

# The Idea of a Liberal Russia: The Russian Revolutions of 1917 and the Norwegian Slavist Olaf Broch

Kari Aga Myklebost (UiT The Arctic University of Norway)

In Norway, a substantial amount of historical research has been conducted on the reception of the Russian Revolution by the labor press and the impact of 1917 on the Norwegian labor movement. Considerably less has been written on the reception by other parts of the Norwegian press.<sup>1</sup> This article will take a closer look at how the revolutionary events were presented on the pages of the leading Norwegian conservative newspaper *Aftenposten*, with a special focus on the articles of professor of Slavonic languages Olaf Broch (1867–1961).<sup>2</sup> During the momentous months of 1917 in Russia, Broch wrote several substantial pieces on the unfolding political drama for the newspaper. As *Aftenposten* did not have a correspondent in Russia during the First World War, the newspaper relied on telegrams and on reports in the

---

1 On the radicalization of the Norwegian labor movement by the Russian Revolution, see Øyvind Bjørnson, *På klassekampens grunn* (1900–1920), Arbeiderbevegelsens historie i Norge, vol. 2. (Oslo: Tiden Norsk Forlag 1990); Åsmund Egge, “Norsk arbeiderbevegelses forhold til Sovjetunionen,” in *Norge-Russland. Naboer gjennom 1000 år*, ed. Daniela Büchten et.al. (Oslo: Scandinavian Academic Press 2004), 336–346; Åsmund Egge og Terje Halvorsen, “. . . ‘kriteriet på en kommunist er hans forhold til Sovjetunionen.’ De norsk-sovjetiske partirelasjoner 1917–1991,” *Arbeiderhistorie* (2002), 9–32; Åsmund Egge, “Aleksandra Kollontaj og norsk arbeiderbevegelse 1915–1930,” in *Revolusjon, kjærlighet, diplomati. Aleksandra Kollontaj og Norden*, ed. Yngvild Sorbye (Oslo: Unipub 2008), 55–82; Jorunn Bjørgum, *Martin Tranmæl og radikaliseringen av norsk arbeiderbevegelse 1906–1918* (Oslo: UiO, 1996). Cf. also special issue of the journal *Arbeiderhistorie* 1 (2017), devoted to the centenary of the Russian Revolution. For case studies on the reception of the Revolution in other parts of the Norwegian press, see *Den russiske revolusjon og norsk presse. Mediehistorisk Tidsskrift* 2, no. 28 (2017), accessed 5 April 2018, <http://www.pressetidsskrift.no/tidsskrift/mediehistorisk-tidsskrift-nr-2-28-2017/>.

2 This article is part of an ongoing book project by the author, which will result in a biography of Olaf Broch and his manifold relations with Russia.

Swedish, British, and French press. It also leaned heavily on the insights of Olaf Broch, who read Russian newspapers such as the liberal *Novoe Vremia* regularly, and who received news through letters from a wide network of Russian friends, colleagues, and acquaintances.

Olaf Broch was one of the foremost experts on Russian language, history, and literature in Norway in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> After studying with some of the leading Slavists in Moscow, Leipzig, and Vienna during the 1880s and 1890s, Broch was appointed Professor of Slavonic Languages at the University of Christiania (today's University of Oslo) in 1900, when he was only thirty-three years old. The professorship was the first position of its kind in Norway, and Broch remained here until his retirement in 1937.

Today, Olaf Broch is referred to as the founding father of Slavonic studies in Scandinavia. He wrote several groundbreaking studies of Slavonic languages and phonetics, and educated a handful of students who later became prominent Slavists. His main academic work appeared in 1910, *Ocherk fiziologii slavianskoi rechi* (German edition: *Slavische Phonetik*, 1911), which was part of Vatroslav Jagić's multivolume edition on Slavonic languages published in the immediate prewar years. Up until the outbreak of the First World War, Broch travelled regularly in the Russian Empire as well as in other parts of the Slavonic world, conducting linguistic fieldwork and studying popular culture. Throughout his career, he corresponded with Russian university colleagues and academicians. He was elected to the Norwegian Academy of Sciences and Letters in the late 1890s, acting as general secretary of the Academy from 1924 to 1945. Broch made a substantial effort to maintain relations with the Russian learned world across the political antagonisms of the interwar and war years.

Along with his academic work, Broch lectured extensively outside the university and wrote on a regular basis for the Norwegian press and journals on Russian history and culture, as well as on the burning political issues of the day. He also translated *Anna Karenina* and *The Brothers Karamazov* into

---

3 Cf. Vladimir Karelin and Kari Aga Myklebost, "Professor Olaf Broch i ego russkii mir," *Istoriia. Problemy istorii Skandinavsko-Baltiiskogo regiona* 4 (58), vol. 8 (2017); Kari Aga Myklebost, "Drømmen om det frisinne Russland," in Kari Aga Myklebost and Jens Petter Nielsen, eds., *Norge og Russland: Et særegent naboskap. Ottar 1/2017*, Nr. 314 (Tromsø Museum-Universitetsmuseet), 30–36; Jan Ivar Bjørnflaten et al. (ed.), *A Centenary of Slavic Studies in Norway. The Olaf Broch Symposium. The Norwegian Academy of Sciences and Letters* (Oslo: n.p., 1998); Erik Egeberg, "Forskerprofil Olaf Broch," *Årbok 2003 for Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi* (Oslo: Novus forlag 2004), 223–236; Tamara Lönngren, "Drug i pomoshchnik chelovechestva': perepiska norvezhskogo slavista Olafa Broka," *Vestnik Alians-Arkheo* 12 (2015): 82–97.

Norwegian, thereby introducing some of the leading Russian authors to the Norwegian reading public. His first newspaper articles appeared in 1898, and by 1917 he was one of Norway's major authorities on Russia.<sup>4</sup> This status was largely due to Broch's wide network in Russia which, in addition to academicians, consisted of figures of political, cultural, and diplomatic importance.<sup>5</sup>

Like most Western Europeans up until the February Revolution, Broch believed that Russia was oppressed by the autocratic rule of the tsar. With the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese war in 1904, Broch wrote in *Aftenposten* on the changing popular mood in Russia—its shift from an initial wave of patriotism at the beginning of the war to increased unrest as the Russian fleet suffered defeat in the Far East. The final defeat caused the 1905 Revolution, and Broch reported in *Aftenposten* on the October Manifesto that Tsar Nicholas II published in the wake of the revolution, the formation of legal political parties, and the establishment of a parliament, the first Duma. Broch's articles were well informed, and a strong enthusiasm for the liberal developments in Russian politics shone through. With the convention in 1906 of the parliament, in which different political parties—such as the Constitutional Democrats—were represented, Russia was gradually moving away from autocratic rule towards a certain level of separation of powers. Still, the tsar kept a strong grip, ensuring for himself the right to dissolve parliament, appoint ministers, and control the greater part of state finances.

According to Broch, the Constitutional Democrats (Kadets) and their leader Pavel Miliukov were the leading political force in Russia. Broch sympathized deeply with the liberal political agenda of the Kadets and their quest to bring about a new constitutional order through reform, with parliamentarism as a core principle.<sup>6</sup> When the tsar dissolved the first Duma after only a few months, accusing it of illegal actions, Broch was infuriated and

4 A bibliography of Broch's newspaper and journal articles before 1940 can be found in *Norsk bibliografisk bibliotek*, vol. 3, no. 5 (Oslo: Fabritius & Sønner 1937–1945), 158–162.

5 Broch's archive is located at The Norwegian National Library in Oslo, and contains letters to and from a broad circle of Russian actors, cf. K. N. Gulkevich, *Pis'ma k Olafu Broku 1916–1923*, ed. V. A. Karelin et al. (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2017); Tamara Lönngrén, “... proshu ne zabyt', chto est' u Vas drug': Olaf Brok i Aleksei Aleksandrovich Shakhmatov,” *Slovo. Journal of Slavic Languages, Literatures and Cultures* 56 (2015): 37–57; Jan Ivar Bjørnflaten, “Iz istorii slavistiki v Norvegii: O perepiske inostrannykh slavistov s professorom Olafom Brokom,” *Slavica Litteraria* 15, suppl. 2 (2012): 61–68.

6 For a thorough study on the political project of Miliukov, see Melissa K. Stockdale, *Paul Miliukov and the Quest for a Liberal Russia, 1880–1918* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press 1996).

predicted popular riots of hitherto unknown dimensions in Russia. It was too late to return to a purely autocratic system, he wrote, as the Russian sense of justice had already changed and the political empowerment of the population had grown. This was obvious, Broch argued, from studying the Russian press, where freedom of speech now dominated political debate.<sup>7</sup> While his predictions of broad popular riots did not come true until the next decade, he maintained his belief that liberal reform would prevail in Russia. Broch himself was a liberal conservative, and believed that the introduction of parliamentarism would free the Russian people from autocratic oppression and bring the country onto a path towards modernization that resembled the societal development of Norway and other Western states. As we shall see, this perspective deeply informed his reports on the events of 1917 in Russia.

## A REVOLUTION OF UNEXPECTED LIGHTNESS

News on the outcome of the February Revolution reached Christiania immediately.<sup>8</sup> The day after the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II, Olaf Broch presented the event all over the front page of *Aftenposten*. The heading read: “An historic event of world importance.”<sup>9</sup> With the help of the generals, the leading forces of the Duma had persuaded the tsar to abdicate after days of demonstrations in the streets of Petrograd and increasingly forceful demands for bread, land, and peace. As regiments of soldiers joined the demonstrations, the tsar had realized the gravity of the situation and decided to step down. A temporary committee, established by the Duma, had arrested the ministers of the tsar’s cabinet and proclaimed its plan to organize a provisional government, secure civil rights, conduct elections for a new constituent assembly, and to implement the principle of parliamentarism in Russia.

In *Aftenposten*, Broch emphasized that the revolution had taken place without bloodshed or violence—and he characterized the events leading up to the tsar’s abdication as “a natural evolution. We have only seldom seen such a short timespan proving so clearly the incompetence of an antiquated government system.” By “incompetence,” Broch referred to the tsar’s bad performance as head of the Russian military forces, as well as his reluctance to cooperate with, or make use of, the political capacities of the Duma. Broch expressed his

7 Cf. Myklebost, “Drømmen om det frisinne Russland,” 30–36.

8 Dates are given according to the modern Russian calendar throughout the article; thus the February Revolution is dated from March 8 to March 15, 1917.

9 *Aftenposten* 135, March 15, 1917: “En verdenshistorisk begivenhed.”

strong belief that the Provisional Government represented a viable way forward for Russia and that it would solve enormous problems facing the empire.

Broch's article was full of enthusiastic phrases describing what he saw as democratic winds blowing over Russia. The world had witnessed a peaceful transition of power, he claimed, which was the result of broad support in the Russian population for the actions of the Duma: "It seems that the radical change that this event implies is accomplished with unexpected lightness. This shows us that the event was ripe as a pear, and did not even need to be picked—it simply fell down by itself." He continued: "The parliamentary system which is now introduced in Russia is not the result of a single political party program. It is the result of an almost unanimous claim from the politically empowered part of the population. . . . Amnesty [for political prisoners], full habeas corpus [an end to unlawful detention or imprisonment], justice before the law, and the introduction of communal self-rule maybe within days—all this is singing over Russia, as a message about the full spring that the country has been longing and fighting for, for so long."

A main factor explaining the successful and, according to Broch, peaceful power transition, was that not only the military units of Petrograd but also the Russian army at the Eastern Front supported the Duma. Broch predicted that the political events in the capital would bring new hope to the Russian armed forces and secure victory for the Entente powers. "Knowing that they are now fighting for a new and free Russia, the educated elements of the armed forces will be lifted on a wave of enthusiasm. The renowned spirit of self-sacrifice and thirst for action among the Russian youth will gain wingspan like never before."<sup>10</sup> The article was illustrated with a photograph of the beautiful Tauride Palace where the Duma was convened, a view of Petrograd's main street Nevskii Prospekt where trams, horses, and people passed peacefully, and portraits of some of the main political figures in the old and the new government.

This was the immediate reception in *Aftenposten* of the February Revolution. Broch's deep admiration for the political project of the liberal forces of the Duma, now represented in the Provisional Government, was clearly visible in the report. Broch mentioned neither the popular demands for an end to the war in the streets of Petrograd, nor the devastating effects of the war upon the Russian population. During 1915 and 1916, people suffered increasingly because of inflation and supply shortages, especially in the big cities, and war casualties were extremely high. By the end of 1916, 3.6 million

---

10 *Aftenposten* 135, March 15, 1917: "Revolutionen i Rusland."

soldiers had died or were seriously injured in battles on the Eastern Front.<sup>11</sup> Still, Broch seemed confident that the political turn of events would instill the soldiers at the front with a renewed will to fight.

Broch's optimistic view was supported by an interview, published on the very next page of *Aftenposten*, with an anonymous but allegedly distinguished Russian citizen who was presently in Christiania. The interviewee agreed that the February Revolution would accelerate victory for the Entente: "This will be the first consequence of the revolution," the interviewee predicted.<sup>12</sup> Still, he disagreed with Broch about the motivations of the people partaking in the revolutionary events. According to the interviewee, it was not the idea of a constitutional political system that had made people riot, but their contempt for the pro-German position of the tsar's government, as well as the impoverished state of the population due to the war. "To try and make the masses of the Russian people understand the principles of parliamentarism is of no use. . . . It was the dissatisfaction with the old government's foreign policy that overthrew it." Due to the German origin of Tsarina Alexandra Fedorovna, as well as the high number of tsarist officials of German-Baltic descent, a popular understanding had arisen that the tsar's government and bureaucracy consisted of foreign, German elements imported to Russia and alien to the Russian people. Such ideas were fed by a flow of anti-tsarist pamphlets during the war, peaking in the winter of 1916–1917, that portrayed the tsarist court as corrupted by German influence and decadence.<sup>13</sup> According to these pamphlets, the tsarist authorities did not really want war with Germany, and had secretly worked to diminish the efforts of the Russian army on the Eastern Front. This had resulted in a protracted and devastating war for Russia.

Thus, three different views of the driving forces behind the February Revolution were aired in *Aftenposten* on 15 March 1917: the democratic, liberal vision advanced by Broch, implying that the Russian population had a strong "urge for liberty"; the war-weariness of the population and the demands for a fast conclusion of the war; and lastly, the hatred for the perceived "Germanness" and decadence of the tsarist authorities. Nevertheless, it was Broch's political vision and the idea of the Russian people demonstrating for freedom in the

11 Cf. Åsmund Egge, "Den Russiske Revolusjon," in *Store norske leksikon*, accessed 5 April 2018, [https://snl.no/Den\\_russiske\\_revolusjon](https://snl.no/Den_russiske_revolusjon).

12 *Aftenposten* 135, March 15, 1917: "En fremtrædende russer udtaler sig til 'Aftenposten' om situationen."

13 Cf. Orlando Figes, *A People's Tragedy. The Russian Revolution* (London: The Bodley Head 2017), 348 ff.

form of constitutional rule that filled the whole front page of the newspaper. There was little doubt as to which perception of the events in Russia resonated most with the conservative *Aftenposten*. As we know today, all three currents played a part in the February Revolution, but in March 1917, it was still not clear which current would be dominant in the long run. The situation was not as settled as Broch claimed.

## THE FEBRUARY REVOLUTION ACCORDING TO THE LABOR PRESS

The ideology behind Broch's and *Aftenposten's* stance towards Russia in 1917 becomes even clearer if we turn to reports on the February Revolution in the labor press. Here, a more violent and dangerous course of events was depicted. On March 10, the newspaper *Social-Demokraten* reported that there had been a week (starting on 8 March) of upheavals and street fights in several Russian cities and industrial centers. Petrograd was like a combat zone, with people raiding magazines and many shot and wounded or killed by armed forces.<sup>14</sup> Rumor had it that revolutionaries had blown up the railroad bridge across the Neva river, but official reports were lacking. The tsar had ordered the dissolution of the Duma, and *Social-Demokraten* stated that "the avalanche of revolutionary forces that is now on the move" would be very hard to stop.<sup>15</sup> On March 15, the newspaper reported on the Duma seizing power and establishing order again. However, the paper observed that a strong revolutionary mood still dominated the streets of Petrograd. The journalist went on to explain in detail the multitude of factions and motivations within the revolutionary camp, from the Socialist Revolutionaries to the nihilists. Overall, the situation was described as more open-ended than in *Aftenposten*. According to *Social-Demokraten*, the revolution was not yet complete, the war was still on—and even if the garrison in Petrograd had declared loyalty to the new Provisional Government, it was still uncertain if the Russian army at the front would do the same.<sup>16</sup>

In hindsight, it is easy to see that *Social-Demokraten* was closer to the truth than *Aftenposten*. In the first three days of the revolution (March 8–10) it is estimated that 450,000 people took to the streets in Petrograd, at first in rather orderly demonstrations shouting for bread. On the second and third day, the slogans turned more political, and red flags and banners appeared.

14 *Social-Demokraten*, March 13, 1917: "Revolutionær bevægelse i Rusland."

15 *Social-Demokraten*, March 14, 1917: "Den revolutionære bevægelse i Rusland."

16 *Social-Demokraten*, March 15, 1917: "Fuldstændig revolution i Rusland. Zarens regering arresteret."



The crowd's slogans were dominated by explicit demands, such as "Down with the Tsar!" and "Down with the War!" As the soldiers of the Petrograd garrisons mutinied and some 8,000 prisoners were released, the level of violence increased, and the tsar was subsequently forced to abdicate. According to some historians, more people were killed and injured—many by pure accident because of the chaos—during the riots in March than in the Bolshevik coup some months later.<sup>17</sup>

One reason why reports on the violence were scarce in *Aftenposten* was that official telegrams giving credible information were lacking—and the newspaper chose not to communicate what it labelled as unreliable sensational notes. We can assume that the enthusiasm of Broch was conditioned in part by the limited information on the situation in Russia seeping through to the outer world.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, he was politically inclined to emphasize the legitimacy of the liberal forces in the Duma seizing power. Ever since the 1905 Revolution, he had followed developments in Russian politics closely, believing strongly in the Duma as an institution and in the constitutional reform program of the Kadets. In the days and weeks following the abdication of the tsar, Broch increasingly saw the revolution as bloodless and hoped for a peaceful transition to a liberal political system. Several of the ministerial positions in the Provisional Government were taken up by liberal Kadets, and the government issued manifestos containing promises of rapid reform. The Kadet leader Pavel Miliukov became minister for foreign affairs.

The labor press, also for ideological reasons, seems to have been more willing to print rumors, especially when they spoke of revolutionary conditions. The reports in *Social-Demokraten* from Petrograd relied heavily on eyewitness accounts from people who had just arrived in Scandinavia from Russia. These were printed without critical remarks, even if the paper had little chance to verify the accounts. The Norwegian labor movement had promoted revolutionary ideas before February, 1917, and was strongly radicalized by the events in Russia. The editor of *Social-Demokraten* in 1917, Jacob Vidnes,

17 Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, 321.

18 Broch noted in his article on March 15 that no regular telegrams had been received from Petrograd since March 11, and this led him to assume that great changes were taking place—but the flow of rumors from Russia over the last months had taught him to be cautious and wait for reliable information. The message from Petrograd telegram bureau on March 15 was the first official report in several days. On telegram bureaus and news information in Norway during World War I, see Jens Petter Nielsen (ed.), *Russland kommer nærmere. Norge og Russland 1814–1917* (Oslo: Pax forlag, 2014), 529–532.



did not belong to the most radical wing of the Norwegian Labor Party, but he still emphasized the revolutionary character of the February Revolution, quite in line with general opinion within the labor movement. In contrast to this, in *Aftenposten* the revolution was hailed as bourgeois in nature, and its revolutionary currents downplayed.

## WAR ALLIANCES AND TRADE INTERESTS

At this stage, the differences in *Aftenposten's* and *Social-Demokraten's* reports on Russian developments were not particularly marked. A genuine divergence, however, developed in the summer and early fall, and increased drastically after the Bolshevik seizure of power in November, 1917. In March of that year, both newspapers had joined in the widespread enthusiasm in Norway following the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II. In Norway, the tsar had long been a symbol of oppression and outdated autocracy for conservatives, radicals, and liberals alike. In the days following the abdication, *Aftenposten* reported on the establishment of the Provisional Government and its promises of civil rights, on growing popular demands in Russia for a republic, on the abolishment of the death penalty, and the release of political prisoners. The paper also printed greetings from Great Britain to the Russian people. In only a few reports were there hints of anxiety about the continuing revolutionary currents among the Russian population.<sup>19</sup>

*Aftenposten's* depiction of the February Revolution as a victory for Russian liberal forces was quite in line with the general reception of the events in the press of the neutral, small Scandinavian states, as well as in the press of the Entente allies. In Great Britain, the February Revolution was celebrated as the fulfilment of a hope long nurtured. Now Russia had freed herself from autocracy, she would embark upon a road to liberal democracy—parliamentarism, the separation of powers, and civil liberties. Russia was to be part of modern Europe, the British press proclaimed.<sup>20</sup> The Provisional Government's foreign minister, Pavel Miliukov (the leader of the Kadets), declared that Russia would strictly observe

19 *Aftenposten* 16, March 24, 1917, various reports.

20 Cf. *The Daily Mirror*, March 24, 1917. On the reception in Sweden, see Martin Alm, "Ryska revolutionen i svenska ögon 1917–1920," in *Rysk spegel. Svenska berättelser om Sovjetunionen—och om Sverige*, ed. Kristian Gerner & Klas-Göran Karlsson (Lund: Nordic Academic Press 2008), 113–149; in Denmark, see various contributions in S. Aa. Christensen and H. Gotlieb (eds.), *Danmark og Rusland i 500 år* (København: Det Sikkerheds-og Nedrustningspolitiske Udvalg 1993).

all existing international treaty obligations and devote herself to the achievement of victory in the war if the Allies and the United States formally recognized the government as Russia's legitimate authority.<sup>21</sup>

The enthusiastic reception of the revolution in Western Europe was to a certain degree a product of the war alliances. Tsarist Russia before 1917 was seen as a stronghold of despotism, and after Russia joined the Entente in the autumn of 1914 the argument that the Entente was waging a righteous war against the authoritarian and militaristic empires of Central Europe became somewhat shaken. After the downfall of tsarist power in February, 1917, Russia became a more credible ally of the Western states. Russia's partners were now hoping for her to develop democratic institutions, and thus make uniform the ideological front against the Central Powers.<sup>22</sup>

The positive reception of the February Revolution in the British and French press quickly filtered through to neutral, but Entente-friendly, Norway. Russian political exiles to Western Europe contributed to this reception. *Aftenposten* reported from London that meetings in the Russian émigré community were characterized by "an immense enthusiasm for the new order of things in Russia," and that they expected the effect to be a strengthening of the democratic movement in Europe as a whole and the suppression of militarism.<sup>23</sup> The Norwegian foreign minister joined in the optimism. After a meeting with imperial Russia's envoy to Norway, Konstantin Gulkevich noted that the same principles and ideas that were at the foundation of Norway's constitution would now guide Russia's political development.<sup>24</sup>

The growing interest of the Norwegian export industry in the Russian market also conditioned the positive reception of the February Revolution. In the decade before the outbreak of the First World War, along with the other Scandinavian countries and Germany, Norway had invested eagerly in Russia. After the dissolution of the union between Sweden and Norway in 1905, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and diplomatic legations abroad were established. The new Norwegian legation in St. Petersburg and envoy Nikolai Chr. Grove Prebensen saw supporting Norwegian investments in Russia as

21 Stockdale, *Paul Miliukov*, 251.

22 Cf. Alm, "Ryska revolutionen," 128.

23 *Aftenposten* 216, May 1, 1917: "Revolutionen i Rusland og russerne i England."

24 Sven Holtsmark (ed.), *Norge og Sovjetunionen 1917–1955. En utenrikspolitisk dokumentasjon* (Oslo: Cappelen forlag 1995), 27.

their foremost task.<sup>25</sup> The outbreak of the war resulted in increased profit from foreign trade for the neutral Scandinavian states, as Germany was no longer a competitor. Norwegian investments in the Russian market grew during the years of conflict, and entrepreneurs prepared themselves for “the war after the War”—the economic race for the Russian market that was expected to start as soon as the conflict ended.<sup>26</sup>

## AN ANTICIPATED REVOLUTION

Even though the February Revolution was front-page news, it was not entirely unexpected. The idea of an imminent bourgeois revolution in Russia had been introduced to the Norwegian public prior to February, 1917. During the First World War, the neutral small states of Norway and Sweden constituted the so-called “Scandinavian corridor,” a travel route between Russia and the Allies. From 1914, a number of Russian politicians, intellectuals, businessmen, and others journeyed through Stockholm and Christiania. In the spring of 1916, and again in the autumn, Pavel Miliukov visited Norway as part of a delegation tasked with strengthening the perception of Russia as a credible member of the Entente by emphasizing the progressive elements of the Duma. At the same time, Russia’s envoy to Norway, Konstantin Gulkevich, seized this opportunity and cooperated with Olaf Broch to arrange two public lectures by Miliukov in Christiania in September, 1916.<sup>27</sup> For Gulkevich, the lectures were part of a broader effort to enhance the image of Russia in Norway and to fight the old idea of a Russian menace towards Norway. Miliukov lectured on how Russian political and religious development over the centuries should be understood as an integral part of European history, not as a deviation from European developments.<sup>28</sup> Among the audience were the Norwegian Prime Minister Gunnar

25 Kari Aga Myklebost, “Nikolai Prebensen and Norway’s first legation in Russia, 1906–1920” in *Caution & Compliance. Norwegian-Russian Diplomatic Relations 1814–2014*, ed. Kari Aga Myklebost and Stian Bones, (Stamsund: Orkana Akademisk 2012), 71–86.

26 Cf. Bent Jensen, “Det ny Amerika.” *Rusland og dansk erhvervsliv før 1917* in *Danmark og Rusland i 500 år*, ed. S. Aa. Christensen and H. Gotlieb (København: Det Sikkerheds-og Nedrustningspolitiske Udvalg 1993), 241–261; Nielsen, *Russland kommer nærmere*, 501–524.

27 K. N. Gulkevich, *Pis’ma k Olafu Broku 1916–1923*, 19–22; Paul Miliukov, *Political memoirs 1905–1917* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967), 370. On Gulkevich’s period as Russia’s envoy to Norway, see Nielsen, *Russland kommer nærmere*, 505–507.

28 *Aftenposten* 471, September 4, 1916: “Dumaens liberale fører om Ruslands ydre og indre politik”; *Aftenposten* 481, September 19 1916: “Russland og Europa. Professor Miljukov”;

Knudsen and several prominent Russian citizens in Christiania. With the help of Broch, the lectures were printed in the journal *Samtiden*, and *Aftenposten* covered Miliukov's visit in an interview where the leader of the Kadets explained his view of the ongoing war. According to Miliukov, the Entente was fighting a defensive war against German militarism and aggression. He rejected the question of war-weariness among Russian soldiers, and underscored that it was necessary to defeat Germany to secure a lasting peace in Europe. He was confident that a liberal era awaited Russia after victory was achieved. Miliukov talked at length about how he envisaged that the land question and other burning policy issues in Russia could be solved by way of progressive reform.<sup>29</sup>

Owing to Miliukov's visit and its coverage by *Aftenposten*, the idea of a liberal Russia soon to manifest itself spread among the Norwegian public. During the winter of 1916–1917, the newspaper *Tidens Tegn* joined in the promotion of progressive Russia. Gulkevich organized a trip to Petrograd for one of the paper's journalists, to cover the political status quo of Russia, and especially the discussions in the Duma. The trip resulted in a series of articles printed in January, 1917, depicting "a constitutional maturation" in the Duma during 1915 and 1916, with progressive forces leading Russia slowly but steadily towards parliamentarism. "The great significance of the liberation movement in Russia today is that it has reached those layers of society which so far have been the pillars of state bureaucracy. . . . The liberation movement can be held up [by the tsar's reaction], but it can no longer be stopped," the journalist concluded, only weeks before the February Revolution.<sup>30</sup>

## THE NATIONALITY QUESTION

During the spring of 1917, Olaf Broch was filled with admiration for the Provisional Government's promises of a new nationality policy. Broch knew and appreciated the national and linguistic diversity of the Russian Empire from fieldwork and study trips in his earlier years, and considered this a

---

*Aftenposten* 482, September 19, 1916, "Verdenskrigens aarsag"; Paul Miljukov, "Russland og Europa," *Samtiden* (1916): 445–463; 495–510.

29 *Aftenposten* 471, September 14, 1916: "Dumaens liberale fører om Ruslands ydre og indre politik"; *Aftenposten* 481, September 19, 1916: "Russland og Europa. Professor Miljukov"; *Aftenposten* 482, September 19, 1916: "Verdenskrigens aarsag"; Paul Miljukov, "Russland og Europa," *Samtiden* (1916): 445–463; 495–510.

30 *Tidens Tegn* 14, January 15, 1917: "Rusland under forvandlingens lov." Cf. also Nielsen, *Russland kommer nærmere*, 532–534.

key political issue to be handled by the new authorities.<sup>31</sup> Imperial Russia consisted of almost 200 different linguistic and religious groups, and “the nationality question” had become increasingly troublesome for the tsarist authorities during the last decades of the nineteenth century, as national movements gained support in various corners of the empire, not least in the western borderlands. Demands for national autonomy also made up part of the revolutionary currents in the spring of 1917, and a basic new principle was implemented immediately after the formation of the Provisional Government: a recognition of all national and religious groups within the empire as equal in terms of civil rights.

As the government started to act on its liberal program, Broch reported eagerly in *Aftenposten*. In April, he presented to his readers the Provisional Government’s declaration on cultural autonomy for all nationalities within the empire. Broch emphasized that “the immediate and radical [granting of full civil rights to all citizens] shows us that this is a question of conscience for liberal Russia; it simply considers equal civil rights for different national and religious groups as human rights.”<sup>32</sup> This policy demonstrated the “patriotic nationalism” of the Russian liberal movement, wrote Broch, in stark contrast to the national chauvinism and assimilative policy towards minority groups in autocratic states such as old, tsarist Russia. According to Broch, the tentative promises about how the national question would be handled from now on were perhaps the strongest proof that Russia was about to become part of the modern, progressive world.

Broch predicted a future federal structure for the new Russian state, and pointed out that this was an idea with certain historical roots in Russia. It was first discussed by the Decembrists in the 1820s, only to resurface again with the progressive intelligentsia in around 1848. Finally, at the founding of the party in 1905, it was made part of the Kadet political program. The core idea had been the same all along: the centralism of the Russian Empire should yield to a federal structure that would better serve the interests of the multinational Russian population. And with the February Revolution, the time had come to put the idea into practice: “For, whereas old Russia saw the heterogenic character of the population as a threat and persecuted every sign of separatism, real or imagined, progressive Russia sees this variety as richness, and is ready to treat it in a just way,” Broch wrote. He pointed out how leading liberals had

31 Cf. Myklebost, “Drømmen om det frisinne Russland,” 33–34.

32 *Aftenposten* 167, April 1, 1917: “Det nye Rusland og nationalismen.”

already welcomed Ukraine's demands for linguistic and cultural independence, and argued that Russia to some extent already consisted of linguistic and ethnographic core areas, which could make up the basis for a federal structure. Still, Broch admitted that this was not an easy political project to promote in war-torn Russia, where Great Russian national currents were most alive in some regions. It could not be taken for granted that a majority of the Russian population would support the idea. Moreover, Russia contained a multitude of regions with mixed populations and no obvious national or linguistic borders. The development of a solid federal structure had to be considered a long-term project, and the process could not be hastened, Broch stated.

Even if Broch had to admit that a federal structure seemed utopian at present, he argued that Russian progressive forces represented nothing less than an avant-garde in the nationality question, promoting political solutions that were sorely needed in all of Europe:

Not only Russia needs new political ideas . . . in the wake of this devastating war. . . . Just as nationalism can be of great cultural value, it can be a destructive force when used in economic struggles, as well as morally despicable when practiced to suppress other people. . . . Liberal Russia . . . holds a more cosmopolitan and wider view [on nationality]. Of course, we cannot expect federal structures to appear in Russia while the country is still at war. We who believe in Russia and the future of her people must even hope that a certain "imperialism" will hold the country together, as long as enemies are threatening at the country's borders. A Russian chaos would be a disaster for all of Europe. But there comes a time after the war. And then we will see the development of a more liberal, higher Russian view on nationalism, on the organization of the state and its tasks, to the benefit of all humanity.<sup>33</sup>

## TOWARDS OCTOBER

To Broch and the readers of *Aftenposten*, the case of neighboring Finland in the aftermath of the February Revolution was of special interest. Finland had been part of the Russian Empire—as a grand duchy—with certain autonomous rights since 1809. As national sentiment and claims of increased autonomy grew in Finland during the second half of the nineteenth century, tsarist Russia

---

33 Ibid.

implemented a harsh policy of Russification, resulting in increased nationalist resistance and demands for independence. In Norway, there was strong sympathy with the Finnish struggle against Russian autocracy.

In an article on the Provisional Government's nationality policy, Broch revealed that he had asked Miliukov about his position on the "Finnish question" when he visited Norway in 1916. Miliukov, wrote Broch, had answered that the question had to be thoroughly discussed between Russia and Finland as equal partners. To Broch, this was an indication that the Provisional Government understood the importance of the matter, and that it would take steps in a liberal direction in due time. One week later, *Aftenposten* printed an interview with Miliukov on the front page, where he—now acting as Foreign Minister—declared that a new era had dawned in Russia. The Russian people had matured politically, and the old order was crushed once and for all, Miliukov declared. He then touched briefly upon the nationality question, confirming that the future would see political freedom for all of Russia's nationalities. Miliukov's main message to *Aftenposten* was that Norway's old idea of the Russian menace could now be buried once and for all, and as soon as the war was over, trade relations between Scandinavia and Russia would blossom like never before.<sup>34</sup>

Miliukov's plans for the future of Russia were soon destroyed by events. Two weeks after his interview in *Aftenposten*, there was a new wave of demonstrations in Petrograd, demanding the immediate withdrawal of Russia from the war. The demonstrations were caused by a secret note written by Miliukov on the continued war aims of the government and its commitment to fight Germany. Miliukov's war policy was highly controversial within the government, and several ministers sought to remove him from office in the weeks following the disclosure of the secret note.<sup>35</sup> His policy was also strongly condemned by the Petrograd Soviet, and the situation in the city seemed increasingly unstable. Broch was clearly worried by the rising tensions and published a short piece in *Aftenposten* on a speech given on May 1 by Georgy Plekhanov, the acclaimed founding father of Russian socialism. Broch cited Plekhanov's call for moderation and patience, and argued that the Provisional Government needed time to prove its worth. Broch ended his article with a sigh: "It remains to be seen what impact the words of the old leader can make."<sup>36</sup>

34 *Aftenposten* 176, April 8, 1917: "Det nye Russland og Norden."

35 Stockdale, *Paul Miliukov*, 252–255.

36 *Aftenposten* 245, May 17, 1917: "Rusland. Til belysning af stillingen."



The very next day, Miliukov was forced to resign as minister of foreign affairs, after only eight weeks in the position. At the same time, several members of the Petrograd Soviet joined the government.<sup>37</sup> During the summer, the continued disagreements within the government on the war issue led to increased support for the Bolsheviks, the only political party of note that was willing to sign an immediate and unconditional peace treaty with Germany. Moreover, the patriotic nationalism of liberal Russia that Broch had praised so eagerly in April was severely compromised. When the Finnish Diet in July declared autonomy from Russia, the Provisional Government responded by dissolving it. New Russia clearly could not afford national liberation movements in the middle of the war.

In early November, Broch wrote in *Aftenposten* defending this act of the Provisional Government, and argued that the elections in Finland in October had proved that the majority of the Finnish population supported the conservatives and their call for order and stability, rather than autonomy, in the current situation. Moreover, Broch emphasized that sympathy for Finland had declined sharply among Entente liberals over the last months due to young Finns joining the Germans in their fight against Russia. The good will of Russia regarding Finland's future autonomy fully depended upon Finnish loyalty in the ongoing war. This was quite fair and could not be disputed, Broch seemed to argue between the lines.<sup>38</sup> Similar viewpoints were advanced in other parts of the conservative Norwegian press, although critical voices defending Finnish autonomy were also present, even in *Aftenposten*.<sup>39</sup>

In *Aftenposten*'s columns, the enthusiasm of March and April had been replaced through the summer and early autumn by worried reports on political instability and unrest on the streets of Russia's big cities. In mid-June, Broch published a harsh attack on what he called the mob rule of present Russia, and described Lenin as the great negative light of the day.<sup>40</sup> Broch had joined what had now become an outright fight for liberal Russia against the propaganda and mobilization of the Bolsheviks.

Only days later, *Aftenposten* reported that the socialists had won the local elections in Petrograd whereas the Kadets had lost support.<sup>41</sup> From Broch's point

37 Stockdale, *Paul Miliukov*, 255–259.

38 *Aftenposten* 558, November 2, 1917: "Rusland og Finland. Den russiske regjering's forslag. Af professor Olaf Broch."

39 Cf. *Aftenposten* 569, November 9, 1917: "Finland og Rusland. Af professor Teodor Odhner."

40 *Aftenposten* 296, June 16, 1917: "Pøbelvælde og retssans."

41 *Aftenposten* 315, June 27, 1917: "Russiske breve til Aftenposten. Socialisternes sier ved kommunevalget i Petrograd."

of view, the destabilizing forces were gaining terrain. Still, he did not express doubts about his belief in liberal Russia, at least not in public. Moreover, he maintained his view that Russia's continued war efforts within the Entente was proof of the country's true progressiveness. Broch could neither accept nor understand the demands for Russia's withdrawal from the war that were stated so loudly by the demonstrators and supported by the Bolsheviks. The powerful image of Germany as the enemy, and the ideological portrayal of the war by the Entente and in liberal Russian circles, dominated Broch's perception of the situation.

Like many others in Western Europe who sympathized with liberal Russia and the ideas of the initial Provisional Government, Broch waited and hoped for the situation to be solved by Germany's military defeat. Within the Entente, victory was believed to be imminent, especially after the US entered the war in April, 1917. During the summer, Broch made plans to travel to Petrograd and even to send his eldest son on a study trip to Russia for a year. The plan was abandoned as late as the middle of September. Envoy Gulkevich, who had helped with the practical arrangements for the trip, agreed with Broch that it was wise to temporarily put the plan aside, although he held strong hopes that "circumstances will soon allow him [Broch's son] to carry through his study trip."<sup>42</sup> In a series of letters in the summer of 1917, Gulkevich assured Broch that there was reason to be optimistic and hold on to the idea that "order would defeat anarchy" in Russia.<sup>43</sup>

The unwavering faith of Olaf Broch throughout 1917 in the ideas and policies of liberal Russia must be understood in the light of the dominant position on the war issue of the time, and the strong ideological differences between the two alliances in the conflict. To Broch, as to Norwegian liberal and conservative opinion in general, peace and stability in Europe depended upon the defeat of Germany and her allies. After the February Revolution and the downfall of tsarist power, Russia attained an increased ideological importance in this fight. And compared to the great cause of the war, the suffering of the Russian people and their demands for peace seem to have made little impact on Broch. He perceived this suffering primarily as a result of the Bolsheviks stirring up popular unrest and encouraging mob rule.

The war years had also brought Russia closer to Norway than ever before. This manifested itself in growing trade relations, in the building of a railroad to Murman which brought even higher expectations of trading opportunities,

42 K. N. Gulkevich, *Pis'ma k Olafu Broku 1916–1923*, 29 ff.

43 Ibid., 23–30.

and also in the plans for a bilateral agreement on hydropower installations on the border river of Pasvik. Gulkevich's efforts to enhance Russia's standing in Norwegian public opinion also seemed to bear fruit.<sup>44</sup> Altogether, this must have strengthened Broch's belief that things were developing in the right direction. Russia was really on the brink of liberalization, and the future held the bright promise of increased contacts between Russia and Western Europe.

Moreover, Broch's viewpoint should probably be understood in the light of the situation in Norwegian domestic politics—the deepening political divide in Norway between the growing labor movement and the establishment. In Norway, more than in any other Scandinavian country, revolutionary currents within the labor movement were strong. During the war, antimilitarism had become a main cause within the Norwegian labor movement, as well as in the West as a whole, and the wish to end the war was closely associated with Europe's revolutionary elements. In late March, one of the leading Bolsheviks, Alexandra Kollontai, spoke at a meeting of the Christiania Workers' Association. He asserted that the war was an imperialist conflict and promised that the Bolsheviks would withdraw the Russian army as soon as they took power in Russia.<sup>45</sup> For Russian liberals, as well as Olaf Broch, giving in to the calls for a peace treaty must have seemed the same as giving in to the revolutionary forces.

## CONCLUSION

Through his articles, and in cooperation with the Russian envoy to Norway, Konstantin Gulkevich, Olaf Broch contributed to the myth of "the glorious February Revolution" as a bloodless revolution. As historians have pointed out, this was a liberal myth that was required by Miliukov and the progressive forces of the first Provisional Government in order to legitimize its fragile power.<sup>46</sup> Still, we must assume that it was more than a myth to the progressive actors involved. In Norway, Olaf Broch was one of the foremost and most sincere proponents of this perception of Russian politics—and one of Miliukov's keenest supporters. After the Bolshevik seizure of power, Broch repeatedly wrote on what he saw as the Bolshevik's speculative program, and on how they—despite their name—represented only an extremist part of Russian socialism. He argued that they should be considered a temporary phenomenon. According to Broch, the Bolsheviks

44 Cf. Nielsen, *Russland kommer nærmere*, 525–541.

45 Ibid., 543.

46 Figes, *A People's Tragedy*, 321, 351 ff.

would disappear again as suddenly as they had appeared on the main stage of world politics. As time would prove, this was not to be the case.

## Bibliography

- Alm, Martin. "Ryska revolutionen i svenska ögon 1917–1920." In *Rysk spegel. Svenska berättelser om Sovjetunionen—och om Sverige*, edited by Kristian Gerner and Klas-Göran Karlsson, 113–149. Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2008.
- Björgum, Jorunn. *Martin Tranmæl og radikaliseringen av norsk arbeiderbevegelse 1906–1918*. Oslo: UiO, 1996.
- Bjørnflaten, Jan Ivar, et al., eds. *A Centenary of Slavic Studies in Norway. The Olaf Broch Symposium*. The Norwegian Academy of Sciences and Letters. Oslo: n.p., 1998.
- Bjørnflaten, Jan Ivar. "Iz istorii slavistiki v Norvegii: O perepiske inostrannykh slavistov s profes-sorom Olafom Brokom," *Slavica Litteraria* 15, suppl. 2 (2012): 61–68.
- Björnson, Øyvind. *På klassekampens grunn (1900–1920), Arbeiderbevegelsens historie i Norge*, vol. 2. Oslo: Tiden Norsk Forlag, 1990.
- Christensen, S. Aa., and H. Gotlieb, eds. *Danmark og Rusland i 500 år*. København: Det SikkerhedsNedrustningspolitiske Udvalg, 1993.
- Den russiske revolusjon og norsk presse. Mediehistorisk Tidsskrift* 2, no. 28 (2017). Accessed 5 April 2018. <http://www.presetidsskrift.no/tidsskrift/mediehistorisk-tidsskrift-nr-2282017/>.
- Egeberg, Erik. "Forskerprofil Olaf Broch." In *Årbok 2003 for Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi*, 223–236. Oslo: Novus forlag, 2004.
- Egge, Åsmund, and Terje Halvorsen. "... 'kriteriet på en kommunist er hans forhold til Sovjetunionen.' De norsk-sovjetiske partirelasjoner 1917–1991." *Arbeiderhistorie* (2002): 9–32.
- Egge, Åsmund. "Norsk arbeiderbevegelses forhold til Sovjetunionen." In *Norge-Russland. Naboer gjennom 1000 år*, edited by Daniela Büchten et al, 336–346. Oslo: Scandinavian Academic Press, 2004.
- Egge, Åsmund. "Aleksandra Kollontaj og norsk arbeiderbevegelse 1915–1930." In *Revolusjon, kjærlighet, diplomati. Aleksandra Kollontaj og Norden*, edited by Yngvild Sørbye, 55–82. Oslo: Unipub, 2008.
- Egge, Åsmund. "Den Russiske Revolusjon." *Store norske leksikon*. Accessed 5 April 2018. [https://snl.no/Den\\_russiske\\_revolusjon](https://snl.no/Den_russiske_revolusjon).
- Figes, Orlando. *A People's Tragedy. The Russian Revolution*. London: The Bodley Head, 2017.
- Gulkevich, K. N. *Pis'ma k Olafu Broku 1916–1923*, edited by V. A. Karelin et al. Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2017.
- Holtmark, Sven, ed. *Norge og Sovjetunionen 1917–1955. En utenrikspolitisk dokumentasjon*. Oslo: Cappelen forlag, 1995.
- Jensen, Bent. "'Det ny Amerika.' Rusland og dansk erhvervsliv før 1917." In *Danmark og Rusland i 500 år*, edited by S. Aa. Christensen and H. Gotlieb, 241–261. København: Det Sikkerheds-og Nedrustningspolitiske Udvalg, 1993.

- Karelin, Vladimir, and Kari Aga Myklebost. "Professor Olaf Brok i ego russkii mir." *Istoriia. Problemy istorii Skandinavsko-Baltiiskogo regiona* 4 (58), vol. 8 (2017).
- Lönnngren, Tamara. "'Drug i pomoshchnik chelovechestva': Perepiska norvezhskogo slavista Olafa Broka." *Vestnik Alians-Arkheo* 12 (2015): 82–97.
- Lönnngren, Tamara. "'...proshu ne zabyt', chto est' u Vas drug': Olaf Brok i Aleksei Aleksandrovich Shakhmatov." *Slovo. Journal of Slavic Languages, Literatures and Cultures* 56 (2015): 37–57.
- Miliukov, Paul. *Political Memoirs 1905-1917*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967.
- Myklebost, Kari Aga. "Nikolai Prebensen and Norway's first legation in Russia, 1906-1920" in *Caution & Compliance. Norwegian-Russian Diplomatic Relations 1814-2014*, edited by Kari Aga Myklebost and Stian Bones, 71–86. Stamsund: Orkana Akademisk, 2012.
- Myklebost, Kari Aga. "Drømmen om det frisinnde Russland." *Norge og Russland: Et særegent naboskap* 314 (2017): 30–36.
- Nielsen, Jens Petter, ed. *Russland kommer nærmere. Norge og Russland 1814–1917*. Oslo: Pax forlag, 2014.
- "Olaf Broch." In *Norsk bibliografisk bibliotek*, vol. 3, no. 5, 158–162. Oslo: Fabritius & Sønner, 1937–1945.
- Stockdale, Melissa K. *Paul Miliukov and the Quest for a liberal Russia, 1880–1918*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996.