” [Ceremonial opening], in *1917 god v istorii i sud’be Rossiiskogo zarubezh’ia: Mezhdunarodnaia nauchno-prosvetitel’skaia konferentsiia. Moskva, 26–28 oktiabria 2017 goda* [1917 in the history and fate of the Russian abroad: International-educational conference] (Moscow: Vifsaida-DRZ, 2017), 11–12.

46. “100 Years of the Russian Revolution: Unity for the Future,” October 31, 2017, http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2926753.

47. V. Sheliakina, “Kak eto bylo u nas” [How it was with us], *Riazanskii vedomosti*, March 7, 2017.

48. A. Shubin, *Velikaia rossiiskaia revoliutsiia: 10 voprosov* [The Great Russian Revolution: 10 questions] (Moscow, 2017), <https://historyrussia.org/images/documents/shubin-10-voprosov-revolution.pdf>.

49. Richter, “Taming the Revolution,” 45, 61.

50. *Rossiiskaia revoliutsiia 1917 goda: Vlast', obshchestvo, kul'tura* [The Russian Revolution of 1917: Power, society, culture], 2 vols. (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2017), 1:8–9; and, for a wider audience, see Ruslan Gagkuev and Aleksandr Repnikov, *Velikaia revoliutsiia 1917 goda* [The great revolution of 1917] (Moscow: Eksmo-lauza, 2017).

51. Fred Weir, “A Revolution Forsaken? Why Russia Is Ignoring Its First Flirtation with Liberalism,” *Christian Science Monitor*, March 6, 2017.

52. On the views of monarchists, see “*Preterpevsbie do kontsa*”: *K 100-letiiu gibeli predstavitelei Imperatorskoi sem'i i ikh okruzheniia. Sbornik materialov nauchnoi konferentsii. Perm', 9 iunია 2017 g.* [“Suffering to the end”: On the centenary of the death of representatives of the imperial family and their entourage. A collection of materials of a scientific conference] (Moscow: Soiuz Dizain, 2018); while “plots” of various types were discussed in a book widely available across Russia in 2017, *Revoliutsiia 1917-go v Rossii kak seriia zagovorov* [The revolution of 1917 in Russia as a series of conspiracies] (Moscow: Algoritm, 2017).

53. Robert Caulson, “Yavlinsky Says 1917 ‘Detour’ Led Russia into 100-Year ‘Dead End,’” RFE/RL, March 5, 2017, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-yavlinsky-1917-revolutsiia/28351757.html>.

54. See his comments on March 14 in Galina Mikhaleva, ed., *Stoletie Fevral'skoi revoliutsii i zadacha politicheskoi modernizatsii v XXI veke: Materialy panel'noi diskussii stola* [The centenary of the February Revolution and the goal of political modernization in the twenty-first century: Materials of a roundtable discussion] (Moscow: Iabloko, 2017), 35, 51.

55. Sergei Mironov, “Tol'ko my, sotsialisty, mozhem otvetit' na sotsial'nye zaprosy liudei i vyzovy sovremennosti!” [Only we, socialists, are able to answer the social demands of the people and the challenges of our time!], in A. K. Nikitin, ed., *Stoletie revoliutsii v Rossii i sovremennyi sotsializm: Materialy mezhdunarodnykh konferentsii (Sankt-Peterburg, Tavricheskii dvorets, 18 marta 2017 goda)* [The centenary of revolution in Russia and contemporary socialism: Materials of an international conference] (Moscow: Kliuch-C, 2017), 9–13.

56. See the summary from November 7, 2017, at <http://duma.gov.ru/news/14626/>.

57. See <https://kprf.ru/party-live/cknews/161901.html>; and Zyuganov's report to the Communist Party, reprinted in *Sovetskaiia rossiiia*, March 28, 2017.

58. *Pravda i Velikii Oktiabr'* [*Pravda* and Great October] (Moscow: Pravda, 2017), esp. 5, 9, 20, 424, 606.

59. *Interfax*, October 25, 2017, <http://russialist.org/interfax-kremlin-had-no-plans-for-russian-revolution-centenary-celebrations-in-first-place-peskov/>.

60. *Reuters*, November 7, 2017, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-russia-revolution-anniversary/putin-wary-of-political-tumult-shuns-russian-revolution-centenary-idUKKBN1D71PN>.

61. Valdai Club, October 19, 2017, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/55882>.

62. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/55948>. Also see Kathleen Smith, "A Monument for Our Times? Commemorating Victims of Repression in Putin's Russia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 71, no. 8 (2019): 1314–44.

63. "Communists Accuse Kremlin of 'Silencing' Revolution Centenary," *RT*, November 3, 2017, <https://www.rt.com/politics/408674-communists-accuse-russian-authorities-of/>; articles on the party's website around November 7, 2017, <https://kprf.ru/infocentre/lenta/>; Ivan Nechepurenko, "Communists Mark Russian Revolution's Centenary in Moscow," *New York Times*, November 8, 2017.

64. Paul Robinson, "A Nation no Longer Divided? How Russians are increasingly Remembering, Rather Than Erasing, the Country's Bloody Civil War History," *RT*, April 29, 2021, <https://www.rt.com/russia/522443-nation-divided-civil-war/>.

65. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56125>.

66. This section is based on a search of two online databases, Russian Central Newspapers (82 papers) and Russian Regional Newspapers (130 papers), produced by East View Information Services (for a list of titles, see <https://www.eastview.com/resources/title-lists/>). "1917" was searched for between January 1 and December 31, 2017, bringing up over 5,750 hits of which the top 200 for each database were read.

67. Ilya Kiriya, "New and Old Institutions within the Russian Media System," *Russian Journal of Communication* 11, no. 1 (2019): 6–21.

68. For example, V. Klochkov, "Uroki fevralia 1917-go" [The lessons of February 1917], *Ural'skii rabochii* [Ekaterinburg], February 24, 2017.

69. For example L. Moskovkin, "Revoliutsiia 1917 goda: Izvlech' uroki i izbezhat' povtoreniia" [The revolution of 1917: Learn the lessons and avoid repetition], *Moskovskaia pravda*, March 3, 2017, 5.

70. I. Ushakova, “Osmyslenie stoletiiia 1917–2017” [Understanding the centenary, 1917–2017], *Slovo* [Moscow], September 1, 2017, 6.

71. S. Il’chenko, “Vsia istoriia XX veka—eto otvet russkuiu revoliutsiiu” [The entire history of the twentieth century is a response to the Russian Revolution], *Vechernii Sankt-Peterburg*, August 16, 2017. Also see “Sotsializm—doroga v budushchee” [Socialism—the road to the future], *Pravda*, November 10, 2017, 3; V. Zharkov, “Chemu nauchil mir Oktiabr’ 1917 goda” [What October 1917 taught the world], *RBK Daily* [Moscow], November 8, 2017, 7.

72. V. Kalashnikov, “Oktiabr’ 1917-go: Uroki istorii” [October 1917: The lessons of history], *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti*, October 20, 2017, 4.

73. Z. Artem’ev, “Ob’ektivnyi i delikatnyi podkhod k revoliutsii 1917 goda” [An objective and delicate approach to the revolution of 1917], *Vecherniiaia Moskva*, January 24, 2017, 5.

74. For example, V. Emel’ianenko, “Oktiabr’ vse-taki nastupaet” [October is approaching nonetheless], *Rossiiskaia gazeta* [Moscow], September 15, 2017, 7.

75. Vladimir Medinskii, “Vovremia zametit’ razlom” [Noticing disintegration in good time], *Argumenty i fakty*, October 4, 2017, 4.

76. O. Bondar’, “Est’ u revoliutsii nachalo” [The revolution has a beginning], *Molodoi kommunar* [Tula], March 31, 2017.

77. For example, A. Samokhin, “1917-i: Kak eto bylo?” [1917: How was it?], *Kul’tura* [Moscow], March 24, 2017, 2; N. Kutenkikh, “1917-i, 1937-i...” [1917, 1937...], *Vladivostok*, June 15, 2017.

78. Sheliakina, “Kak eto bylo u nas?”

79. Vdoviyak, “Pravoslavnyi brein-ring.”

80. For example, “Kino na temu” [Cinema on the topic], *Severnyi kraj. Iaroslavskii region*, June 7, 2017; E. Kovalevskaia, “Progulka v 1917-i” [A walk in 1917], *Rossiiskaia gazeta* [Moscow], May 25, 2017, 2; “Iubilei Oktiabr’skoi revoliutsii” [The centenary of the October Revolution], *Taimyr* [Dudinka], November 9, 2017; “Na Donu otmechaiut 100-letie revoliutsii” [The Don commemorates the centenary of the revolution], *Molot* [Rostov-na-Donu], November 10, 2017.

81. K. Golodiaev, “Obshchestvo: Fevral’skie ‘tezisy’ 1917-go” [Society: February “theses” of 1917], *Sovetskaia Sibir’* [Novosibirsk], February 15, 2017.

82. For example, S. Ekshtut, “O chem pisali Rossiiskie gazety v ianvare 1917 goda” [What Russian newspapers wrote about in January 1917], *Rossiiskaia gazeta* [Moscow], January 12, 2017, 12; and “V ianvare 1917-go” [In January 1917], *Ogonek* [Moscow], January 16, 2017, 13.

83. “V vashei sem’e vspominaiut o sobytiakh 1917-go?” [Does your family remember the events of 1917?], *Orenburzh’e*, November 8, 2017.

84. For example, Klochkov, “Uroki fevralia 1917-go”; “Analiziruem uroki istorii” [Let us analyze the lessons of history], *Lipetskaia gazeta*, April 8, 2017;

Kalashnikov, “Oktiabr’ 1917-go”; Naranova, “O sobytiakh 1917 goda”; A. Ashikhmina, “No ona ne zabyvalas’...” [But she was not forgotten...], *Stavropol’skaia Pravda*, April 19, 2017; and Kutenkikh, “1917-i, 1937-i....”

85. V. Voloshinova, “Privivka protiv vsiacheskikh revoliutsii” [Vaccination against all types of revolution], *Molot* [Rostov-na-Donu], April 28, 2017.

86. A. Pozdniakov, “Profsoiuzy napomnili o sobytiakh 1917 goda” [Trade unions remembered the events of 1917], *Trud* [Moscow], April 7, 2017, 6.

87. For example, V. Iur’ev and V. Zhirinovskii, “Revoliutsiia—ne povod dlia prazdnika” [Revolution—not a reason for celebration], *Argumenty i fakty* [Moscow], November 1, 2017, 7; “Posle Oktiabria 1917-go nasilie stalo glavnyim instrumentom” [After October 1917 violence became the main tool], *Ogonek*, March 13, 2017.

88. A. Pozdniakov, “Nam vsem ne stoit zabyvat’ uroki 1917-go” [We should all not forget the lessons of 1917], *Trud* [Moscow], January 20, 2017, 7; Samokhin, “1917-i. Kak eto bylo?”

89. “Vikhri vrazhdebnye...” [Hostile whirlwinds...], *Dagestanskaia pravda* [Makhachkala], November 30, 2017.

90. Sergei Mironov, “1917–2017: Istoriia—strogaia dama” [History—a strict lady], *Argumenty nedeli* [Moscow], April 20, 2017, 8; Kutenkikh, “1917-i, 1937-i....”

91. “Kakoe istoricheskoe znachenie imeet dlia Rossii Oktiabr’skaia revoliutsiia 1917 goda?” [What is the historical significance of the October Revolution of 1917 for Russia?], *Lipetskaia gazeta*, November 2, 2017. For discussion of the Soviet Union during the centenary, see V. Kalashnikov, “Oktiabr’ 1917-go”; “Vpered v SSSR” [Forward to the USSR], *Literaturnaia gazeta* [Moscow], February 22, 2017, 28; and V. Matvienko, “Vsmatrivaemsia v proshloe, chtoby luchshe videt’ budushchee” [Examine the past in order to see the future better], *Izvestiia* [Moscow], November 7, 2017, 1.

92. A. Arkhangel’skii, “‘Reshaite sami’: Pochemu Kreml’ izbegaet eticheskoi otsenki revoliutsii 1917 goda?” [“Decide for yourself.” Why is the Kremlin avoiding an ethical assessment of the revolution of 1917?], *Republic (Slon)*, February 6, 2017.

93. V. Kostikov, “Kak poimat’ pero zhar-ptitsy?” [How to catch a firebird’s feather?], *Argumenty i fakty*, November 8, 2017, 5.

94. S. Shelin, “Neinteresnoe nasledie: Pochemu pamiati o revoliutsii 1917 goda net mesta v Rossii 2017-go” [An uninteresting legacy: Why the memory of the revolution of 1917 has no place in Russia in 2017], *Republic (Slon)*, October 16, 2017.

95. G. Popov, “Uroki 1917 goda dlia 2017-go” [The lessons of 1917 for 2017], *Moskovskii komsomolets*, February 22, 2017, 4; D. Travin, “Prizrak 1917

goda: Chetyre stsenariia revoliutsii, kotoroi ne budet” [The Ghost of 1917: Four scenarios of a revolution that will not happen], *Republic (Slon)*, March 6, 2017.

96. Kiriya, “New and Old,” 12.

97. A summary of the meeting is at <https://historyrussia.org/proekty/100-letie-revolutsii-1917-goda/vtoroe-zasedanie-orgkomiteta-posvyashchennoe-100-letiyu-revolutsii-1917-g.html>, and a recording at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pBsxyQ8k594&feature=share>. A transcript of Naryshkin’s interview is at <https://historyrussia.org/proekty/100-letie-revolutsii-1917-goda/sergej-naryshkin-revolutsionnye-sobytiya-1917-goda-bolshe-ne-raskalyvayut-obshchestvo.html>.

98. The number of Russian visitors to the State Museum of Political History in St. Petersburg increased by over a half in 2017, particularly on tours, with peaks around February and, especially, October/November when around three thousand people visited every day; *100-letie Revoliutsii v Muzee Revoliutsii: Muzej politicheskoi istorii Rossii v 2017 godu* [The centenary of the revolution in the Museum of the Revolution: The Museum of the Political History of Russia in 2017] (St. Petersburg: Liubavich, 2018), 8, 68–69.

99. Sergei Spiridonov, “Istoriia Rossiiskoi revoliutsii 1917–1922 gg.: Novyi opyt muzeinoi interpretatsii” [The history of the Russian Revolution 1917–1922: A new experiment in museum interpretation], in *Revoliutsiia 1917 goda v Rossii*, 142–43.

100. E. Gorbunova, “Obrazy, mify i parallely revoliutsionnoi epokhi: Vystavochnye proekty OGAUK ‘Leninskii memorial’ k 100-letiiu velikoi rossiiskoi revoliutsiia” [Images, myths and parallels of the revolutionary epoch: The exhibition projects of OGAUK “Lenin’s memorial” on the centenary of the Great Russian Revolution], in *1917–1922 gg.: Provintsiiia v epokhu sistemnykh krizisov. Materialy Mezhdunarodnogo foruma istorikov, filosofov i publitsistov i Mezhhregional’nogo kraevedcheskogo foruma k 100-letiiu Velikoi rossiiskoi revoliutsii 6–7 dekabria 2017 g. v g. Ul’ianovske* [1917–1922: The provinces in the epoch of systemic crises. Materials of an international forum of historians, philosophers and publicists and interregional local studies forum on the centenary of the Great Russian Revolution] (Ul’ianovsk: Izdatel’ Kachalin Aleksandr Vasil’evich, 2018), 138.

101. On these problems, see the discussion of a project exploring how museums across Russia commemorated the centenary; Iu. Kantor, “Proekt ‘muzei v revoliutsii/revoliutsiia v muzee’: Opyt analiza refleksii professionalov i posetitelei na sobytiia 1917 goda” [The project of “the museum in revolution/the revolution in the museum”: Analyzing the reflections of professionals and visitors on the events of 1917], in *Uroki oktiabria i praktiki sovetsoi sistemy. 1920–1950-e gody: Materialy X mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii. Moskva, 5–7 dekabria 2017 g.* [The lessons of October and practices of the Soviet system. 1920–1950s:

Materials of the tenth international scientific conference] (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2018), 139–46.

102. For a sense of the range of exhibitions, see the articles by Leonid Maksimenkov, Irina Davidian and Iurii Basilov in Bordiugov, ed., *Revoliutsiia-100*, 302–58, 423–54, 476–82.

103. See comments on the “tragic fracture” of 1917 in *Nekto 1917* [Someone 1917] (Moscow: Gosudarstvennaia Tret’iakovskaia galereia, 2017), 31; the “tragedy” that befell the tsar’s family amid the “storm” of revolution in *Tsarskoe selo. 1917: Nakanune...* [Tsarskoe selo. 1917. On the eve...] (St Petersburg: Russkaia kolleksiia, 2017), 3; and the “tragic” experience of October in *Lenin. K 100-letiiu Rossiiskoi revoliutsii 1917 goda: Katalog istoriko-dokumental’noi vystavki* [Lenin. On the centenary of the Russian Revolution of 1917: Catalogue of a historical-source exhibition] (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2017), 7, 9.

104. See the report on the ceremony on March 21, 2017, at <https://historyrussia.org/proekty/100-letie-revolutsii-1917-goda/vystavka-1917-kod-revolutsii-v-muzee-sovremennoj-istorii-rossii.html>.

105. “Illuminator ‘Avrory,’ zapiski Lenina predstavleny na vystavke v ‘Kod revoliutsii. 1917’” [The porthole of the “Aurora”, the notes of Lenin shown at the exhibition “The Code of Revolution. 1917”], TASS, March 21, 2017, <http://tass.ru/obschestvo/4113832>.

106. *1917. Kod revoliutsii: Katalog vystavki. 1917. The Code of Revolution: Exhibition Catalogue* (Moscow: GTsMSIR, 2017), 3.

107. The following discussion is based on personal observations.

108. Various examples are reprinted in *1917. Kod revoliutsii*, 64, 71, 93, 130, 172.

109. *100-letie Revoliutsii v Muzei Revoliutsii*; and Tat’iana Frumenkova, “Muzei Sankt-Peterburga o 100-letii revoliutsii 1917 g. v Rossii: Istoricheskie vystavki” [The museums of St. Petersburg on the centenary of the revolution of 1917 in Russia: Historical exhibitions], in Andrei Nikolaev, ed., *Revoliutsiia 1917 goda v Rossii: Nove podkhody i vzgliady* [The revolution of 1917 in Russia: New approaches and views] (St. Petersburg: RGPU im. A. I Gertsena, 2019), 192–206.

110. *Energiia mechty: K 100-letiiu Velikoi rossiiskoi revoliutsii. Vystavka v Gosudarstvennom istoricheskom muzee* [The energy of dreams: On the centenary of the Great Russian Revolution. Exhibition in the State Historical Museum] (Moscow: GIM, 2017), 8. This discussion is based entirely on this catalogue. See also the interview with Levykin in A. Sabova, “Sroka davnosti dlia etogo sobytia net” [There is no statute of limitations for this event], *Ogonek*, November 6, 2017, 26.

111. At least one independent exhibition reinforced this narrative, if inadvertently. Memorial, an organization targeted repeatedly by the state due to its independent mindset and foreign links, focused on the repressive nature of the early Soviet

state: *Pervye aresty: 25 Oktiabria 1917–4 Ianvaria 1918. Po materialam vystavki “Pervye” (otkrytie 25 Oktiabria 2017)* [The first arrests: October 25, 1917–January 4, 1918. From materials of the exhibition “The First” (opening October 25, 2017)] (Moscow: Memorial, 2017)].

112. Rare exceptions included an exhibition in Vladivostok’s main museum on “Lenin” (a semi-celebratory, Soviet-style collection of Lenin memorabilia) and exhibitions at Nicholas’s places of death and burial at Ekaterinburg and nearby Ganina Yama, which celebrated the “progress” of Imperial Russia.

113. This section is based primarily on visits to exhibitions in Moscow, Ekaterinburg, Tiumen’, Irkutsk and Vladivostok. See also *Moskva, 1917: Vzgliaad s Vagan’kovskogo kholma* [Moscow, 1917: The view from the Vagan’kovskii Hill] (Moscow: Pashkov dom, 2017); and <http://moscow1917.rsl.ru/>.

114. E. Antropov, “Programmy muzeia Novosibirska, posviashchennye 100-letiiu revoliutsii 1917 goda: Problematika vybora temy, predmetnogo riada i sredstv ekspozitsii” [The programs of the museum of Novosibirsk dedicated to the centenary of the revolution of 1917: The problem of selecting the theme, subject line and method of exposition], in *Oktiabr’skaia revoliutsiia 1917 goda v Rossii i ee rol’ v mirovoi istorii: Materialy mezbrezional’noi nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii posviashchennoi 100-letiiu Velikoi oktiabr’skoi revoliutsii, 23–24 noiabria 2017* [The October Revolution of 1917 in Russia and its role in world history: Materials of an interregional scientific-practical conference dedicated to the centenary of the Great October Revolution] (Novosibirsk: SibAGS, 2017), 78–86.

115. A. Muchnik, “Deciphering a Revolution,” *Moscow Times*, March 30, 2017, 11; V. Kostikov, “Slepye povodyri” [Blind guides], *Argumenty i fakty*, November 1, 2017, 6; E. Kriviakina, “Medvedev vzglianul v litso 1917-go” [Medvedev looked at the face of 1917], *Komsomol’skaia Pravda*, November 28, 2017, 2; “Irkutsk v 1917 godu” [Irkutsk in 1917], *Vostochno-Sibirskaiia Pravda*, March 14, 2017; and P. Trifonova, “Krasnaia tochka peremen” [The red point of change], *Respublika Tatarstan*, December 15, 2017.

116. <https://1917.tass.ru/article/8-marta>.

117. https://www.ntv.ru/peredacha/Revolucia_LIVE//.

118. See Boris Sokolov, “Iubilei revoliutsii 1917 goda v khudozhestvennoi literature, khudozhestvennom kino, televizionnykh serialakh, dokumental’nykh fil’makh i v teatral’nykh postanovkakh” [The centenary of the revolution of 1917 in artistic literature, artistic cinema, television serials, documentary films and in theatrical productions], in Bordiugov, ed., *Revoliutsiia-100*, 404–17; and Precious Chatterje-Doody and Vera Tolz, “Regime Legitimation, Not Nation-building: Media Commemoration of the 1917 Revolutions in Russia’s Neo-authoritarian State,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 23, no. 3 (2020): 343–45.

119. Shaun Walker, “Russian Revolution’s ‘Rock’n’roll Star’ Trotsky gets Centenary TV Series,” *Guardian*, November 3, 2017; and Oliver Carroll, “Russian State-run TV Marks Revolution’s Centenary with Surprise Series Recounting Rise and Fall of Leon Trotsky,” *Independent*, October 16, 2017.

120. For a comparison of both series with clips, see Maksim Markov, “Serialy: ‘Trotskii’ pereigrail ‘Demon revoliutsii’ po vsem punktam” [Serials: “Trotskii” outplayed “The Demon of the Revolution” on all counts], *Ridus*, November 9, 2017, <https://www.ridus.ru/news/265096>.

121. See Sokolov, “Iubilei revoliutsii,” 386–98; and “‘Nenauchnaia fantastika’: Istoriiki o serialakh ‘Demon revoliutsii’ i ‘Trotskii’” [“Unscientific fantasy”: Historians on the serials “The Demon of the Revolution” and “Trotskii”], *KinoPoisk*, November 10, 2017; <https://www.kinopoisk.ru/media/article/3064991/>.

122. Elena Perrier (Morenkova), “Memory Watchdogs. Online and Offline Mobilizations around Controversial Historical Issues in Russia,” in Bernsand and Törnquist-Plewa, eds., *Cultural and Political Imaginaries*, 146.

123. For a useful survey of the various online projects and discussions, see Pavel Opalin, “Set’ dlia revoliutsii: 1917 god v tsifrovom prostranstve” [Network for revolution: 1917 in the digital space], in Bordiugov, ed., *Revoliutsiia-100*, 152–77.

124. Marielle Wijermars, “Project 1917—Free History’: Reliving the Russian Revolution in the Digital Age,” *Digital Icons: Studies in Russian, Eurasian and Central European New Media* 18 (2017): 56–57.

125. <https://1917.rt.com/#!/en/twitter>.

126. See the comments from RT’s managing editor, Aleksei Nikolov, in Nikolay Shevchenko, “Dive into the Russian Revolution on Its 100th Anniversary with RT’s New Project,” *Russia Beyond the Headlines*, November 8, 2017, at <https://www.rbth.com/lifestyle/326656-russian-revolution-youtube-rt-360>.

127. Rhys Crilley, Marie Gillespie and Alistair Willis, “Tweeting the Russian Revolution: RT’s #1917LIVE and Social Media Re-enactments as Public Diplomacy,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 23, no. 3 (2020): 354–73; and Stephen Hutchings, “Revolution from the Margins: Commemorating 1917 and RT’s Scandalising of the Established Order,” *ibid.*, 315–34.

128. Similar conclusions were reached in a study of the coverage of the centenary of the October Revolution on nine state-controlled and independent news websites. The authors noted differences in the critical analysis of events and the extent to which parallels were drawn to the present, but argued that the multiplicity of memories failed to challenge the state, instead providing an outlet to “let off steam”; Anna Litvinenko and Andrei Zavadski, “Memories on Demand: Narratives about 1917 in Russia’s Online Publics,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 72, no. 10 (2020): 1657–77 (quote 1673).

129. <https://project1917.com/about>. A version with far fewer posts has been published: Frank Althaus and Mark Sutcliffe, eds., *Eyewitness 1917: The Russian Revolution as It Happened* (London: Fontanka, 2019).

130. K. Safonova, “Mikhail Zygar’—o tom, kak ustroen proekt ‘1917’: Svo-bodnaia istoriia” [Mikhail Zygar’—on how the project “1917: Free history” was created], *Village*, November 15, 2016, at <https://www.the-village.ru/village/weekend/weekendkomment/250333-proekt-1917>. Zygar’ attempts something similar in a book, published in English as *The Empire Must Die: Russia’s Revolutionary Collapse, 1900–1917* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2017).

131. As well as Safonova, “Mikhail Zygar’,” see Mikhail Zygar’, “Putin Likes to Pretend 1917 Never Happened,” *Atlantic*, April 1, 2017; and Pavel Koshkin, “Interview with Mikhail Zygar’: 1917–2017,” Johnson’s Russia List, August 21, 2017, <http://russialist.org/interview-with-mikhail-Zygar'-1917-2017-an-ominous-anniversary-for-russia-here-is-why-the-kremlin-is-not-eager-to-celebrate-the-100th-anniversary-of-the-1917-revolution-and-use-it-in-its-political/>.

132. TED 2018 talk, “What the Russian Revolution Would Have Looked Like on Social Media,” April 2018, https://www.ted.com/talks/mikhail_Zygar'_what_the_russian_revolution_would_have_looked_like_on_social_media?utm_source=twitter.com&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=tedsread. The comparisons with the present are made explicit in his book unlike on the internet site.

133. Wijermars, “Project 1917,” 45–65.

134. See a review of the meeting at <https://historyrussia.org/proekty/100-letie-revolyuitsii-1917-goda/orgkomitet-k-100-letiyu-revolyuitsii-podvel-itogi-raboty-za-god.html>.

135. Anna Lively, “Three Colours of Truth: The Centenary of the Civil War in Russia,” *Revolutionary Russia* 32, no. 2 (2019): 290–94.

136. <https://fom.ru/Proshloe/13829>; and <https://fom.ru/Proshloe/13837>. See also M. Gorshkov and V. Petukhov, “Oktiabr’skaia revoliutsiia 1917 g. i ee posledstviia v vospriatii sovremennykh rossiian” [The October Revolution of 1917 and its consequences in the perceptions of contemporary Russians], *Sotsiologicheskie issledovanie*, no. 1 (2018): 6–18; and Félix Krawatzek, “Which History Matters? Surveying Russian Youth and their Understandings of the Past,” *Problems of Post-Communism*, online (June 1, 2020): 10–11, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10758216.2020.1753081>.

137. Boris Kolonitskii and Mariia Matskevich, “Pamiat’ o ‘Neispol’zovannom’ iubilee: 100-letie revoliutsii v vospriatii zhitelei Rossii [The memory of a “useless” anniversary: The centenary of the revolution from the perspective of the inhabitants of Russia], *Revue des études slaves* XC, no. 1–2 (2019): 23–24; and Boris Kolonitsky and Mariya Matskevich, “Idle Memory? The 1917 Anniversary in Russia,” in Adamski and Gajos, eds., *Circles of the Russian Revolution*, 207–10.

138. <https://wciom.ru/analytical-reviews/analiticheskii-obzor/oktyabrskaya-revoluyuciya-1917-2017>.

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