

A Reluctant Opposition: Soviet Liberals within the Moscow Tribune

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With the advent of perestroika, the USSR witnessed a wave of activism called the “informal movement.” In 1987, along with chess and sports clubs, clubs devoted to political discussion started to appear. Seizing the opportunities created by glasnost by the 1989 and 1990 elections, many of these clubs turned to active politics and played an important role in building up the movements and parties that challenged Gorbachev’s leadership over perestroika.¹ Among the numerous discussion clubs that blossomed throughout the country, the Moscow Tribune (*Moskovskaia Tribuna*, hereafter MT) was by far the most prestigious and influential, gathering the Muscovite who’s who of the Soviet liberal intelligentsia for highbrow discussions on current political issues.² From its creation in 1988 until 1991, its monthly sessions were often reported and commented on in the media, and it served as the antechamber of the first parliamentary fraction, the Interregional Deputies Group, which itself inspired the emergence of the opposition movement Democratic Russia. No other political discussion club had such intellectual and political leverage in recent Russian history.

The MT is mentioned in almost every study of political life during perestroika.³ Its history, however, remains to be written.⁴ This curious gap in the

I would like to thank the late Leonid Batkin, who helped me locate the scattered materials of the Moscow Tribune, as well as Bela Koval’ from the Sakharov Archive, Boris Belinkin from the International Society Memorial, and Elena Strukova, from the State Historic Public Library of Russia.

1. For a detailed study of the social background and politics of the informal movement, see Carole Sigman, *Clubs politiques et perestroïka en Russie: Subversion sans dissidence* (Paris, 2009), also available in Russian: Karol’ Sigman, *Politicheskie kluby i Perestroïka v Rossii: Oppozitsiia bez dissidentstva* (Moscow, 2014).

2. I use the term “liberal” following a common and convenient usage to designate one of the ideological camps of the late Soviet Union, generally contrasted with that of “nationalists” and “communists.” As all ideological labels, these should be used with caution. One must keep in mind that they are not exhaustive of all political nuances, that they were not necessarily assumed by those they designate (many Soviet liberals did not use this label prior to 1990), and that they do not necessarily correspond to the definition of the related terms in western social science. To underline this specificity, I refer to the intellectuals under study as *Soviet liberals*.

3. M. Steven Fish, *Democracy from Scratch: Opposition and Regime in the New Russian Revolution* (Princeton, 1995), 33; Judith Devlin, *The Rise of the Russian Democrats: The Causes and Consequences of the Elite Revolution* (Brookfield, VT, 1995), 94, 133, 154, 158–65; Geoffrey A. Hosking, Jonathan Aves, and Peter J. S. Duncan, eds., *The Road to Post-Communism: Independent Political Movements in the Soviet Union 1985–1991*, (London, 1992), 70, 76, 80, 87; Peter Reddaway and Dmitri Glinski, *The Tragedy of Russian Reforms: Market Bolshevism against Democracy* (Washington, DC, 2001), 141–42; David Remnick, *Lenin’s Tomb: The Last Days of the Soviet Empire* (New York, 1993), 29–30; Viktor Sheinis, *Vzlet i padeniye parlamentarizma v Rossii*, t. 1 (Moscow, 2005), 119–20, 240, 270, 679; Carole Sigman, *Clubs politiques et perestroïka en Russie*, 287–88; Vladimir Sogrin, *Politicheskaia istoriia sovremennoi Rossii 1985–2001: Ot Gorbacheva do Putina* (Moscow, 2001), 49; Michael Urban, Vyacheslav Igrunov, and Sergei Mitrokhin, *The Rebirth of Politics in Russia* (Cambridge, Eng., 1997), 118, 132, 168.

4. To my knowledge, the only study devoted specifically to this topic is an unpublished master’s thesis defended in 2012 under the supervision of Viktor Sheinis: Ripsime *Slavic Review* 81, no. 3 (Fall 2022)

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historiography can be explained by different factors. The first one is personal: none of its founders or regular members took it upon her- or himself to recount the club's experience. At the end of his life, the club's initiator wondered "whether the short, but very dense and bright history of the Moscow Tribune will be ever written."⁵ In this respect, the situation of MT contrasts poorly with that of other clubs, which were less influential but are better known today because of the dedication of their founders to keep their memory alive.⁶ The second factor is material: the complete record of its transcripts was allegedly lost, following the death in 2003 of the club's main former secretary, the journalist Galina Koval'skaia.⁷ The third factor, which may in part contribute to the first one, is psychological: the memory of the MT mirrors so closely the ideas and the hopes of the Soviet liberal intelligentsia during perestroika that it seems to have suffered from the same bitter disappointment over its outcome. The Soviet liberals themselves, in their retrospective accounts, often dismiss the aspirations that drove their political activism at the time of perestroika—notably in attempting to reform socialism—as naive illusions that have not withstood the test of reality and, consequently, do not deserve much more than irony or repentance.⁸

This article is intended as the first contribution to the history of the MT, focusing on its most active period, from its creation in 1988 to its sharp decline in 1991. In doing so, it uses the MT as a privileged vantage point to reflect on one of the most spectacular and decisive developments of the time, that is the dramatic political shift of many established Soviet liberals, from initial support of Gorbachev's reformism to support of Yeltsin's anti-communist revolution and opposition to the Soviet regime. In academic literature, this process is usually explained by the necessary unfolding, as circumstances came to allow it, of the oppositionist mindset of the Soviet liberal intelligentsia. An idea well expressed by Michael Urban in his landmark study of the rebirth of politics in Russia: "At the core of the liberal world-view were concepts of opposition: at first, opposition to stagnation, to bureaucrats and conservatives; later, as perestroika proved disappointing, opposition to everything associated with the communist system, including perestroika and its chief

Martirosian, "Klub 'Moskovskaia Tribuna' v gody perestroiki (1988–1991 gg.)" (MA thesis., Moscow Historical Archives Institute, 2012). This work explains the position of the club leaders on the basis of their articles published in 1988 and recounts some of the club key debates on the basis of Viktor Sheinis' unpublished private archives, which constitute a precious source of information.

5. Leonid Batkin, *Epizody moei obshchestvennoi zhizni* (Moscow, 2013), 128.

6. See for example Aleksandr Shubin, *Predannaia demokratiia: SSSR i neformaly (1986–1989)* (Moscow, 2006); Aleksandr Sungurov, "Leningradskii klub 'Perestroika' kak prototip Tsentra publichnoi politiki," in M. Gornyi and A. Sungurov, eds., *Publichnaia politika 2007: Sbornik statei* (St. Petersburg, 2007), 127–35; Valentin Tolstyykh, ed., *Svobodnoe slovo: Intellektual'naia khronika desiatiletiia 1985–1995* (Moscow, 1996).

7. Leonid Batkin, personal communication, December 9, 2012.

8. See for example Iurii Kariakin's memoirs: *Peremena ubezhdenii (Ot oslepleniia k prozreniiu)* (Moscow, 2007). See also Inna Kochetkova, *The Myth of the Russian Intelligentsia: Old Intellectuals in the New Russia* (London, 2010), chapter 4.

proponent.”⁹ Explanations vary regarding the source of this alleged oppositionist mindset. A first set of studies simply takes it for granted, following either an implicit liberal assumption on the struggle opposing society to the state, or an explicit “realist” approach considering opposition as a self-evident strategy for democrats as rational actors under authoritarian rule.¹⁰ A second set of studies takes the Soviet liberals’ oppositionist mindset as its very object of investigation, either to celebrate it as a demonstration of moral courage in the face of power, or to lament it as the shameful legacy of the Bolshevik revolutionary ethos.¹¹ In post-Soviet Russia, the Soviet liberals’ alleged oppositionist mindset is routinely denounced, in echo to *Vekhi*’s classical argument, as yet another demonstration of the destructive radicalism typical of the Russian intelligentsia.¹² However diverse in their assumptions and conclusions, all these appraisals concur in that the Soviet liberals’ shift against the regime was the logical expression of their inherent drive towards opposition, once circumstances allowed.

In this paper, I would like to challenge this common understanding by unpacking the notion of opposition in the context of perestroika. Following an approach fruitfully applied to previous periods, I wish to historicize this notion in order to question the assumption of an anti-regime sentiment on the part of educated Soviet citizens.¹³ Opposition, indeed, is a catch-all concept that can refer to a wide array of discourses and practices, from moral to political opposition, from internal exile to revolutionary upheaval. In order to bring some clarity and precision to the matter, it is useful to recall the fine-tuned typologies of oppositions elaborated in the 1970s and 1980s by scholars of communist regimes inspired by Robert Dahl’s 1966 seminal work.¹⁴ In the context of communist regimes, this literature has highlighted two main variables

9. Urban, *The Rebirth of Politics in Russia*, 92.

10. See respectively Fish, *Democracy from Scratch*, and Vladimir Gel’man, *Authoritarian Russia: Analyzing Post-Soviet Regime Changes* (Pittsburgh, 2015).

11. For a positive appraisal, see Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Soviet Intellectuals and Political Power: The Post-Stalin Era* (Princeton, 1990); and Leon Aron, *Roads to the Temple: Truth, Memory, Ideas and Ideals in the Making of the Russian Revolution, 1987–1991* (New Haven, 2012). For a more critical appraisal, see Alexander Lukin, *Political Culture of Russian “Democrats”* (Oxford, 2000); and Reddaway and Glinski, *The Tragedy of Russian Reforms*.

12. Vadim Mezhev, “Perestroika i intelligentsiia,” in Valentin Tolstykh, ed., *Perestroika: Desiat’ let spustiia* (Moscow, 1995), 112–17; Aleksandr Tsipko, ““Demokraticheskaia Rossiia” kak bol’shevistskaia i odnovremenno pochvenniceskaia partiia,” *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, April 9, 1993, 5. *Vekhi* was a famous collection of critical essays on the Russian intelligentsia, originally published in 1907: Nikolai Berdiaev, Sergei Bulgakov, Mikhail Gershenzon, A. S. Izgoev, Bogdan Kostiakovskii, Petr Struve, Semen Frank, *Vekhi: Landmarks* (Armonk, NY, 1994).

13. Jochen Hellbeck, “Speaking Out: Languages of Affirmation and Dissent in Stalinist Russia,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1, no. 1 (Winter 2000), 71–96; Benjamin Nathans, “The Dictatorship of Reason: Aleksandr Vol’pin and the Idea of Rights under ‘Developed Socialism,’” *Slavic Review* 66, no. 4 (Winter 2007), 630–63.

14. See Leonard Schapiro, ed., *Political Opposition in One-Party States* (London, 1972); Frederick C. Barghoorn, “Factional, Sectoral and Subversive Opposition in Soviet Politics,” and H. Gordon Skilling, “Opposition in Communist East Europe,” in Robert Dahl, ed., *Regimes and Oppositions* (New Haven, 1973); Rudolf L. Tökés, ed., *Dissent in the USSR: Politics, Ideology, and People* (Baltimore, 1975). These works follow the approach introduced in Robert Dahl, ed., *Political Oppositions in Western Democracies* (New Haven, 1966).

by which types of opposition differ: the opposition's *goals* and *strategies*.¹⁵ The goals, on the one hand, range along a spectrum defined by the extent to which they differ from those of the government, from limited disagreements on specific matters to rejection of the whole political system, with many intermediary positions in-between.¹⁶ The strategies, on the other hand, include non-public actions such as letters- and petitions-writing, and peaceful public actions such as manifestations and picket lines, as well as violent struggle. It should be underlined that these two variables are related, but distinct: highly unorthodox goals can be pursued through very orthodox means of action, or the other way around. Considering this variety of possible options and combinations, the meaning of "opposition" can certainly not be taken for granted.

In this paper, I use primary materials from the debates taking place within the MT between 1988 and 1991 to elucidate the goals and strategies of the opposition embodied by established Soviet liberals. I draw on the comparative scholarship on types of oppositions in communist regimes to make sense of these choices in a larger historical picture. Indeed, the MT did not appear in a vacuum; it was informed by the legacy of the Soviet and east European dissident movements, as well as the recent experimentations of the Soviet informal movement, and the east European revolutions of 1989, all of which provided the club members with different repertoires of organization and action. As a matter of fact, the discussions among MT members reveal a plurality of visions of opposition among Soviet liberals. In this paper, this plurality is addressed both diachronically and synchronically. On the one hand, I show how the opposition embodied by MT shifted over time, following the drastic changes in domestic and international circumstances, which occurred more swiftly than anyone anticipated. On the other hand, the discussions taking place at the MT demonstrate that these intellectuals were constantly divided over the need to stand in opposition to the government, even after it became thinkable, feasible, and even legal. Indeed, the main finding of this paper is that the opposition embodied by the MT experienced a two-speed radicalization during perestroika, with its goals evolving much faster than its strategies. While the objective of reforming communism was largely abandoned in favor of anti-communism over a strikingly short period of time, intellectuals at the MT were constantly divided over their desired relationship with the government. In the club's own terms, "moderates" remained faithful to the initial agenda of "constructive" opposition, which entailed full support of the government to help overcome the resistance to change, while "radicals" argued for a shift towards confrontational opposition to pressure the government from below. As this persistent divide demonstrates, and contrary to the narrative commonly established after 1991, opposition to communism *did not* necessarily entail a readiness to oppose the government, let alone to overthrow it as soon as circumstances allowed. At stake in these discussions, I suggest, were not

15. Dahl identifies "goals" and "strategies" as two of the six ways in which political oppositions differ. These two criteria, however, have been identified by Schapiro and Skilling as the main distinguishing features between types of opposition in communist regimes.

16. Jean Blondel, "Political Opposition in the Contemporary World," *Government and Opposition* 32, no. 4 (October 1997): 469.

only the fate of communism and that of the Soviet multinational state, but the role and purpose of opposition, an underappreciated question that will prove to have far-reaching consequences in post-Soviet Russia.

This article is based on materials gathered from private archives: from Andrei Sakharov's archives, at the Sakharov Archive in Moscow, and from Viacheslav Igrunov's archives, both at the Sakharov Archive and at the library of the International Society Memorial in Moscow.¹⁷ These materials include documents issued by the MT, letters from members to the club's administrators, and session transcripts in written, audio, and video format. I complemented the fragmentary record of the session transcripts with various reports and comments on the MT sessions published in the official and informal Soviet press, which I consulted at the State Historic Public Library of Russia. Finally, I gathered information about the club functioning from published testimonies and from interviews with former club members.¹⁸

Among the impressive variety of topics discussed at the MT—from the nationality question to amendments to the legal code, and economic reforms—the present paper focuses on debates that dealt specifically with the goals and strategies of the opposition. The article is organized in four parts. The first section is devoted to the creation of the club and the initial definition of its purpose. The next section deals with the first debate regarding its relation to Gorbachev, which took place in the fall of 1988. The third section deals with the renewed debate that arose over the meaning of opposition in 1989 in the context of the rebirth of competitive politics in Soviet Russia and the revolutionary experience in eastern Europe. The final section jumps in time to the fall of 1991, when MT members clashed again over the meaning of opposition, but this time it meant opposition to Boris El'tsin, who by then had established himself as the main leader over the course of reforms in Soviet Russia.¹⁹ At the most immediate level, each of these debates dealt with tactical considerations informed by very specific circumstances. Yet it is precisely this diachronic variance that makes the recurrent divide of Soviet liberals over strategies of opposition even more striking. From 1988 to 1991, the lines of division between “moderates” and “radicals” at the club remained broadly

17. Viacheslav Igrunov acquired many materials from MT as part of his work at the Moscow Bureau of Information Exchange, which he created to collect and preserve the publications from the informal movement.

18. Testimonies include Batkin, *Epizody moei obshchestvennoi zhizni*; Iakov Berger, “INION kak seredina zhizni: Rasskaz Iakova Bergera,” *Sotsionet*, at <https://socionet.ru/publication.xml?h=repec:rus:vlebon:2> (accessed October 8, 2015; no longer available); Iakov Berger, “Interv'iu s Iakovom Bergerom,” *Yel'tsin Tsentser*, at <http://www.yeltsincenter.ru/decryption/intervyu-s-ikovom-bergerom> (accessed August 3, 2015; no longer available); Andrei Sakharov, *Gorkii, Moskva, dalee vezde* (Moscow, 1989); Mikhail Tsalenko, *Vzgliad iz nevidiashchikh glaz* (Hanover, 2013). The interviews I conducted: Iurii Afanas'ev, Mytishchi, October 24, 2013; Marietta Chudakova, Moscow, April 20, 2014; Svetlana Gannushkina, Moscow, April 5, 2017; Leonid Gozman, Moscow, April 10, 2017; Viacheslav Igrunov, Moscow, October 21, 2013; Vladimir Iliushenko, Moscow, April 10, 2017; Viktor Sheinis, Moscow, November 8, 2013.

19. The format of this paper does not allow to present another debate on the strategies of opposition, which took place at the MT in the spring 1990, regarding the creation of the Presidency of the Soviet Union by—and for—Gorbachev.

the same, despite the enormous ideological and political shift they experienced during this period, thus revealing a deep-seated yet implicit dilemma on the very meaning of opposition.

1988: The Initial Definition of Opposition

The MT was created thanks to the conjoined efforts of three established Soviet liberals: the historian Leonid Batkin, who was its initiator and master mind, his friend and fellow historian Iurii Afanas'ev, a successful academic entrepreneur who put up together the founding group and facilitated logistics issues, and the physicist and famous dissident Andrei Sakharov, the great moral figure who decisively contributed to the club's reputation and attractiveness. In the summer of 1988, Batkin aptly described the general state of mind of the Soviet liberal intelligentsia as "measured optimism."²⁰ On the one hand, perestroika had taken the promising path of democratization since the January 1987 Central Committee plenum, and this course had been confirmed in April 1988 by the official rebuttal in *Pravda* of Nina Andreeva's conservative manifesto. In June of the same year, the Nineteenth Party Conference adopted an ambitious agenda of political reforms, including the creation of a new legislative body chosen through competitive elections. On the other hand, Gorbachev's numerous inconsistencies disturbed his supporters. The reforms decided at the June Party Conference, for example, failed to specify the voting system, which was to be negotiated behind closed doors at the highest level of the Party in the following months. It was feared that Gorbachev could yield to conservative pressure and allow the new democratic institution to become mere window dressing for unchanged domination of the Party. This worrying perspective seemed to be confirmed by the decrees adopted on July 28, 1988, curtailing the rights of demonstrations in reaction to the rise of street activism in Armenia, Estonia, and Moscow.²¹

For Batkin, these contradictory trends in the course of reforms fostered the need for a club through which the Moscow intelligentsia would express its independent voice, which would be heard both by the Party reformers and the population. In the summer of 1988, Batkin and Afanas'ev created an "initiative group" (*initsiativnaia grupp*a) responsible for the club's foundation. Most members of this founding group already knew each other, as they had collaborated a few months before for *Inogo ne dano*, a collection of essays in favor of perestroika, edited by Afanas'ev.²² The most famous among these

20. Leonid Batkin, "Vozobnovlenie istorii," in Iurii Afanas'ev, ed., *Inogo ne dano: Perestroika: Galsnost', demokratiia, sotsializm* (Moscow, 1988), 155.

21. These decrees were denounced in one of the MT's first official declarations, drafted on October 12, 1988. Arkhiv Sakharova, Moscow, Russian Federation (hereafter AS), fond (f.) 1, (Andrei Dmitrievich Sakharov), opis' (op.) 3 (Obshchestvenno-politicheskaia deiatel'nost), razdel' (raz.) 3.4.3, "Moskovskaia Tribuna," ed. khr. 169 (Obrashchenie k Verkhovnomu sovetu SSSR, in *Biulleten' Moskovskoi Tribuny* no. 1, [Moscow, 1989], 6–10). All references to *Biulleten' "Moskovskoi Tribuny"* are from 1989, published in Moscow.

22. Afanas'ev, *Inogo ne dano*. The book became the most famous collection of essays of the time of perestroika and was translated into various foreign languages.

contributors was undoubtedly Andrei Sakharov.²³ The decision to found the MT was taken on August 9, 1988, during an informal meeting in Protvino, in the Moscow region, where Sakharov and his wife were resting for the summer. A few months later, on October 12, some 120 scholars, writers, journalists and artists gathered for the first session of the club in the hall of ceremonies of Moscow Historical Archives Institute, which was made available thanks to its director, none other than Afanas'ev. The “political-cultural social club Moscow Tribune” was officially founded on its fourth meeting, on February 4, 1989.²⁴ Ten months later, in December 1989, the club counted 194 duly registered members.²⁵ During the three following years, the club met more or less once a month, except for breaks from July to September. The meetings usually took place at 10 am on Saturdays in the halls of prestigious cultural or scientific institutions for sessions that lasted for no less than four hours.²⁶ Batkin and Afanas'ev were its main leaders, as they chaired most of the sessions until the end of 1991, when their departure coincided with the club's rapid decline.²⁷

Both Batkin and Sakharov wrote in their memoirs that the MT was created as the “seed” (*zachatok*) of an opposition.²⁸ But what could opposition mean in the USSR in the summer of 1988? As evoked earlier, one must keep in mind that goals such as the democratization of the communist system *did not* necessarily entail strategies that would challenge the regime. To understand the MT's initial choice of goals and strategies and the shift that would subsequently occur, I draw on the comparative scholarship on types of oppositions in communist regimes.

In his political memoirs, Batkin recalled that the historian Mikhail Gefter had initially suggested the MT to be a kind of research seminar providing

23. Other members of the initiative group who had contributed to *Inogo ne dano* included Iurii Kariakin, Len Karpinskii, Iurii Burtin, Ales' Adamovich, and Mikhail Gefter. The physicists Roal' d Sagdeev and Arkadii Migdal also joined on Sakharov's invitation.

24. AS, f. 1, op. 3, raz. 3.4.3, ed. khr. 169 (O sozdanii politiko-kul'turnogo obshchestvennogo kluba “Moskovskaia Tribuna,” in *Biulleten' “Moskovskoi Tribuny,”* no. 1), 3.

25. Biblioteka mezhdunarodnogo obshchestva “Memorial,” Moscow, Russian Federation (hereafter BM), Fond sovremennoi politicheskoi dokumentatsii, papka “Moskovskaia Tribuna,” (Chleny Moskovskoi Tribuny [po sostoianiu po 16 dekabria 1989 goda]). Of that number, three were already deceased at the moment the list was established: the historian Natan Eidel'man, the lawyer Sof'ia Kallistratova, and Andrei Sakharov. The MT was mostly a boys' club, with only 22 women out of the 194 members listed.

26. Institutions that hosted MT sessions between 1988 and 1991 include the Central House of scholars, the Central House of artists (now the New Tretiakov Gallery), the Central House of Culture of Health Care Workers (now the Helicon Opera), the Central House of Writers (now the Moscow Capital Club), the Moscow Aviation Institute, the Moskva Hotel, the Mossovet (now the City Hall), and the House-Museum of A.S. Pushkin. AS, f. 1, op. 3, raz. 3.4.3, ed. khr. 168 (*Annotatsii videozapisei 1989–1991 g.g. S. I. Alenikovi-Vol'kenshtein*). An indication regarding the length of the sessions can be found in the suggestion of a member to limit them to four or five hours, so there would be more time for informal contacts and discussions during the rest of the day. Leonid Gozman, “V biuro MT—Predlozheniia po rabote kluba” in Martirosian, *Klub “Moskovskaia Tribuna,”* annex 3, 95–96.

27. Berger, “INION kak seredina zhizni”; Leonid Gozman, interview, Moscow, April 10, 2017; Vladimir Iliushenko, interview, Moscow, April 10, 2017.

28. Sakharov, *Gorkii, Moskva, dalee vezde*, 333; Batkin, *Epizody*, 123.

practical recommendations to the regime. This model corresponds to what has been described in comparative scholarship as “sectoral” or “specific” opposition: an opposition that limits its goals, however unorthodox they might be, to certain specific spheres—cultural, economic, scientific—and does not reject the regime or the system. Its most common strategies of action were non-public recommendations to the concerned authorities.²⁹ In the USSR, “sectoral opposition” was exemplified in the 1980s by influential academic think tanks led by Soviet liberals, like the Institute of Economics of the World Socialist System, the Institute of World Economy and International Relations, or the Novosibirsk Institute of Economics, which provided Soviet leaders with recommendations that could be bold in substance while presenting no direct challenge to the system.³⁰ This model of opposition, however, was rejected by the MT founders on the grounds that research seminars could now work freely in institutes, and also because its sectoral character would exclude parts of the intelligentsia such as artists or scholars of natural sciences.³¹ This idea of an advisory opposition had such strong appeal that, despite its explicit rejection by MT leaders, some members went on expecting the club to produce specific scientific analyses and blaming its failure to do so.³² At the session on February 4, 1989, an ultimate proposal to define the club’s mission as “a corrective to the lack of professionalism of the power apparatus” was bluntly rejected by Batkin on the grounds that such a task was hopeless. Consequently, he insisted that the MT’s duty was to allow the expression of public opinion and to provide “professional-expert work of an alternative character.”³³

The alternative character Batkin had in mind was to serve as a platform to overcome “the dispersion of the intellectual and creative forces, the lack of random and personal contacts between us, the impossibility of a large and regular exchange of opinions, judgements, and ideas.” In short, it was expected to “fully express the self-consciousness of the intelligentsia.”³⁴ Batkin was building on the traditional view in Russia, drawing back from the nineteenth century and cultivated by the Soviet regime, of the intelligentsia as a distinct and cohesive social body infused with a moral mission.³⁵

29. Skilling, “Opposition in Communist East Europe,” 93; Barghoorn, “Factional, Sectoral, and Subversive Opposition in Soviet Politics,” 39.

30. On the influence of the *institutchiki* (experts from institutes) on Gorbachev, see Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (Oxford, 1996), 111–15.

31. Batkin, *Epizody*, 123.

32. Two members expressed this view at MT session on December 6, 1988. AS, f. 1, op. 3, raz. 3.4.3, ed. khr. 168, (Zasedanie kluba “Moskovskaia tribuna” o Karabakhe 6 dekabria 1988 goda), transcript of audiocassettes no 85 and 86.

33. AS, f. 1, op. 3, raz. 3.4.3, ed. khr. 168 (Zasedanie kluba “Moskovskaia tribuna” [raspechatany vyderzhki] 4 fevralia 1989 goda), transcript of audiocassettes no 80, 81, 84, and 87.

34. AS, f. 1, op. 3, raz. 3.4.3, ed. khr. 169 (O sozdanii politiko-kul’turnogo obshchestvennogo kluba “Moskovskaia Tribuna,” in *Biulleten’ “Moskovskoi Tribuny”* no. 1), 3. This objective was the only one mentioned in the manuscript drafts of the founding declaration written by Batkin. This is also the first motivation Batkin mentions in his memoirs: Batkin, *Epizody*, 122.

35. On the inheritance of this view from the nineteenth century among late Soviet intellectuals, see Vladislav Zubok, *Zhivago’s Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge, Mass., 2009). For a study of the cultivation of this ideal by the Soviet regime,

Indeed, MT members seemed to commonly assume that their club embodied the “Moscow intelligentsia”—in whose name it routinely spoke—and that, as such, their role was to enlighten both the authorities and society at large.³⁶ This sense of mission did not seem to require any explanation or justification, and was only spelled out from time to time as a reminder, lest the club members forget their duty. In November 1988, for example, Afanas’ev commented on the club’s activities as follows: “the Moscow intelligentsia should not lose sight that its opinion. . . must be expressed and delivered to the public (*obshchestvennost’*) and the leadership (*rukovodstvo*).”³⁷ There was nonetheless one important limitation to this idea of embodying the whole intelligentsia, and it was an explicit ideological criterion. The club’s founding document welcomed members with a diversity of views, on the express condition that they supported perestroika “as a historical chance for reforms in the spheres of economy, law, foreign policy and ecology, under the control of democratic institutions,” *de facto* excluding a wide group of nationalist and communist intellectuals who challenged the course of Gorbachev’s reforms, but also Soviet liberal dissidents who did not trust perestroika.³⁸ MT’s initial goals, without any ambiguity, were defined in support of Gorbachev’s agenda of reform communism. Yet, which strategies could the “seed of an opposition” legitimately use to pursue such objectives?

With regard to its relationship with the Soviet regime, the MT aspired to “mutual respect and reasonable dialogue.”³⁹ It categorically rejected what comparative scholarship has called either “structural,” “subversive,” or “integral” opposition, which rejects the government or even the system, and opts for strategies of covert or overt resistance, from mass demonstrations to violent revolts or revolutionary conspiracies.⁴⁰ In 1988, this strategy was emphatically exemplified in Russia by the Democratic Union, a self-declared

see Benjamin Tromly, *Making the Soviet Intelligentsia: Universities and Intellectual Life under Stalin and Khrushchev* (Cambridge, Mass., 2014).

36. See for example AS, f. 1, op. 3, raz. 3.4.3, ed. khr. 169 (K miru v nashem dome, in *Biulleten’ “Moskovskoi Tribuny”* no. 1), 1–13.

37. AS, f. 1, op. 3, raz. 3.4.3, ed. khr. 169 (Stenogramma obsuzhdenia proektov zakona SSSR ob izmeneniakh i dopolneniakh konstitutsii SSSR i zakona o vyborakh narodnykh deputatov SSSR, in *Biulleten’ “Moskovskoi Tribuny”* no. 1), 65. For a similar reminder, see Gozman, “V biuro MT—Predlozheniia po rabote kluba” in Martirosian, *Klub “Moskovskaia Tribuna,”* annex 3, 95–96. For an explicit—and critical—reflection by a MT member on the triangular relation between the intelligentsia, the rulers, and the people (*narod*), see Iurii Levada, “Intelligentsia,” in Iurii Afanas’ev, and Mark Ferro, eds., *50/50. Opyt slovaria novogo myshleniia* (Moscow, 1989), 128–31.

38. AS, f. 1, op. 3, raz. 3.4.3, ed. khr. 169 (O sozdanii politiko-kul’turnogo obshchestvennogo kluba “Moskovskaia Tribuna,” in *Biulleten’ “Moskovskoi Tribuny”* no. 1), 3. Afanas’ev had openly formulated that double exclusion a few months before in his editor’s foreword to *Inogo ne dano*, explaining that he did not consider contributions from both the “adversaries” of perestroika and from those who were “openly skeptical” of its course. Iurii Afanas’ev, “Neskol’ko slov ot redaktora,” in Afanas’ev, ed., *Inogo ne dano*, 6.

39. AS, f. 1, op. 3, raz. 3.4.3, ed. khr. 169 (O sozdanii politiko-kul’turnogo obshchestvennogo kluba “Moskovskaia Tribuna,” in *Biulleten’ “Moskovskoi Tribuny,”* no. 1), 3.

40. Skilling, “Opposition in Communist East Europe,” 92. Barghoorn, “Factional, Sectoral, and Subversive Opposition in Soviet Politics,” 40.

opposition party that openly challenged the Soviet regime and organized street protests that came under harsh police repression. In explicit contrast, the MT officially declared to operate on the ground of “political realism,” a notion Batkin defined as the ability to bring change by seriously taking into account all the constraints of the situation.⁴¹ Not the least among these constraints was a challenge typical of oppositions in communist countries: “to establish its credibility as a loyal, non-insurrectionary group working to improve the existing body politic [in a society where] public opposition violates one of the most important mores of the political culture.”⁴² Taking this situation into account, the MT designed its initial strategies with great caution.

The MT has probably been inspired in its modes of organization and action by the club *Perestroika*, founded the year before, in March 1987, which held regular discussions in prestigious Moscow institutes and disseminated its ideas by sending petitions to the regime and by publishing a monthly bulletin.⁴³ Similar to the club *Perestroika*, the MT scrupulously avoided any mention of the term “opposition” and rather described itself as a “social scientific-consultative council,” whose discussions aimed at “revealing and comparing different approaches, as well as elaborating general evaluations, predictions, and especially positive economic, political, and cultural recommendations.”⁴⁴ This model corresponds to what political scientist H. Gordon Skilling proposed to call “fundamental opposition,” an intermediary between advisory opposition and subversive opposition, which aims at “opposition to, or severe criticism of, a whole series of key policies of the regime, reflecting crucial differences in standards of value but not a rejection of the Communist system itself.”⁴⁵ For Skilling, an eminent example of fundamental opposition under communism is the 1968 Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia, which was meant to profoundly reform the system from within.

This delicate balance between criticism and loyalty was in many respects an ambiguous and blurred one, but it should not be discarded retroactively as

41. Batkin, “Vozobnovlenie istorii,” 475, 484.

42. Howard L. Biddulph, “Protest Strategies of the Soviet Intellectual Opposition,” in Tökés, ed., *Dissent in the USSR*, 115.

43. It is very telling of the MT’s self-representation, however, that neither the club *Perestroika* nor any previous Soviet informal club were explicitly considered for emulation in its founding documents. The only club model openly praised was that of the Club of Rome, a famous international think tank created in 1968, which gathered intellectuals, scientists, high-ranking officials, and industry barons. At the session on November 12, 1988, a member asked the club not to abandon the model of the Club of Rome, thus signaling that this model was commonly accepted among the members. AS, f. 1, op. 3, raz. 3.4.3, ed. khr. 169 (Stenogramma obsuzhdenia proektov zakona SSSR ob izmeneniakh i dopolneniakh konstitutsii SSSR i zakona o vyborakh narodnykh deputatov SSSR, in *Biulleten’ “Moskovskoi Tribuny”* no. 1), 92. A month later, another member sent a letter to the MT bureau with practical recommendations for the club functioning based on Aurelio Peccei’s book about the Club of Rome. BM, Fond sovremennoi politicheskoi dokumentatsii, papka “Moskovskaia Tribuna.” (Iurii Samodurov, Predlozheniia k deiatel’nosti “Moskovskoi Tribuny.”)

44. AS, f. 1, op. 3, raz. 3.4.3, ed. khr. 169 (O sozdanii politiko-kul’turnogo obshchestvennogo kluba “Moskovskaia Tribuna,” in *Biulleten’ “Moskovskoi Tribuny”* no. 1), 3.

45. Skilling, “Opposition in Communist East Europe,” 93, 104.

a contradiction symptomatic of pathological doublethink.⁴⁶ In late communist regimes prior to 1989, as a rule, most of those denouncing the abuses of communism considered that the only realistic and relatively safe way to change the regime was from within. This was also true in Poland and Hungary, where informal groups could operate somewhat more freely than in the USSR prior to perestroika. Batkin's "political realism" in this sense closely echoed Adam Michnik's "new evolutionism" and Janos Kis's "radical reformism," which meant openly recognizing and working within the boundaries of established realities, including the leading role of the Party.⁴⁷ In documents from the MT, this balanced strategy was called "constructive opposition," thus anticipating a common expression in post-Soviet Russia to designate an opposition that is relatively autonomous, yet loyal to the Kremlin.⁴⁸

1988: Debating the Relation to Gorbachev

During its first months of existence, from October 1988 to February 1989, the MT's preferred mode of action was to send addresses to the media and governing bodies. One of its main preoccupations at the time was the ongoing conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. On this issue, the MT even proposed itself as a mediator to reach a peaceful resolution, sending a special delegation to the Caucasus to investigate and eventually created a special committee to act as a relay between the Soviet state and incarcerated informal leaders from the Caucasus.⁴⁹ The most prominent issue discussed in the club at the time, however, was Gorbachev's announced political reform, which raised crucial questions regarding the desired relationship between the MT and the government. On November 12, 1988, the MT met in the House of Artists to discuss the political reform project. After being outlined at the Nineteenth Party

46. See for example David Remnick, "The Double Thinkers," in his *Lenin's Tomb: The Last Days of the Soviet Empire* (New York, 1993), 162–79.

47. Barbara Falk, *The Dilemmas of Dissidence in East-Central Europe: Citizen Intellectuals and Philosopher Kings* (Budapest, 2003), 315–16. Likewise, in Czechoslovakia, dissidents such as Václav Havel and Charter 77 forcefully avoided until the fall of 1989 defining themselves as an opposition to communist rule, in fear that a direct challenge could lead to violent repression.

48. "Uchreditel'noe sobranie obshchestvenno-diskussionnogo kluba 'Moskovskaia tribuna,'" *Ekspress-khronika*, no. 42 (63), October 1988, 8. On the post-Soviet usage of the term, see for example Luke March, "Managing Opposition in a Hybrid Regime: Just Russia and Parastatal Opposition," *Slavic Review* 68, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 504–27.

49. The historian Mikhail Gefter drafted a declaration on this topic that was approved by the club at its first session: AS, f. 1, op. 3, raz. 3.4.3, ed. khr. 169 (K miru v nashem dome, in *Biulleten' "Moskovskoi Tribuny"* no. 1), 1–13. It was followed by an official call for a halt to hostilities, dated from November 28, 1988: AS, f. 1, op. 3, raz. 3.4.3, ed. khr. 168 (K obshchestvennomu mneniiu– otkrytoe obrashchenie chlenov kluba "Moskovskaia tribuna" v sviazi s obostreniem armiano-azerbaidzhanskogo konflikta). The MT delegation travelled to Azerbaijan and Armenia from December 21 to 26, 1988. It was composed of Batkin, Elena Bonner, Sakharov, and the anthropologist Galina Starovoitova, who was selected as a Caucasus specialist. The special committee "Spravedlivost'" in support of incarcerated informal leaders from Armenia and Azerbaijan was created at the session on February 4, 1989. AS, f. 1, op. 3, raz. 3.4.3, ed. khr. 169 (Zaiavlenie komiteta Spravedlivost' in *Biulleten' "Moskovskoi Tribuny"* no. 1), annex.

Conference in June, its details had been publicized in the fall for a month-long public discussion before its final adoption. The project provided that a new legislative body was to be elected in the spring of 1989, the Congress of the People's Deputies, through a Byzantine system of voting, which reserved a third of the seats to delegates from social organizations, including the Communist Party, the Komsomol, and professional organizations. This huge parliament of more than two thousand deputies was in principle to become the main legislative authority, but in practice it would only meet a few weeks every year, and its first task would be to elect the members of a smaller, permanent legislative body, the Supreme Soviet, whose chairman would become the head of the state. When discussing the project in the MT, most members agreed that it had numerous shortcomings and that its introduction would not prevent important decisions to be taken beyond public control. The members disagreed nonetheless on the public position they should take in regard to this not-so-democratic democratization.

The club's working documents used the labels "moderate" and "radical" to describe the two perspectives that regularly clashed during the MT meetings.⁵⁰ One must be careful, however, not to assume what this "moderation" and "radicalism" was about. At the MT, these labels did not reflect the members' respective attitudes towards the communist system. All members, indeed, belonged to the camp supporting democracy, westernization, and a market economy. Some members, to be sure, aspired to reform socialism and admired Scandinavian social democracy, while others wanted a clear turn towards capitalism, but this distinction was not considered politically relevant at the time.⁵¹ The moderate-radical divide within the MT concerned a much more immediate issue: the Soviet liberals' strategies as an opposition.

Regarding Gorbachev's proposed political reform in fall 1988, speakers like Batkin, the sociologist Iurii Levada, the philosopher Vladimir Bibler, the historian Evgenii Ambartsumov, and the jurist Boris Kurashvili called for substantial modifications. Their propositions included the direct election of the head of state, the direct election of a permanent parliament, and the simplification of the nomination process for candidates.⁵² Batkin summarized

50. In a poll distributed in 1990 by MT bureau, the club members were asked, among other things, if they considered themselves "moderate" or "radical," if they thought most of the members were more moderate or more radical than themselves, and if they believed the public statements issued by the bureau reflected their point of view. The results of this poll, unfortunately, were not preserved in the archives. BM, Fond sovremennoi politicheskoi dokumentatsii, papka "Moskovskaia Tribuna." "Uvazhaemyi kollega!" poll with answers from Viacheslav Igrunov. The labels "moderates" and "radicals" were also used by journalists reporting on the club's sessions. See for example Aleksandr Verkhovskii, "Na Moskovskoi Tribune," *Panorama*, December 12, 1989, 2.

51. As demonstrated by the oft-cited fact that Soviet liberals were hardly distinguishable among themselves on programmatic issues despite their use of different political labels as of 1990, such as "republicans," "social democrats," "Christian democrats," and "constitutional democrats." See Fish, *Democracy from Scratch*, 55. Further ideological distinctions took place after the dissolution of the Soviet Union when programmatic issues moved to the fore of the electoral struggle.

52. AS, f. 1, op. 3, raz. 3.4.3, ed. khr. 169 (K obsuzhdeniiu na Moskvoskoi Tribune proektov zakona SSSR ob izmeneniiakh i dopolneniiakh konstitutsii SSSR i zakona o vyborakh narodnykh deputatov SSSR, in *Biulleten' "Moskovskoi Tribuny"* no. 1), 37–64;

this “radical” position in an article denied publication, in which he criticized Gorbachev’s project as a bizarre transitory model that could only deceive the population and turn it away from perestroika.⁵³ The adoption of the project, Batkin argued, should be delayed in order to organize a constitutional referendum. After all, he said, there was no hurry: “We lived a thousand years without democracy, let’s take three more months to introduce a more mature form.”⁵⁴ This call for amendments, however, was met with skepticism by “moderate” members of the MT, like the physicist Evgenii Feinberg and the sociologists Vladimir Shubkin, Leonid Gordon, and Vladimir Iadov. They supported Gorbachev’s project as a true democratic breakthrough that allowed the intelligentsia to elect “worthy” (*dostoinye*) people through their professional organizations.⁵⁵ MT moderates also expressed concern about the outcome of a potential direct election of the head of state, which could also lead to Gorbachev’s overthrow and the end of perestroika. They were preoccupied by what they perceived as the corruption of the Soviet people: it would be “sociologically precocious,” in Shubkin’s words, to entrust the people with such a decisive choice, considering their current state of agitation, their lack of political culture, and their high level of alcoholism.⁵⁶ Feinberg, for his part, declared that the three-month delay requested by Batkin was not enough “to replicate German consciousness, cure alcoholism, or improve anything substantial. We need to constantly work on that for much more time.”⁵⁷ At the end of the day, the “radical” position won the vote, and it was reflected in an official statement calling for amendments to the reform project.⁵⁸

It soon became obvious, however, that none of the MT’s propositions were considered by Gorbachev. As soon as the third club session, on December 6, 1988, members of the MT expressed bitter disappointment about their own powerlessness. Elena Bonner observed that the club was conducting “empty discussions” that had no impact: “these are kitchen talks, and it does not

AS, f. 1, op. 3, raz. 3.4.3, ed. khr. 169 (Stenogramma obsuzhdeniia proektov zakona SSSR ob izmeneniakh i dopolneniakh konstitutsii SSSR i zakona o vyborakh narodnykh deputatov SSSR, in *Biulleten’ “Moskovskoi Tribuny”* no. 1), 65–104; B. P. “Moskovskaia tribuna vyrazhaet somnenie,” *Referendum*, 20, November 1–15, 1988, 7–8.

53. *Izvestiia* rejected the publication of the article, which was eventually published two years later in a book of collected essays: Leonid Batkin, “Tri stseny iz pervogo akta,” in A. Protashik, ed., *Cherez ternii* (Moscow, 1989), 404–9.

54. *Ibid.*, 409.

55. This was indeed the way most deputies from the MT were elected in the following spring. As a rule, Soviet liberal candidates encountered more support in their professional organizations than in electoral constituencies, as explained below.

56. AS, f. 1, op. 3, raz. 3.4.3, ed. khr. 169 (Stenogramma obsuzhdeniia proektov zakona SSSR ob izmeneniakh i dopolneniakh konstitutsii SSSR i zakona o vyborakh narodnykh deputatov SSSR, in *Biulleten’ “Moskovskoi Tribuny”*, no. 1), 89.

57. Evgenii Feinberg, AS, f. 1, op. 3, raz. 3.4.3, ed. khr. 169 (Stenogramma obsuzhdeniia proektov zakona SSSR ob izmeneniakh i dopolneniakh konstitutsii SSSR i zakona o vyborakh narodnykh deputatov SSSR, in *Biulleten’ “Moskovskoi Tribuny”* no. 1), 99.

58. AS, f. 1, op. 3, , raz. 3.4.3, ed. khr. 168 (Otkrytoe obrashchenie kluba “Moskovskaia Tribuna” o proektakh zakonov “Ob izmeneniakh i dopolneniakh Konstitutsii SSSR” i “O vyborakh narodnykh deputatov SSSR”), November 12, 1988.

change a thing that there are a hundred of us, and not five, like in a kitchen.”⁵⁹ From that moment onward, the failure of the dialogue with the Soviet leaders came to be considered as the club’s greatest shortcoming.⁶⁰ This development prompted a first shift in the political stance of the MT.

1989: Shifting Opposition to Gorbachev

On February 4, 1989, Batkin gave a speech at the tribune on “the autonomy of society,” in which he insisted that a “natural, constructive, and well-intended opposition” must closely cooperate with mass organizations so it could be heard by the government. He insisted that such a position did not imply opposition to Gorbachev nor the introduction of a multiparty system, but the expression of an independent opinion that would exert influence through partnership and debate.⁶¹ In this sense, a constructive opposition was presented as an essential condition for perestroika and for renewed popular confidence in the Communist Party. Following this logic, the club undertook two important changes to reinforce its independent position. First, it opened its doors for closer collaboration with the informal movement, including activists that resorted to “radical” actions such as street protest. This new policy was publicized in these terms: “Abandoning, if you wish, the aspect of an ‘elite reunion,’ carefully selecting its members, ‘Tribuna’ is inviting all those who wish to take an active part in discussions and expert and work groups on given themes.”⁶² As a result, the MT rapidly co-opted many young leading figures of the informal movement, such as Sergei Stankevich and Oleg Rumiantsev. Second, many of the most famous figures of the club decided to run for a seat at the newly created Congress of People’s Deputies of the Soviet Union, in the hope of contributing to the legislative process. At the session on April 22, 1989, members of the MT applauded their elected candidates: Adamovich, Afanas’ev, Gordon, Kariakin, Popov, Sagdeev, and Sakharov.⁶³ In the following months, the MT played a growing role in pre-electoral mobilization. Its first experience in the streets was a modest 30-minute demonstration on April 16 under heavy rain in front of the Georgian cultural center, in protest against the bloody repression that took place a week before in Tbilisi.⁶⁴ Commenting on this event, an informal leader remarked sarcastically: “The

59. AS, f. 1, op. 3, raz. 3.4.3, ed. khr. 168, (Zasedanie kluba “Moskovskaia tribuna” o Karabakhe 6 dekabria 1988 goda), transcript of audiocassette no 85.

60. Berger, “Interv’iu s Iakovom Bergerom”; Sheinis, *Vzlet i padenie parlamentarizma*, vol. 1, 120; Tsalenko, *Vzgliad iz nevidiashchikh glaz*, 163.

61. AS, f. 1, op. 3, raz. 3.4.3, ed. khr. 168 (Zasedanie kluba “Moskovskaia tribuna” [raspechatany vyderzhki] 4 fevralia 1989 goda), transcript of audiocassettes no. 81, 84, and 87.

62. Nina Beliaeva, “Moskovskaia Tribuna,” *Moskovskie novosti* 7, February 12, 1989, 2.

63. All of them had been elected by their professional organizations, except for Afanas’ev, who ran for the popular vote. Nuikin and Korotich also chose this riskier strategy, but failed to be registered as candidates.

64. On April 9, 1989, a demonstration at Tbilisi was heavily repressed by the army, resulting in twenty-one deaths and many injuries. For an account of an MT demonstration by a club member, see Viktoriia Chalikova, “‘Moskovskaia tribuna’ v pervye vyshla na miting,” *Soglasie*, April 30, 1989, 8.

decision of members of Moscow Tribune to hold a demonstration was proof of their complete indignation at the actions of the authorities—members of this respectable organization preferred to meet in the comfortable hall of the House of Scholars. However, even now, the streets were still an alien and comfortless place.”⁶⁵ As the electoral campaign took pace, however, the MT did become increasingly involved in the informal movement. This collaboration culminated with a huge political meeting organized jointly by the MT and other informal organizations at the Luzhniki stadium on May 21, on the eve of the Congress’s first session. The meeting was a success no one anticipated: more than 150,000 persons gathered to listen to rising political figures such as the maverick apparatchik Boris El’tsin and the self-styled corruption-buster Tel’mán Gdlian, but also members of the MT such as Sakharov, Batkin, Afanas’ev, Adamovich, and Kariakin.⁶⁶

The first session of the Congress, from May 25 to June 9, 1989, was a watershed in Soviet politics. To millions of viewers who followed it on TV, it exposed the deepening split between Gorbachev and Soviet liberal intellectuals. Sakharov, notably, caused a scandal by refusing to vote for Gorbachev at the head of the Congress without prior discussion and by calling openly for the abolition of the monopoly of the Communist Party. At the MT session that took place immediately afterwards, Batkin declared that the club should pursue the strategy adopted in February and “go to the people,” to encourage the “involvement of wide masses in perestroika.” The MT, he said, “should play the role of an intellectual bridge between the democratic minority at the Congress and society.”⁶⁷ Again, the main impetus for the shift towards more direct opposition was the perceived failure to be heard by Gorbachev, but the foreign context was also important. With the unexpected electoral triumph of *Solidarnosc* (Solidarity) in Poland on June 4, the Soviet liberals could begin to consider open contestation of the regime as something other than political suicide. In an article published at the time, Batkin explicitly called to follow the “Polish model” in creating an opposition that would enter into dialogue with the government with the support of a powerful mass movement.⁶⁸

Not only was the “Polish model” inspirational, but direct advice from Solidarity intellectual Adam Michnik helped to create the first legal parliamentary fraction in the Soviet Union, the Interregional Deputies Group (*Mezhregional’naia deputatskaia gruppya*, hereafter MDG), de facto challenging the Communist Party’s leadership over perestroika.⁶⁹ The MT, again, was closely involved in the process, as three of the five MDG co-chairmen

65. Boris Kagarlitsky, *Farewell, Perestroika: A Soviet Chronicle* (New York, 1990), 133.

66. MT’s aspiring role as the intellectual propeller of democratic mobilization was met with frustration from some of the informal activists, who did much of the organizational work. On the power struggles behind the various organizers of the meeting at Luzhniki, see Sigman, *Clubs politiques*, 276–77.

67. N. L. “‘Moskovskaia Tribuna’ (Zasedanie 16 iyunia 1989 g.),” *Glasnost’*, 31, 198–99.

68. Leonid Batkin, “Vstrecha dvukh mirov na s’ezde deputatov,” *Moskovskie novosti* 24, 1989, 9.

69. Adam Michnik was invited to Moscow to attend one of the preparatory meetings of MDG’s founding, in order to share his experience from Solidarity. Sheinis, *Vzlet i padenie parlamentarizma*, 248.

were members of the club—Afnas'ev, Sakharov, and Popov.⁷⁰ Although the MDG staunchly refused to call itself an opposition, it devised an alternative “program” of reforms, which included demands such as the creation of a multiparty system, the rejection of all non-democratic provisions of the electoral law, and the formal abolition of censorship. In the fall of 1989, however, the failure of the MDG to impose its program to the next session of the Congress, along with the revolutionary upheavals in Eastern Germany and Czechoslovakia, prompted some “radical” MT members to consider the use of bolder repertoires of action to pressure Gorbachev from below, such as mass demonstrations and political strikes.⁷¹

These developments were met with great defiance from many members of the MT. Some went as far as to call for a halt to democratization and claimed that Gorbachev could only overcome conservative resistance if he turned himself into a “progressive dictator.”⁷² Most of the “moderates,” however, stood on middle ground: they insisted on supporting Gorbachev, but without giving up on democratization. They notably expressed their disagreement with the “radicals” during the MT session of November 18, 1989. Political scientist Viktor Sheinis initiated the discussion by arguing that the main obstacle to perestroika was not the resistance of the Party apparatus nor Gorbachev's passivity, but the “rightist populist” mass movements emerging at the time, especially the Unified Front of Workers.⁷³ In the face of this threat, democratic forces should rally in support of Gorbachev by turning their discourse from criticism to “constructive propositions.”⁷⁴ This argument was echoed by the playwright Aleksandr Gel'man, the translator Stella Aleinikova-Vol'kenshtein, and the sociologist Viktoriia Chalikova, who insisted that the Communist Party was still the only real political force in the country and that, considering the absence of any massive democratic movement like Solidarity, the democrats should strive to influence the Party from within. The MT,

70. The two other MDG chairmen were Moscow deputy Boris El'tsin and Estonian deputy Viktor Pal'm.

71. On the circulation of repertoires of action from the revolutions in eastern Europe to the Soviet Union, see Mark Kramer, “The Collapse of East European Communism and the Repercussions within the Soviet Union (Part II),” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 6, no. 4 (Fall 2004): 3–64; Guillaume Sauv , “De la difficult  de rattraper l'Europe de l'Est. Dilemmes des d mocrates de Russie face aux r volutions de 1989,” *Revue d' tudes comparatives Est-Ouest* 50, no. 2–3 (2019): 49–82.

72. Igor' Kliamkin, Andranik Migranian, and Georgii Tselms, “Nuzhna li zheleznaia ruka?,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, August 16, 1989, 10. This call for an “iron hand” was met with a strong rebuttal in the press, notably from fellow MT members: Leonid Batkin, “Mertvyi khvataet zhivogo,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, September 20, 1989, 10; Evgenii Ambartsumov, “Oboidemsia bez zheleznoi ruki,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, December 27, 1989, 10. On this debate, see Barry Sautman, “The Devil to Pay: The 1989 Debate and the Intellectual Origins of Yeltsin's ‘Soft Authoritarianism,’” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 28, no. 1 (March 1995): 131–51.

73. The United Front of Workers was created in Sverdlovsk (now Ekaterinburg) on 8–9 September 1989. Its positions were often the opposite of those of the Interregional Deputies Group: against national secessionist movements and against economic reforms towards market economy.

74. Quoted in Aleksandr Verkhovskii, “Na Moskovskoi Tribune,” *Panorama*, December 12, 1989, 2.

moreover, was accused of having undermined the legitimacy of Gorbachev, to whom there was no alternative.⁷⁵ In the opposing camp, the “radical” position was most vividly voiced by the sinologist Iakov Berger. For him, Gorbachev’s perestroika had exhausted itself, as the reformer proved himself incapable of forming any alliance with the rising democratic forces. The philosopher Bibler even suggested that the MT should take the lead of the democratic opposition, since the MDG was failing to do so.⁷⁶ According to a journalist who attended the session, the majority of the audience shared the feelings of the “radical” camp. The situation must have remained tense nonetheless, because Batkin concluded the session by stating that it was currently impossible to make a call between the two camps.⁷⁷

This dispute forcefully erupted in public a few weeks later when some MT leaders called on their own initiative for a two-hour nationwide political strike against Gorbachev on December 11, following the recent example of Czechoslovakia, requesting the Soviet leader include the MDG proposals in the agenda of the Congress’s second session scheduled to begin on December 12. The call for strike, signed by five prominent MDG figures including Sakharov, caused a virulent outcry among “moderate” MT and MDG members, who accused the “radicals” of playing into the hands of the conservatives, leading one of the signatories of the appeal to withdraw his support, arguing a misunderstanding.⁷⁸ In answer, Sakharov delivered a passionate speech, a few hours before his death on December 14, an outright advocacy of opposition, not only to the abuses of communism, but also to the Communist Party and to Gorbachev’s rule: “What is opposition? We cannot take all the responsibility for what the leadership is doing. It is leading the country to a catastrophe, delaying the process of perestroika for many years. . . . The only way, the only possible evolutionary path is the radicalization of perestroika.”⁷⁹ This was a dramatic shift from Sakharov’s own views at the beginning of the same year, when he fully agreed with the general position of the MT in believing that opposition was “constructive” only as far as it did not question the leadership of perestroika.⁸⁰ In this respect, Sakharov’s evolution through 1989 was typical of that of other MT “radicals” such as Batkin and Afanas’ev. Yet, it was *not* representative of Soviet liberals in general, since many in the MT remained loyal to the initial strategy of unfailing support towards Gorbachev.

1991: Opposition to El’tsin

Despite Sakharov’s death and the massive dismissal of the preemptive general strike among Soviet liberals in December 1989, the shift of the MT towards

75. Quoted in Martirosian, *Klub “Moskovskaia Tribuna,”* 55.

76. Quoted in Verkhovskii, “Na Moskovskoi Tribune,” 2.

77. Verkhovskii, “Na Moskovskoi Tribune,” 2.

78. Elena Bonner, “Mezhregionaly i Sakharov,” *Sakharovskii Tsentri*, December 26, 2008, at <https://www.sakharov-center.ru/news/2008/mezregionsakharov-t.html> (accessed August 2, 2022); Reddaway and Glinski, *The Tragedy of Russian Reforms*, 149.

79. Andrei Sakharov, “Poslednoe vystuplenie,” in his *Vospominaniia* (Moscow, 1996), 589.

80. See Sakharov’s electoral campaign program, published in February 1989: “Predvybornaia platforma,” *Vospominaniia*, 570–74.

opposition to Gorbachev accelerated in the two following years, paradoxically facilitated by Gorbachev himself, who allowed the adoption of a multiparty system in March 1990.⁸¹ Many members of the MT were directly involved in the creation and coordination of a mass organization in opposition to the Communist Party: first the short-lived Civic Union, modelled on the example from Czechoslovakia, and later the movement Democratic Russia (hereafter DR), which went on to organize the largest demonstrations in Russian history in the spring of 1991.⁸² Again, the example of eastern Europe played a decisive role, as many Soviet liberals became convinced that the Soviet Union, after having led the way of reforms with perestroika, was now lagging behind its western neighbors and desperately needed to catch up on them. In the spring of 1990, for example, a delegation of eight Soviet deputies, including four MT members, travelled to Poland at the invitation of Solidarity and marveled at the course of reforms, one deputy concluding that “Poland is now what we’ll be tomorrow.”⁸³ The influence from eastern Europe also took the form of “indirect spillover,” in Mark Kramer’s words, as old verities and established assumptions were profoundly discredited.⁸⁴ Thus, the agenda of reform communism was severely shaken by the landslide victories of anti-communist forces in eastern Europe, including in countries with a traditionally left-leaning intelligentsia, such as Eastern Germany. In the Soviet Union, shortly afterwards, the failure to build a “Democratic platform” within the Communist Party led prominent MT members like Afanas’ev to quit the Party with a bang and to vociferously reject communism.⁸⁵ These foreign influences notwithstanding, the most decisive factor facilitating the Soviet liberals’ move towards opposition to Gorbachev was domestic: the emergence of Boris El’tsin as an alternative reformer. Having become the undisputed leader of the democratic movement after the death of Sakharov, El’tsin managed to be elected in the spring of 1990 at the head of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, following the example of the Baltic popular fronts in using republican institutions as a lever to challenge Gorbachev from within the system.⁸⁶

Originally created in January 1990 as a democratic voting coalition for the March elections in Russia, DR was transformed into a full-fledged political

81. On March 14, 1990, at the initiative of Gorbachev, the Congress amended the sixth article of the Soviet Constitution, which stipulated the “leading role” of the Communist Party.

82. MT members active in the leadership of DR included Afanas’ev, Batkin, Burtin, Iakunin, Popov, Sheinis, and Starovoitova.

83. The four MT members were Ales’ Adamovich, Sergei Stankevich, Galina Starovoitova, and Vladimir Tikhonov (quote author). The four other delegation members were Oleg Bogomolov, Arkadii Murashev, Aleksandr Iakovlev, and Egor Iakovlev; “Landscape after a Battle: USSR People’s Deputies on their Meetings with MPs from Polish Solidarity,” *Moscow News*, March 25–April 1, 1990, 5.

84. Kramer, “The Collapse of East European Communism.”

85. Afanas’ev tore his Party card as early as April 1990. Other MT members, such as Evgenii Ambartsumov—but also Boris El’tsin, who was not a MT member—followed his steps in July 1990, after the definitive failure of the “Democratic Platform” at the Twenty-eighth Party Congress.

86. On the influence of the Baltic republics and the discourse of “sovereignty” in Soviet Russia, see Mark R. Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State* (Cambridge, 2002), 409.

movement in the fall of 1990. It soon gained support from many members of the MT, both “radicals” and “moderates,” yet for different reasons. MT “radicals” were pleased to finally join a mass organization in overt rejection to the Communist Party, while “moderates” approved DR’s unfailing support of Boris El’tsin, whom they saw as the true protector of statehood (*gosudarstvennost’*) and social order, while Gorbachev came to be associated with state collapse and ethnic feuds.⁸⁷ The divide between “moderates” and “radicals” persisted nevertheless, as there was still a fundamental disagreement with regard to the relations between the Soviet liberal intelligentsia and the new reformer—El’tsin. The last of these key discussions within the MT took place in October 1991. After the failed putsch of August and the dissolution of the Communist Party, El’tsin managed to get the upper hand on his rival Gorbachev and to impose himself as primarily responsible for the course of reforms. The Soviet liberal intelligentsia and the DR movement were then confronted with tactical questions that would decide their political fate. Notwithstanding the radical novelty of the situation after the coup, the question of opposition was raised by the liberal intelligentsia in terms very similar to the ones used two years before: either to support the government (then: Gorbachev, now: El’tsin); to help overcome the resistance of conservative forces (then: the Party apparatus and organizations like the United Front of Worker, now: the “red-brown plague”); or to hold an independent stance to pressure the government from below and ensure that it properly realized its reform agenda.⁸⁸ To put it more succinctly, should Soviet liberals stick to their initial strategies of constructive opposition, or should they allow themselves to denounce El’tsin’s shortcomings the same way they had criticized Gorbachev?

At the MT, the initial trigger of this discussion in the fall of 1991 was an article by the literary scholar Marietta Chudakova, who called for all the democratic forces to rally behind El’tsin to help him definitively overthrow communism. El’tsin deserved unfailing support, she argued, because democrats for the first time in many years shared a “real affinity” with the rulers in the “sincere rejection of the Party and its methods.” Writing about the new Russian government, she stated emphatically: “they are ours, it is our regime (*nasha vlast’*), we walk on the same ground and the cold autumn rain falls on us from the same sky.” She also expressed her dream for all intellectuals of “a moratorium on all irrelevant emotions,” a kind of self-censorship she thought was necessary because the “exhausted population” would not understand if the democrats went on criticizing each other.⁸⁹

Prior to its publication, Chudakova presented her article at the MT session on October 26, 1991, where it was warmly applauded and found support from influential members, including the publicists Ales’ Adamovich and Vasili

87. El’tsin largely followed Gorbachev in claiming to defend statehood from collapse, see George W. Breslauer and Catherine Dale, “Boris Yel’tsin and the Invention of a Russian Nation-State,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 13, no. 4 (October 1997), 303–32.

88. The “red-brown plague” (*krasno-korichnevaia chuma*) was a widespread depreciatory expression within Soviet liberal circles to designate the political alliance of communist and nationalist forces.

89. Marietta Chudakova, “Blud bor’by,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, October 30, 1991, 3.

Seliunin.⁹⁰ Her arguments were also met with a strong rebuttal from the “radicals,” beginning with Batkin. The support to the Russian government, he claimed, should be conditional based on its reform agenda, and this will not happen without pressure from below. The engineer Iurii Boldyrev, who had become an influent MP at the Congress, warned that El'tsin, although nominally a democrat, should not be trusted blindly because he had shown worrying authoritarian tendencies. Beyond these tactical considerations, some “radicals” categorically rejected the democrats' imperative of unity with “their” regime. For the sinologist Berger, this attitude of collaboration was simply immoral, because it rested on conformism and thirst for power. For Batkin, it ran counter to the critical and reflexive vocation of the intelligentsia.⁹¹ In an article published shortly afterwards, he mocked Chudakova's lyrical formula: “there are many people with whom we walked on the same ground throughout this century, and the rain keeps falling from the sky, but not everyone gets wet the same way. . . . There is no such thing as our regime, at least in democracy.”⁹² This last point referred to a more fundamental argument, stipulating that the unity to which Chudakova aspired was incompatible with democracy because it blurred the distinction between the state and society. As the philosopher Bibler declared during the debate in the MT: “If democracy is equated with the ruling regime (*vlast'*), then there is no democracy.”⁹³

Shortly afterwards, a similar debate took place at the head of DR, leading the “radical” leaders to walk out from the organization in January 1992.⁹⁴ From that moment onward, DR consistently adopted a policy of full support to El'tsin.⁹⁵ At the end of the day, the three-year battle fought between Soviet liberal “moderates” and “radicals” regarding politics of opposition ended with the “moderates'” decisive victory. Famous members of this camp, like Adamovich, Chudakova, Kariakin, and Migranian were promoted to the prestigious Presidential Council, while the MT “radicals” either took part in the creation of the liberal opposition party Iabloko, like Boldyrev, or withdrew from political activism, like Batkin and Afanas'ev, as their propositions for an autonomous democratic movement fell on deaf ears against the background of growing tensions between the Russian presidency and the Russian Congress in 1991–93.⁹⁶ A similar development occurred in the MT itself. After the depar-

90. See Galina Koval'skaia, “Intelligentsia i vlast',” *Demokraticheskaia Rossiia*, November 3, 1991, 5.

91. Koval'skaia, “Intelligentsia i vlast'.”

92. Leonid Batkin, “Rossiia na rasput'e,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, November 11, 1991, 3.

93. Vladimir Bibler, quoted in Koval'skaia, “Intelligentsia i vlast'”.

94. Iurii Afanas'ev, Leonid Batkin, Bela Denisenko, Iurii Burtin, “Nam nechego delat' v etoi kompanii,” *Demokraticheskaia Rossiia*, January 30, 1992.

95. Yitzhak Brudny, “The Dynamics of ‘Democratic Russia,’ 1990–1993,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 9, no. 2 (1993): 141–70; Carole Sigman, “Russie démocratique: Histoire d'une organisation politique,” in Roberte Berton-Hogge, ed., *Les Partis politiques en Russie* (Paris, 1993), 13–20.

96. Along with Viacheslav Ivanov, Lev Timofeev, Vladimir Bibler, and Elena Bonner, Batkin and Afanas'ev created in 1991 an alternative group called “Independent Civic Initiative” (*Nezavisimaia grazhdanskaia initsiativa*), which attempted to hold an autonomous democratic position after DR had moved in full support of El'tsin. The group

ture of its founding leaders in late 1991, the club pursued its activities for a few years under the new chairmanship of the sociologist Vladimir Iliushenko.⁹⁷ With a sharply declining membership, the club's general orientation changed in favor of the "moderate" position: the majority of its members now fully supported El'tsin, in apprehension of a conservative backlash by nationalists and communists.⁹⁸

The Moscow Tribune was a unique phenomenon in recent Russian intellectual and political history, not only because of the high profile of its members, which distinguished it from other discussion clubs of the time, but also because of its prominent role in the political struggles that marked the last years of the Soviet Union. The debates that took place in this club, therefore, constitute a precious vantage point to analyze the changing goals and strategies of the opposition led by elite Soviet liberals, from supporting Gorbachev and reform communism, to supporting El'tsin and anticommunism. This radicalization, it turns out, did *not* result from the logical unfolding of an alleged oppositionist mindset as soon as circumstances allowed. Circumstances, of course, did play a crucial enabling role. In a country where the notion of opposition used to be branded "at worst as treasonable, at best as pathological," Soviet liberals with relatively privileged positions would not have turned massively against the regime, if it had not been for the political opening granted by Gorbachev and for the example provided by the democratic upheavals in eastern Europe.⁹⁹ Yet, the analysis of key debates taking place within the MT demonstrates that the impact of these developments on Soviet liberals was not straightforward. In fact, Soviet liberals at the club experienced a two-speed radicalization during perestroika: while their *goals* quickly evolved from reform communism to anticommunism, they remained divided over *strategies*, as they kept disagreeing over the need to create an opposition to the government, even when it became both thinkable and feasible. Following the terms used at the club, "moderates" remained faithful to the initial agenda of constructive opposition, which entailed full support of the government to help overcome resistance to change, while "radicals" argued for a shift towards confrontational opposition to pressure the government from below. The Soviet liberals' shift towards opposition during perestroika, in sum, was anything but self-evident; it was reluctant, reactive, and constantly disputed.

published a few polemical declarations in 1991–93, but it failed to leave its mark on the polarized politics of the unfolding constitutional crisis. They started devoting more and more of their time to the new post-Soviet academia. Afanas'ev founded the Russian State University for the Humanities (*Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi humanitarnyi universitet*), and invited Batkin to become a member of the university board.

97. Interview with Iliushenko, Moscow, April 14, 2017.

98. Batkin, *Epizody*, 128; Berger, "Interv'iu s Iakovom Bergerom"; Tsalenko, *Vzgliad iz nevidiashchikh glaz*, 163. Aleksandr Mitrofanov, "'Moskovskaia Tribuna' protiv 'korichnevoi ugrozy,'" *Podol'skii rabochii*, no. 20, February 5, 1992, unknown page number.

99. The quotation is drawn from Barghoorn, "Factional, Sectoral, and Subversive Opposition," 74.

This conclusion allows us to refine our understanding of the role of the liberal intelligentsia during perestroika in three important ways. First, it reminds us once again not to assume an anti-regime sentiment on the part of the educated Soviet population, even when it stands in opposition to communism. To be clear, the point here is not to celebrate or to lament the Soviet liberals' relative reluctance to form an opposition, but to observe the very recurrence of their disagreement on this issue from 1988 to 1991, a recurrence that cannot be satisfactorily explained by factors such as the decreasing level of institutional constraints or the deep-seated determinations of political culture.

Indeed, what was at the root of this persisting divide? The second way in which the case of MT is enlightening is that it leads us to reappraise Soviet liberals' assumed main lines of action during perestroika. Much has been written regarding the spectacular ideological shift they experienced at the time, which saw the definitive discrediting of Marxism-Leninism and the demise of reform communism.¹⁰⁰ However momentous, this ideological shift does not suffice to explain the constant divide observed within MT, which persisted well into 1991, *after* reform communism had been largely abandoned by Soviet liberals. As a matter of fact, the debates at the MT were not driven by ideology in the sense of a confrontation of clear-cut social and political world-views.¹⁰¹ The core of the disagreements, as we have seen, opposed “moderates” and “radicals” over the question of their desired relationship with the government. Such dichotomy is far from new, yet the struggle going on at MT challenges the established knowledge regarding the victory of El'tsinites over Gorbachevians as the triumph of radicals over moderates. The dénouement of perestroika is usually told, in echo to Crane Brinton's classical “anatomy” of revolutions, as the story of hubris-driven radicals overtaking the moderates and overthrowing the regime.¹⁰² Yet, the situation turns out to be much more complex if one considers, as distinct variables, the *goals* and *strategies* espoused by the Soviet liberals as an opposition. True, El'tsin's supporters were much more radical than Gorbachev's in their *goals*: they usually went further in their rejection of communism and, consequently, in the depth and speed of the reforms to which they aspired. Yet, when it came to the choice of *strategies* in relation to the government, the adoption by most Soviet liberals of a definitive pro-government stance in late 1991 marked the victory of none other than the “moderates,” who had always insisted on supporting unflinchingly the “enlightened reformer.”¹⁰³ The victory of anticommunism, in short,

100. See Dmitri Furman, “‘Perevernutyj istmat?’ Ot ideologii perestroiki k ideologii ‘stroitel'stva kapitalizma’ v Rossii,” *Svobodnaia mysl'*, no. 3 (1995); Vladislav Zubok, “How the Late Socialist Intelligentsia Swapped Ideology,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 15, no. 2 (May 2014): 335–42.

101. This lack of ideological clarity has been lamented, and rightly, as it led to many misunderstanding as to the real objectives of the reforms, but it should not be forgotten by projecting an artificial ideological clarity onto the fluid ideological landscape of the time.

102. Crane Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution* (New York, 1965).

103. See for example the call for full support for El'tsin expressed at a round table in the summer of 1992 by former MT members Vassilii Seliunin, Leonid Gordon, and Iakov Berger (who had become “moderate” at that point): Iurii Burtin, ed., *God posle Avgusta. Gorech' i vybor: Sbornik statei i interv'iu*, (Moscow, 1992), 209–56. See also the uncompromising position expressed during the October 1993 crisis by former MT members

came at the price of the rejection of oppositional politics by most Soviet liberals in order not to hinder the course of reforms, an underappreciated outcome that had far-reaching consequences afterward.

The reluctance to stand in opposition sheds light on the motives that inspired many liberal intellectuals, in the years following perestroika, to support and to grant democratic legitimacy to the Russian president's attempts at the monopolization of political power, which was eventually enshrined in the 1993 Constitution.¹⁰⁴ The debate on opposition observed within the MT also foreshadows one of the most important dividing lines of post-Soviet Russian politics. Throughout the 1990s and, indeed, the early 2000s, disagreements over the politics of opposition were at the core of the irreconcilable dissension between the liberal party Iabloko, which embodied the "radical" position formerly expressed in the MT, and the various pro-presidential liberal parties, like Choice of Russia, Democratic Choice of Russia, and the Union of Right Forces, which followed the principles promoted by "moderates" in the MT.¹⁰⁵ Beyond personal feuds between party leaders, this line of contention reflected a long-standing dilemma that was first publicly debated during perestroika and has not lost its currency still.

More broadly, I would like to suggest that this debate on opposition is crucial because it raises a fundamental question about the purpose and nature of democracy, insisting either on its efficiency in the resolution of urgent policy questions, such as economic reform, or on its ability to guarantee opportunities for citizens to participate in political life. Far from being specific to Soviet Russia, this political predicament echoed "the essential conflict between the deontological imperative of democracy and pragmatic concerns to achieve results efficiently," observed by James Krapfl among the Czechoslovak democrats in the wake of 1989.¹⁰⁶ Hence, the third and final lesson taught by the debates at the MT is to invite us to think of democratization as an open-ended transformation that entails intractable choices regarding the design and dynamics of its desired outcome. Arguably, citizens of established democracies can hardly claim more certitudes in this regard than their Soviet or east European counterparts.

Ales' Adamovich, Iurii Davydov, Iurii Kariakin, Andrei Nuikin, Bulat Okudzhava, Valentin Oskotskii, Anatolii Pristavkin, and Boris Vasil'ev, along with several other famous liberal intellectuals: "Pisateli trebuiut ot pravitel'stva reshitel'nykh deistvii," *Izvestiia*, October 5, 1993, 3.

104. On the "superpresidential" character of the 1993 Russian Constitution, see M. Steven Fish, *Democracy Derailed in Russia: The Failure of Open Politics* (New York, 2005), chapter 7.

105. David White, "Going Their Own Way: The Yabloko Party's Opposition to Unification," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 21, no. 4 (2005): 462–86; Ol'ga Malinova, *Liberalizm v politicheskom spektre Rossii (na primere partii "Demokraticeskii vybor Rossii" i obshchestvennogo ob'edineniia "Yabloko")* (Moscow, 1998).

106. James Krapfl, *Revolution with a Human Face: Politics, Culture, and Community in Czechoslovakia, 1989–1992* (Ithaca, 2013), 227.