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Planning as a Social Technology. Yevgeni Preobrazhensky and the Prognosis for the Future

Il piano come tecnologia sociale.
Yevgeni Preobrazhensky e la prognosi per il futuro

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A B S T R A C T

Yevgeni A. Preobrazhensky was one of the main economists of Soviet Russia. In his analysis of the transition from the NEP to socialism we find structural elements of what the author calls plan-based thought. The concept of «socialist rationality» and «primitive socialist accumulation», the formulation of a «new economic and administrative science», the concept of planning as a result of «social rationalization» and the idea of «forecasting» as an expression of a specific conception of time that claims to impose the future in the present, are fundamental for understanding plan-based thought and its transformations on a global level.

KEYWORDS: Preobrazhensky; Soviet Plan; Social Prognosis; Socialist Rationality; New Economics.

Yevgeni A. Preobrazhensky è stato uno dei principali economisti della Russia sovietica. Nella sua analisi del passaggio dalla NEP al socialismo troviamo elementi strutturali di quello che l'autrice chiama pensiero di piano. Il concetto di «razionalità socialista» e di «accumulazione socialista primitiva», la formulazione di una «nuova scienza economica e amministrativa», il concetto di pianificazione come risultato della «razionalizzazione sociale» e l'idea di «previsione» come espressione di una specifica concezione del tempo che pretende di imporre il futuro nel presente, sono fondamentali per comprendere la storia del pensiero di piano a livello globale e le sue trasformazioni attuali.

PAROLE CHIAVE: Preobrazhensky; Piano sovietico; Prognosi sociale; Razionalità socialista; New Economics.

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“We building ants...” As he pronounced this word, a cold monster of hatred stirred at the back of his gray eyes. “Yes, we building ants are necessary [...] while you solitary geniuses with your tremendous ideas that stand on tenuous legs, are not necessary. There is no capitalist here to buy your ideas, and the people have no use for primitive passions that jolt the economic routine”¹.

MEPHISTO:

Gray, my dear friend, is every theory,
And green alone life’s golden tree².

«The principal mistake we have all been making up to now is too much optimism; as a result, we succumbed to bureaucratic utopias. Only a very small part of our plans have been realised. Life, everyone, in fact, has laughed at our plans. This must be radically altered. Anticipate the worst»³ Lenin wrote in 1921. In twenties’ Russia the plan was used as a weapon for continuing the revolution in a society that had yet to be transformed⁴. The plan was not reducible to «socialist accounting»⁵ because it embodied a clash with the social forces of the past. Throughout the history of Soviet planning the agrarian question represented a recurrent and inescapable – then known as «accursed» – problem. For this reason Bolshevik power considered its main weapon to be industrialization, which with Stalin would become the *workerisation* of society.

The plan is the Soviet history of power, of the attempt to synthesise political and social power⁶. At the heart of the restructuring of the relationship between economy and politics in the USSR is a specific conception of the plan that develops through debate, theorization and practical experiments. This is not simply a Soviet history but part of a global history of the plan⁷. All over Europe various planning experiments were carried out, to mention only a few: the *Beveridge Report*, which follows Beveridge’s *Planning Under Socialism* of 1936,

¹ V. DUDINTZEV, *Not by Bread Alone*, London, Hutchinson, 1957, p. 140.

² W. VON GOETHE, *Faust*, New York, Anchor Books, 1990, p. 207.

³ V.I. LENIN, *Ideas About A State Economic “Plan”*, in V.I. LENIN, *Collected Works*, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1965, Vol. 32, pp. 499-500.

⁴ P.J. BOETTKE, *The Political Economy of Soviet Socialism: The Formative Years, 1918-1928*, New York, Springer Science, 1990; E.H. CARR, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923, Vol. III*, New York, Macmillan Company, 1953.

⁵ Y.A. PREOBRAZHENSKY, *From NEP to Socialism, Lessons II*, «Marxist Archive», <https://www.marxists.org/archive/preobrazhensky/1921/fromnep/lecture11.html>, accessed 25 June 2020.

⁶ S. PONS – F. WELCOME, *The Power System of Stalinism. Party State in the USSR (1933-1953)*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 1988.

⁷ Q. SLOBODIAN, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2018; K.K. PATEL, *The New Deal. A Global History*, Princeton, Princeton UP, 2016; S. PONS, *La rivoluzione globale. Storia del comunismo internazionale, 1917-1991*, Torino, Einaudi, 2012.



and the Fabian conception of a *Plan for Britain* (1943)⁸; Fascist corporatism and the so-called “programmatic economy” in Italy⁹; *planism* in France and in German trade unions¹⁰. Already by the 1920s a new discourse on society was developing at a global level – also in reaction to the crisis of liberalism – evidenced in the debate on administration in Great Britain, on corporate and state planning in the US, and, in Germany, on *Sozialisierung*, as a social democratic answer to the Novemberrevolution and *Rationalisierung* that started with Walter Rathenau and Friedrich von Gottl-Ottlilienfeld. Despite their ideological differences, *Planwirtschaft*, the Planned Economy and *Economie dirigée* or *Planisme*, the Soviet Plan and the National Socialist Plan¹¹ all express a new way to react to the problems of «global society» revealed by the 1929 crisis. Even earlier in the US the institutionalization of a “technocratic bargain” among social actors and social sciences was a first attempt at capitalist planning¹².

The debate on planning in the USSR was therefore part of the diffusion of what could be defined as a *plan-based thought* that involved both politics and social sciences, and had above all complicated the relationship between the economy and the state in Europe and the US.

⁸ B. WOOTTON, *Freedom under Planning*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1945. See also R. FERRARI, *Beatrice Potter e il capitalismo senza civiltà*, Roma, Viella, 2017, chap. 4.

⁹ P. SCHIERA, *Il corporativismo: concetti storici*, in A. MAZZACANE – A. SOMMA – M. STOLLEIS (eds), *Korporativismus in den südeuropäischen Diktaturen*, Frankfurt am Main, Klostermann, 2005, pp. 35-48; P. SCHIERA, *Korporativismus in Faschismus*, in G. BENDER – R.M. KIESOW – D. SIMON (eds), *Das Europa der Diktatur. Steuerung – Wirtschaft – Recht*, Baden-Baden, Nomos, 2002, pp. 69-70; R. FERRARI, *Una società senza qualità. L'ordine gerarchico del corporativismo di regime tra Italia e Germania*, «Rivista Storica Italiana», 1/2019, pp. 180-204.

¹⁰ D. VAN LAAK, *Planning. History and Present of Anticipating the Future*, «History and Society», 34/2008, pp. 305-326; D. VAN LAAK, *Technocracy in 20th Century Europe – An Influential “Background Ideology”*, in L. RAPHAEL (ed), *Theorien und Experimente der Moderne. Europas Gesellschaften im 20. Jahrhundert*, Köln, Böhlau, 2012, pp. 101-128; D. VAN LAAK, *Between ‘Organic’ and ‘Organisational’: ‘Planning’ as a Political Guiding Category between Weimar and Bonn*, in B. DIETZ – H. GABEL – U. TIEDAU (eds), *Griff nach dem Westen. Die ‘Westforschung’ der völkisch-nationalen Wissenschaft zum nordwesteuropäischen Raum (1919-1960)*, Münster, Waxmann Verlag, 2003, Vol. 1, pp. 67-90; T. ETZEMÜLLER (eds.), *Die Ordnung der Moderne. Social Engineering im 20. Jahrhundert*, Bielefeld, Transcript, 2009.

¹¹ P.G. NORTH, *France’s New Deal. From the Thirties to the Post-war Era*, Princeton, PUP, 2010; L. RAPHAEL, *Radical Ordnungsdenken und die Organisation totalitärer Herrschaft: Weltanschauungseliten und Humanwissenschaftler im NS-Regime*, «Geschichte und Gesellschaft», 27/2001, pp. 5-40.

¹² See in this issue J. LEVY, *Planning in the Post-World War II United States*, pp. 95-105. See also M. RICCIARDI, *The Discipline of Freedom. High Modernism and the Crisis of Liberalism*, in M. CIOLI – P. SCHIERA – M. RICCIARDI (eds), *Traces of Modernism*, Frankfurt/New York, Campus, 2019, pp. 107-128. O.L. GRAHAM, *Toward a Planned Society: from Roosevelt to Nixon*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1976; G. ALCHON, *The Invisible Hand of Planning. Capitalism, Social Science, and the State in the 1920s*, Princeton NJ, Princeton Legacy Library, 1985; R. BARITONO, *Ripensare lo stato: scienze sociali e crisi politica negli Stati Uniti fra Otto e Novecento*, «Ricerche di Storia Politica», 3/2013, pp. 301-318; I. KATZNELSON, *Fear Itself. The New Deal and the Origins of our Time*, New York-London, Liveright Publishing, 2013; W. SCHIVELBUSCH, *Tre New Deal. Parallelismi fra gli Stati Uniti di Roosevelt, l’Italia di Mussolini e la Germania di Hitler. 1933-1939*, Milano, Marco Tropea Editore, 2008.

The Soviet plan was the product of a plan-based thought that had developed over time, as a response to the various challenges that the Bolshevik power had had to face, and therefore did not have a fixed and unitary model. On the contrary, it was exposed to the tensions on all sides that ran through Soviet society following the revolution. In spite of the establishment in 1921 of the Planning Commission, known as Gosplan, the launch of the first five-year plan seven years later was the result of a series of partial plans and technical *budgetary* tests of *the national structural economy*, and served to determine the economic objectives of Bolshevik politics within the context of conflicts that continually revealed the gap between ideology and social reality.

Before the five-year plan, the Vesencha (the Supreme Council of the National Economy) was the laboratory of Soviet planning. It had been established on 15 December 1917, in the anarchy of the First World War and the period after the revolution. What drove the plan formulated by the Vesencha was not budgets or coefficients but a significant number of Soviets that were meant to plan the present, control and use the resources of the bourgeoisie, seize the state machinery, and take control of economic power¹³. The rest, as Lenin observed, was more a matter of experience than of having a plan: «experience will teach us many more things... Let's nationalize the banks and the unions... and then we'll see»¹⁴. The present would be planned in order that the future could take a different form from that which had been the Russian reality for centuries, and a different direction from that taken in Western capitalist countries.

After 1927-28, faced with the limitations and challenges of the *NEP*, the plan changed its purpose and revealed an essential political contradiction: Soviet plan-based thought was the ideology that put an end to the revolutionary process and its unpredictability, while actively pursuing its realization¹⁵. The history of this struggle against unpredictability characterized the Soviet plan of the thirties: Soviet economists like Yevgeni A. Preobrazhensky, critics of political economy but aware of the backwardness that hindered the immediate establishment of the socialist economy, had to invent a «new economic science» to strengthen the economic politics of the plan. As Soviet jurists Evgeny Pashukanis and Peteris Stuchka noted, the plan unmasked the essential antinomy between state and law¹⁶, i.e. between power and norm. In a similar way,

¹³ O. ANWEILER, *The Soviets. The Russian Workers, Peasants, and Soldiers Councils, 1905-1921*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1975.

¹⁴ V.I. LENIN quoted in M. DOBB, *Russian Economic Development since the Revolution*, New York, Routledge, 1928, p. 28.

¹⁵ N. CUPPINI - R. FERRARI, *Il piano come strategia d'ordine del capitalismo*, «Quaderni di Scienza & Politica», 8/2020, pp. 227-258.

¹⁶ E. PASHUKANIS - P.I. STUCKA ET. AL, *Teorie sovietiche del diritto*, Milano, Giuffrè, 1964, p. 91. See R. GUASTINI, *La "teoria generale del diritto" in USSR*, «Materiali per una storia della cultura giuridica», 1/1971, pp. 408 ff. E. PAŠUKANIS, *Problema gosudarstva vo vtoroi piatiletke (The Problem of the State in the Second Five Year Plan)*, VKA, 6/1932, pp. 80-84; P.I. STUCHKA, *Selected Writings on Soviet Law and Marxism*, ed. by R. SHARLET - P.B. MAGGS - P. BEIRNE, New York,



Preobrazhensky's theory revealed the antinomy between politics and economics.

His intellectual and political development was strongly focused on the social character of economic development. He grew up and studied in an orthodox religious environment and then, having abandoned his faith, devoted himself to history and economics. His strong interest in the social novel and his involvement in political activities meant he paid increasing attention to the inequalities and exploitation of the poor. He joined the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party in 1903 and was chosen to represent the Urals at the all-Russia party conference in 1907, where he met Lenin for the first time. He took an active part in the February revolution and at the 6th Party Congress was elected to be a member of the Central Committee, where he argued against socialism in one country. In 1918, in his book *Anarchism and Communism* he affirmed the need for a centralized planned economy, in which there would be «no waste of social labour since the role of the market [...] will be replaced by the work of a statistician»¹⁷ and criticized *worker artels* (cooperative associations) as structures that would favour the interests of small groups. Preobrazhensky was also charged with following the work of three departments: women's work; agitation and propaganda; and work in rural areas. He thus had the opportunity to observe the causes and effects of the problem of economic inequality in these departments. He wrote a thesis for the Central Committee monthly circular on the fight against material inequality and bureaucracy in the party. Confirming the important position he had acquired not only in theoretical debates but also in state structures, he became a member of the Central Control Committee (*Tsentral'naya Kontrol'naya Komissiya*), which had been the party's highest controlling body since its establishment in 1920¹⁸. In 1921 he became the person to whom Lenin referred for financial policy. But by the following year two strongly conflicting visions of the plan had already emerged: one was a social plan based on the «*smychka* (alliance) of the city and the village», the other was Preobrazhensky's conception of the *scientific* and *technological* planning of society that bypassed the political problem of Bolshevik power in rural areas.

Though he has often been studied as an original economic thinker – the inventor of a theory of «economic take-off completely alternative to the

M.E. Sharpe, 1988; W. ROSENBAUM, *Zum Rechtsbegriff Bei Stučka Und Pašukanis*, «Kritische Justiz», 4, 2/1971, pp. 148-65.

¹⁷ Y.A. PREOBRAZHENSKY, *Anarkhizm i kommunistizm (Anarchism and Communism)*, Moscow, Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1921, pp. 44-45.

¹⁸ M.M. GORINOV – S.V. TSAKUNOV – K. GUREVICH, *Life and Works of Evgenii Alekseevich Preobrazhenskii*, «Slavic Review», 50, 2/1991, p. 287.

traditional one»¹⁹ preceding Walt Rostow's theory of economic growth – there has not yet been a political analysis of the concepts he employs. I do not intend to reconstruct the history of the Soviet plan, nor will I face the age-old question of how socialist Preobrazhensky's plan was or its exact place within the enormous and complex political and ideological debate on industrialisation²⁰. In order to think about the global problems of the plan, I will focus on some central aspects of Preobrazhensky's theory. I am interested in analysing the semantics of the plan in an author who addressed two fundamental problems of plan-based thought: the plan as the art of government and the plan as the formulation of a new relationship between time and forecast, which would again become central in Soviet planning in the 1950s and 1960s²¹ and which is crucial to understanding the forms planning currently takes. Preobrazhensky's plan develops a politics of «forecasting» within a global political debate on the relationship between economics and politics. In order to reconstruct the semantics of the plan starting from these problems, we must think about the history of the struggle against that «worst» evoked by Lenin, that is, the structural problem to which the plan had to respond: the gap between unequal material conditions and the socialist political project at the base of which an inexhaustible war between old and new was still on-going.

1. *The plan as art of government*

The model of the planned economy that was already beginning to take shape in the early 1920s was a political form of compromise taking place within the complex framework of the «accursed peasant problem», the bitter debate triggered by the *NEP*, the concept of industrialization as a socialist path to progress and finally the «invention» of a *development economics* that was unprecedented in the Western world²².

Despite his differences with both Lenin and Stalin – the latter condemned him to death in 1937 – Preobrazhensky was a fundamental thinker of what he called the «proletarian planning principle». In his analysis of the transition from the *NEP* to socialism we find structural elements of his *plan-based thought*: the concept of «socialist rationality», the formulation of a «new economic science», planning as an outcome of social «rationalization» and finally

¹⁹ M. CACCIARI – P. PERULLI, *Piano economico e composizione di classe*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1975, p. 83.

²⁰ A. ERLICH, *The Soviet Industrialization Debate, 1924-1928*, Cambridge, Harvard UP, 1960.

²¹ E. RINDZEVIČIŪTĖ, *The Future as an Intellectual Technology in the Soviet Union*, «Cahiers du monde russe», 56, 1/2015, 111-34; S. GEROVITCH, *From Newspeak to Cyberspeak: A History of Soviet Cybernetics*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2002; see also G. GRAPPI, *L'ordine logistico come problema politico, tra esperienze storiche di cibernetica per il socialismo e la piattaforma come piano*, «Quaderni di Scienza & Politica», 8/2020, pp. 331-356.

²² A. NOVE, *An Economic History of the U.S.S.R.*, Baltimore, Penguin Books, 1969.



«forecasting» as an expression of a specific conception of time that thinks of the future as a process taking place and determined in the present.

Preobrazhensky formulated his theory during a crucial political moment in the history of the Soviet plan. The Leninian conception of the plan understood the economy as a dependent variable of power: the *NEP* aimed at the Bolshevik control of capital; it was the present to be planned. With the transition to Stalin's model, the revolutionary project became the plan, as a technical construction of the socialist future against the difficulties of the present. The plan was proposed as an institution of the working class, which in turn was quickly transformed into the ideological engine and material mechanism of the planning machine²³. In the Stalinist command economy, work planning was the paradoxical condition for the collective liberation from work. It was both the compromise offered to a working class that could not yet be freed from work, and indeed had to be made to work, transformed into «worker ants», and the institution that would have to consecrate the supremacy of class struggle and the elimination of the capitalist market and its bourgeois knowledge. Stalin produced a workers' anthropology that was aimed at overcoming all economic difficulties and addressing the problem of the transformation of society. With Stalin's plan, Lenin's insistence on political education, the political control of capital and the appropriation of bourgeois knowledge, became something different: the total substitution of the market with the plan and of capitalist knowledge with a workers' science²⁴.

In Preobrazhensky's theory this science took the form of a «social technology (*sotsialnaia tekhnologiia*)». Planning is a series of stages and phases of «transition» and the mechanisms that socially reorganize production and ensure that there is constant movement towards its ideal objectives.

As, in the sphere of economic reality, the commodity of the capitalist mode of production is replaced in planned economy by the product, value by the measurement of labour time, the market (in its capacity as the sphere in which the law of value manifests itself) by the bookkeeping of planned economy, surplus value by surplus product, so in the sphere of science political economy gives place to social technology, that is, the science of socially organized production²⁵.

This «social technology» was made up of a set of economic practices and laws and was social because it produced «the new Soviet man»²⁶ and in so doing managed the construction of a socialist society. The ideology of the plan

²³ R. DI LEO, *Il modello di Stalin*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1977.

²⁴ R. DI LEO, *L'esperimento profano*, Rome, Ediesse, 2012.

²⁵ Y.A. PREOBRAZHENSKY, *The New Economics*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1965, p. 48.

²⁶ Y.A. PREOBRAZHENSKY, *From NEP to Socialism*; M. CIOLI – P. SCHIERA – M. RICCIARDI (eds), *Traces of Modernism*.

was not a demagogic tool but was a force for imposing a new «social rationality», needed to establish the society of the plan.

This period also saw the struggle for *the new Soviet man*, for the regeneration of the Russian worker as an actual national type. Soviet industry could not make rapid progress so long as there had not been vanquished, in the working class itself, not merely ignorance and lack of culture but also laziness, lack of conscientiousness in work, and slovenliness. Soviet industry could not triumph without the introduction into it of *a new scientific organization of labour* and the formation of a type of worker who would correspond to the higher type of industry.

Preobrazhensky's plan therefore required the «theorization» of a *new economic science* and the scientific organization of work and production. The new economic science had to administer the economic laws and understand the functioning of the Soviet economy as a *counter-plan* to capitalism²⁷, which, in Lenin's terms, later taken up by Stalin, was imposed as an «inevitable, constant and continuous process»²⁸.

The individualistic principle that dominated the peasant world allowed the social reproduction of capitalism, imposing itself as the only possible form of economic development and social relations. The NEP had left the fear of an indefinite predominance of the individualistic principle of production, something which had to be overcome with a new criterion that was not only political, but also scientific. What Preobrazhensky called *Novaia Ekonomika: Teoriia I Praktika* (*The New Economics. Theory and Practice*) indicated the need for a rationalization of the conditions for the country's development. It was the paradigm of a new path for development, in the face of a «ruined and backward» economic situation. He argued that the party faced two contemporary and converging challenges. It was forced to plan within global capitalism, ensuring that the Soviet experiment survived despite its international isolation. Thus it had to solve «the problem of economic equilibrium under concretely existing capitalism and in the economy of the USSR». At the same time, however, it had to politically direct its internal processes and impose itself within the requirements of political struggle and economic needs.

We know the Soviet economy, it is an historical fact, and we can to some extent discern its laws of development in their specific peculiarity. This consists above all in the fact that the socialist sector of our economy has not yet developed all its advantages over capitalism but still rests upon a backward technical basis quite inadequate to the level of its social structure, which is historically more progressive than the most advanced contemporary capitalism. This sector still has to master the first steps of socialism: it has to assemble, in very difficult conditions and in a very dangerous international situation, the basic elements for production necessary to beat

²⁷ Y.A. PREOBRAZHENSKY, *Economic Notes III. On the Advantage of a Theoretical Study of the Soviet Economy*, in D.A. FILTZER (ed), *The Crisis of Soviet Industrialization*, New York, White Plains, 1979, pp. 42-53.

²⁸ Y.V., STALIN, *Collected Works*, vol. 12, Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1952, p. 43.



capitalism economically, that is, by a more rapid development of its productive forces²⁹.

The referral to the «dangerous international situation» shows that if in Soviet history the building of socialist society could never be reduced to a purely economic question, the need to invent a new economy and apply administrative rationality to the revolutionary process also showed an awareness of the material limits of the party's agency. Preobrazhensky's attention to the imbalance of social forces in the USSR means we cannot look at the history of the Soviet plan solely through the lens of political domination over the economy³⁰. His work is a more or less explicit attempt to solve the problem of power in the USSR with the new economy. This meant that he perfectly understood that the antinomy between politics and economics could not be solved simply stating the supremacy of the first: the conditions for this supremacy had to be created. Economically. With the affirmation of the «planning principle» there was a change in public political discourse. The increasing emphasis on technical skills and the constant recurrence of the concept of «development» signalled the imposition of a socialist ideology of progress, that is, of an ideology of the plan which, in spite of the party, took on an autonomy of its own and had material effects on the construction of Soviet society.

While the NEP was conceived of as an institutional, rather than simply economic, transformation, thus as a strategic compromise, the principle of planning rationalized and stabilized the power of the party, which, by institutionalizing the revolution, renounced the revolution's procedural dimension and considered itself as the one and only manifestation of the power of the proletariat. In Stalin's plan, productivity had a non-strategic but substantial logic: it was a matter of rationalizing in order to equal, and thus overcome, capitalism³¹, as a means for achieving socialism in the future. Preobrazhensky, and many theorists of the plan, relied on this idea of the future for legitimising Soviet economic politics in the present. The Soviet plan aimed simultaneously at productivity in the present and at sustaining a promise for the future. The idea that the future retroactively commanded the planning of the present was part of its fundamental logic. There was a debate between geneticists, who saw the plan as a scientific tool for the analysis of present economic conditions, and teleologists³², for whom the plan was the implementation of the revolution, i.e. «a

²⁹ Y.A. PREOBRAZHENSKY, *The New Economics*, p. 24.

³⁰ R.W DAVIES – M. HARRISON – S.G. WHEATCROFT (eds), *The Economic Transformation of the Soviet Union, 1913-1945*, Cambridge, CUP, 1994.

³¹ Preobrazhensky forcibly admitted this at the XXVII Congress (1934), see A. NOVE, *Introduction*, in Y.A. PREOBRAZHENSKY, *The New Economics*, pp. vii-xix.

³² G. CADIOLI, *Soviet Planning in Theory and Practice. From Marxist Economics to the Command System*, in this issue, pp. 17-39.

system of tasks to change reality»³³. Although the latter prevailed, this debate led to a model in which scientific and statistical analysis was used to produce the targets of the plan as a synthesis of forecasting and management³⁴.

The political enigma of the Soviet plan took form in Preobrazhensky's work: the idea that it was necessary to give material substance to socialist society, but that in order to do so, the revolutionary process had to be ended and stabilized, or, in other words, the revolution had to be continued by the government.

Both the law of value and the planning principle, the basic tendencies of which assume in the Soviet economy the form of the law of primitive socialist accumulation, are operating within a single economic organism, and are counterposed one to the other as a result of the victory of the October revolution. Consequently, neither law appears in its pure form. The proletarian state guides not only the state economy but also domestic and foreign policy, endeavouring to protect the system as it exists, to strengthen it, and to bring socialist principles to triumph in it³⁵.

The plan is thus the art of government. After the 1917 revolution the *dictatorship of the proletariat* became a form of government necessary for the party to make the *Soviets* functional, to direct production and therefore development, imposing strategies capable of mediating between the given situation and the change that the political project required³⁶. The ideology of the plan served to produce a fundamental change of perspectives between the abstract time of forecasting and the concrete time of the present; forecasting was defined as concrete and infinitely manageable, while the present had to be forced into the scheme of the plan and its targets.

In his conception of the transition from the NEP to the planned economy, Preobrazhensky inserted a technological conception of the plan that considered «primitive socialist accumulation» as the keystone of a development that was something new with respect to capitalist accumulation, insofar as it happened *after* the Bolshevik revolution and aimed at a predefined political objective:

With the abolition of the law of value in the sphere of economic reality, the old political economy is abolished likewise. Its place is now taken by a new science, the science of foreseeing economic necessity in an organized economy and the more expedient fulfilment of needs by production and other means. This is a quite different science, this is social technology, the science of organized production, organized labour, the science of a system of production-relations where economic regularity manifests itself in new forms, where there is no more reification of human relations, where, with the abolition of the commodity, commodity fetishism also disappears, where foreseeing the results of economic measures and study of what will be

³³ R.E VAISBERG, *Problemy pyatiletnego perspektivnogo plana*, Moscow, Gos. Izdat, 1928, p. 15.

³⁴ G.T. GRINKO, *The Five-Year Plan of the Soviet Union. A Political Interpretation*, NY, International Publishing, 1930; G. GROSSMAN, *Notes for a Theory of the Command Economy*, «Soviet Studies», 15, 2/1963, 101-123.

³⁵ Y.A. PREOBRAZHENSKY, *The New Economics*, p. 55.

³⁶ A. NOVE, *An Economic History of the U.S.S.R.*; M. LEWIN, *Political Undercurrents in Soviet Economic Debates: From Bukharin to the Modern Reformers*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1974.



occupies not a smaller but within a very short time a more important place than estimating objective consequences, than analysing what was and why it was³⁷.

He formulates a technical and economic theory of development (*razvitiie*) «neutral (*neitralnoe*) from the standpoint of direct influence on socialist accumulation»³⁸. He believed «pure» economic analysis was necessary to determine the conditions of socialist accumulation in practice and, therefore, for «the achievement of the optimum expanded socialist reproduction»³⁹.

Paradoxically, we see here that the unity between economics and politics is broken by the principle of planning itself, because it demanded a practice for managing technical progress that in fact postponed politics. The new economic science had to achieve the targets set by politics. The definition of «practice» that resulted was «the highest court of appeal for deciding the truth or falsity of a particular theory or a particular theoretical argument». Preobrazhensky could therefore state that «the central practical theme of the present book is the problem of accumulation in state economy»⁴⁰. The *Gosplan*, he continues, «designs its programs on the basis of objective facts». To legitimize the plan, economic science had to offer a new vision of these facts: practice has the final say, but it is theory that governs. Theory is required to dominate the empirical: the plan has its own epistemology.

2. *Socialist Rationality and Socialist Accumulation*

Preobrazhensky redefined Marx and Engels's conception of a «social plan»⁴¹ as a process of the «rationalization» (*ratsionalizirovatsia*) of the division of labour, of political economy and of socialist relations.

He believed the plan should ultimately replace the market, but that its design and implementation had to be founded on the market and its objective «regularities». The problem of planning as a process of forecasting and contingency management was formed around this internal contradiction of the persistence of the plan-market dualism. Preobrazhensky noted that even in advanced capitalist countries the market couldn't survive without the plan⁴². Even where the market was the prevailing economic form, there were institutions that ensured that «the distribution of productive forces takes place in

³⁷ Y.A. PREOBRAZHENSKY, *The New Economics*, pp. 54-55.

³⁸ *Ivi*, p. 212. See also E.A. PREOBRAZHENSKI, *Novaia Ekonomika. (Teoriia I Praktika)*, Moskva, Izdatestvo Glavarkhiva Moskvyy, 2008, p. 186.

³⁹ Y.A. PREOBRAZHENSKY, *The New Economics*, p. 146.

⁴⁰ Y.A. PREOBRAZHENSKY, *The New Economics*, p. 41.

⁴¹ Vedi R. DAY, *Preobrazhensky and the Theory of the Transition Period*, «Soviet Studies», 27, 2/1975, pp. 196-219.

⁴² Vserossiiskaya konferentsiya RKP (bol'shevikov), *Byulleten' No. 2*, p. 23, quoted in R.B. DAY, *Preobrazhensky and the Theory of the Transition Period*, «Soviet Studies», 27, 2/1975, pp. 196-219, p. 202.

such a way as to guarantee [...] that the most important branches of industry receive productive forces and means». Yet in Russia, where the transition to socialism was still theoretically on going, he believed systematic planning was being forgotten and that the party had overlooked the fact that state capitalism implied a regulated market, subject to state intervention and control.

Preobrazhensky's compromise in the face of the plan-market dilemma lies in his recognition that, at least for a certain amount of time, the producers of raw materials work for the market and money continues to play a necessary role in «primitive socialist accumulation». In his schema, the law of value and the law of primitive socialist accumulation are clearly juxtaposed and polarized: «the law of primitive socialist accumulation is a regulator of economic life operating simultaneously and in conflict with the law of value»⁴³. The essential point of his theory is to accumulate in the hands of the proletarian state the «material resources mainly or partly from sources lying outside the complex of state economy»⁴⁴. These are obviously the resources of the petit bourgeoisie and, more particularly, of the peasant economy: «the task of the socialist state consists here not in taking from the petty-bourgeois producers less than capitalism took, but in taking more from the still larger income which will be ensured to the petty producer by the rationalization of everything, including the country's petty production»⁴⁵. The problem of the relationship between industrialized society and peasant society was reduced to planned economic exchange.

Planning was therefore the administrative rationalization of the economic-social structure, of the productive and distributive process and of class relations and consciousness: it was the «rational use of the labor force»⁴⁶ as a technical application of «socialist rationality». Preobrazhensky held that capitalist accumulation in the USSR had to become a tool for primitive socialist accumulation, and that the planned economy had to be a process that would engage in a struggle to integrate hostile sectors of society into socialist rationality. It was a class struggle pursued administratively against hostile peasants, or, in other words, an administration of class struggle: it was therefore a project of a future society. Hence, the technology of the plan served not only to address Russian backwardness, but to impose and enforce the economic relations necessary to produce socialist rationality. Preobrazhensky's economic analysis is in fact intertwined with a discourse on the social development of the working class as a

⁴³ Y.A. PREOBRAZHENSKY, *The New Economics*, p. 24.

⁴⁴ *Ivi*, p. 84.

⁴⁵ *Ivi*, p. 249.

⁴⁶ Y.A. PREOBRAZHENSKY, *Economic Equilibrium in the System of the USSR*, in D.A. FILTZER (ed), *The Crisis of Soviet Industrialization*, New York, White Plains, 1979, pp. 168-235, p. 228.



solution to the peasant problem, and on the stabilization of Soviet power⁴⁷. The problem of power is thus formulated in terms of a social rationalization of economic development:

What is the essence of the worker-peasant bloc? It is that the proletariat, as the ruling class and therefore as the class which takes responsibility for the Soviet economy as a whole, by leading the peasantry in its struggle for the existence of the Soviet system, carries out its great historical mission of developing and consolidating a new type of economy, and fights against all vacillations, moods of disappointment, revolts and retreats on the part of its ally⁴⁸.

The «proletarian planning principle»⁴⁹ was defined as a principle of struggle, but in fact the poor farmers that were part of this struggle would be subject to the technological rationalization of their work, without any accompanying material support, at least not immediately. Although Preobrazhensky saw the *non-equivalence* between productive sectors, i.e. the social inequality of different segments of the population, as transitory and dictated by the needs of primitive socialist accumulation, it clearly demonstrated the problem of *time* for the ideology of the plan. The *new economy* was thus also the technology that governed and decided social processes and the differentiated and hierarchical relevance of time. The past became the time of revolution but also of an economic backwardness that had to be overcome, the present was the time of the social technology necessary to create the conditions for socialist politics.

At the XI Congress of the Party, Preobrazhensky criticized the concept of state capitalism, which meant state intervention through the nationalization of the means of production but also the reintroduction of money. Lenin had defined this as a «strategic retreat». Instead, Preobrazhensky did not see in state capitalism any temporary strategic step back from socialism, but rather insisted on the existence of a double regulator in the Soviet economic system, i.e. the non-peaceful coexistence of the *market and socialism*⁵⁰. For him, the NEP was not capitalism; on the contrary, there was a need for the greater specialization of the Soviet power apparatus to allow it to be an alternative able to meet the challenges of capitalism. Whereas for Lenin the NEP was a political strategy, linked primarily to his idea of a political union between peasants and workers, for Preobrazhensky it was a necessary tactic for triggering «the law of primitive socialist accumulation» (*Zakon pervonachalnogo sotsialisticheskogo nakopleniia*), that is, the first «stage» of socialist development. But this stage would soon have to be replaced by the next one to stop the recovery of the commercial

⁴⁷ M. LEWIN, *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power: A Study of Collectivization*, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1968.

⁴⁸ Y.A. PREOBRAZHENSKY, *The New Economics*, p. 245.

⁴⁹ *Ivi*, p. 19.

⁵⁰ See M.M. GORINOV – S.V. TSAKUNOV – K. GUREVICH, *Life and Works of Evgenii Alekseevich Preobrazhenskii*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017.

market from damaging industrialization. Preobrazhensky supported the NEP for different reasons than Lenin, who was increasingly critical of Preobrazhensky's «ultra- and super-academic» concept of the plan⁵¹. While Lenin thought that Soviet power as working class power could risk the presence and movement of capitalist elements, Preobrazhensky wanted a social technology that stabilized Soviet power by fixing the course of economic development. For Lenin, the NEP was a government of contingency that produced contingencies. For Preobrazhensky it was instead a question of understanding how to eliminate them. This is also why he was ultimately opposed to the alliance with the peasants who were supposed to produce the surplus needed to start the process of industrialization.

In contrast with Bukharin, Preobrazhensky argued that the transition period from the NEP to socialism could not be completed unless the existing imbalance between industry and agriculture was countered and destroyed through a system of the «non-equivalence of exchange» between the two sectors. The net transfer of value from agriculture to industry responded to the law of primitive socialist accumulation, i.e. the set of devices that had to produce a shift of productive resources from the private to the socialized sector. He believed that this was how it would be possible to bring about the «expanded reproduction of socialist relations» and «an advance in the socialist quality of these relations»⁵². The problem of Soviet power returns here to the question of reaching an economic equilibrium, firstly on a technical level. The first stage of primitive socialist accumulation refers to the transfer of value to the state economy from sources extraneous and external to it, mainly small private industrialists and petit bourgeois and kulak mercantile agricultural capital. He goes on, «by socialist accumulation», which is the second stage, «we mean the addition to the functioning means of production of a surplus product which has been created within the constituted socialist economy and which does not find its way into supplementary distribution among the agents of socialist production and the socialist state, but serves for expanded reproduction»⁵³. In this way socialist accumulation would gradually develop, replacing primitive socialist accumulation and becoming that «surplus product» theorized by Marx⁵⁴.

Insisting on the class contradictions brought to the surface by the NEP and the need for state intervention to safeguard the socialist part of the economy, Preobrazhensky introduced a theory of development based on large industry

⁵¹ V.I. LENIN, *To Comrade Molotov For the Members of the Political Bureau. Re Comrade Preobrazhensky's Theses*, in V.I. LENIN, *Collected Works*, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1965, Vol. 33, p. 238.

⁵² Y.A. PREOBRAZHENSKY, *The New Economics*, p. 70.

⁵³ *Ivi*, p. 84.

⁵⁴ K. MARX, *Critique of the Gotha Program*, in K. MARX – F. ENGELS, *Marx/Engels Selected Works*, Volume Three, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1970, pp. 13-30.



and the centralization of decisions. His analysis reveals the «new function» that economic science assumes in a context of a mixed economy in relation to «political economy [that] studies only an historically transient type of production relations, so that its transformation into a different science after the socialist revolution is quite inevitable, if any forward movement can be said to be inevitable in the sphere of theory»⁵⁵. In Preobrazhensky's work, the relationship between planning, economic science and the political project of the party is set out according to a circular scheme:

the more organized the economy of the transition period becomes, the more transparent become the laws of economic necessity [...] the more the study of what exists will give way to the problem of understanding and predicting what needs to be done, the more the political economy will be transformed into the theory of economic strategy and the organizational ability of the state economy which subordinates the peripheral private economy to itself⁵⁶.

Rather than being the counterpoint between economy and politics, the Soviet plan should be understood here as assuming a relationship of constant tension between the two. The «proletarian planning principle» is always wider than the economic plan of socialist accounting, agricultural and industrial technology, and economic equilibrium⁵⁷. The «social technology» of the plan is necessarily a form of administration of the class struggle, which transforms the latter into a struggle between two *different types of economy*: «the state economy of the proletariat and the present day peasant economy constitute historically *two different types of economy*, to unite which a very long historical period of struggle between these forms is needed, with the adaptation of the lower forms to the higher»⁵⁸. It is significant that, after rejecting his reinterpretation of the law of value, theoretically developed by Nikolai A. Voznesensky, Stalin recovers much more Preobrazhensky than Bukharin in trying to justify his rejection of the idea of the «transformed law of value».

In spite of the ideological insistence on the domination of politics, which much literature has continued to use as a lens through which to understand the Soviet plan of the 1930s, through this analysis it is possible to see the economy as continuing to exert its tyranny over politics, forcing its continuous redefinition. Stalin had to get rid of the kulaks and the *nepmeny*⁵⁹ but ended reintroducing, initially as contingent measures, market, currency and trade, and then going so far as to consecrate them definitively as “Soviet” and socialist

⁵⁵ Y.A. PREOBRAZHENSKY, *The New Economics*, p. 69.

⁵⁶ Y.A. PREOBRAZHENSKY, *La legge dell'accumulazione socialista*, in N. BUKHARIN – Y.A. PREOBRAZHENSKIJ, *L'accumulazione socialista*, ed. by L. Foa, Roma, Editori Riuniti, 1969, p. 72. My translation.

⁵⁷ Y.A. PREOBRAZHENSKY, *Economic Equilibrium in the System of the USSR*.

⁵⁸ Y.A. PREOBRAZHENSKY, *The New Economics*, p. 245.

⁵⁹ Businessmen during the NEP.

measures. The problem was not just economic needs, but the way the relationship between economic system, social power and political power was thought out. This is something that has not yet been investigated since it complicates the historical analysis of the role of ideology and call into question the concrete power of the party.

In making the plan the art of government, Preobrazhensky faced a double problem that persisted until the collapse of the Soviet system: economic development and the advancement of the political process. He addressed this problem by distinguishing between economic theory and economic politics, according to a relationship of derivation that was never linear, in which the economic politics of the Soviet state had its own rules, could «apply the method of Marxist dialectics in new conditions»⁶⁰ and could be derived from the field of economic theory. Precisely for this reason, however, the study of the latter was essential, because it was entrusted with the task of clarifying the actual functioning of what he defined as the «double regulator» within the Soviet economy and the mechanism of primitive socialist accumulation. In this way, a separate superstructure emerged, with a set of its own theoretical necessities, which had to guide social development: this socialist ideology of progress overlapped with and transformed the political project for the construction of a socialist society. At the XIII congress, Preobrazhensky emphasised the need to strengthen planning elements. It could not be limited to a system of ex post controls and checks or to production optimization in relation to the distribution of resources. The plan had to be a tactic of intervention and transformation in production and power relations between the classes at the *hands of the Soviet state*. The objective was to strengthen cooperation, to expand state production, and to achieve a new technical level through scientifically and technologically defined industrialization. The plan was also taking the form of a technical government of politics. Paraphrasing and reversing Lenin's well-known expression⁶¹, it was electrification, specifically its administrative and economic organization, that created the Soviets in every city. «Socialist rationality» was industrial development within the framework of a «socialist encirclement» of agriculture realized through the forecasting and technical predisposition of production and distribution. Accelerated productive growth would naturally be followed by a rise in wages, an improvement in the relationship between productive sectors and an increase in schooling. Productive «discipline» (*distsiplina*) itself constituted a crucial element of that social technology that allowed for a transformation of social relations: «Through a certain system of labour education, all the necessary skills and the discipline of collective labour will be transformed here into

⁶⁰ Y.A. PREOBRAZHENSKY, *The New Economics*, p. 69.

⁶¹ «Communism is Soviet government plus the electrification of the whole country».



social instincts and will manifest as any other physiological instinct»⁶². The social reorganization that Preobrazhensky proposes betrays a “Darwinian socialism” that changes the level of discourse from political conflict to the social discipline of labour, politically neutralizing the strike: «where a strike has served to improve the lives of workers, a new, voluntary, general communal labour discipline should now serve. This discipline has already been born in us; it develops and grows stronger»⁶³.

The «social technology» of the plan would gradually transform a worker into a new «sovetskii chelovek (Soviet man)»⁶⁴. That *new man* would become the paradigmatic concept of the crisis of modernity and of modernist time⁶⁵. The new economy was therefore also «the struggle for the new Soviet man, for the regeneration of the Russian worker as an actual national type». The referral to the nation is striking: on the one hand it echoes the British discourse on *national character*, and on the other hand it signals the overlap between the Soviet worker as a political subject and his inclusion in a community different from that of class, clearly marked by a history that is not only Soviet but also Russian. This formula is even more controversial if we take into account the fact that the five-year plan was the price to pay for having a revolution in one country. The Soviet man was the individual appropriate to Soviet industry and its political project. «Soviet industry could not triumph without the introduction into it of a new scientific organization of labour and the formation of a type of worker who would correspond to the higher type of industry»⁶⁶.

3. *The plan as a forecasting technology and the politics of time*

In his first work Preobrazhensky imagined a journey through time, giving voice to a hypothetical Soviet economist from 1970 who explains to his audience how Europe managed to become socialist. The «planning principle» is here understood as a forecasting principle, defining a politics of time that considers the class struggle as a process of social evolution.

Preobrazhensky understands the «transition» in terms of clearly defined «stages». His theory of development proceeds by technical stages that necessarily determine political ones, or rather each single productive stage determines a political stage that should guarantee gradual progress towards socialist society, according to an evolutionary and mechanistic scheme. He imagined that even the shocks and tensions in which these steps would take place would

⁶² Y.A. PREOBRAZHENSKY, *Novaia Ekonomika*, p. 215.

⁶³ *Ivi*, p. 546.

⁶⁴ Y.A. PREOBRAZHENSKY, *From NEP to Socialism*, Lessons 11.

⁶⁵ M. CIOLI – P. SCHIERA – M. RICCIARDI (eds), *Traces of Modernism*.

⁶⁶ Y.A. PREOBRAZHENSKY, *From NEP to Socialism*, Lessons 11.

necessarily be functional to the plan: in fact, he imagined a kulak-bourgeois uprising in response to the shrinking of the private sector which would try to oppose and come into conflict with the «socialist reaction»⁶⁷ thus reactivating the revolution throughout Europe. It would be economic disequilibrium, the unequal exchange between sectors and the control of the surplus⁶⁸ that would trigger the political process, significantly defined both as «competition» and as «class struggle». As he wrote in an article published in 1921: «the outcome of the struggle will depend largely on the degree of organization of the two extreme poles, but especially on the strength of the state apparatus of the proletarian dictatorship»⁶⁹. From this point of view, the rationality of planning comes into conflict with the more complex process of proletarian organization. The social technology which Preobrazhensky theorizes as the essence of the socialist rationality of the plan imposes an evolutionary order over social conflict. The principle of planning unfolds in the name of political ends that are always related to a future time, but that govern the present with their abstract rationality:

In the Soviet Union, where there is a centralized state economy of the proletariat and the law of value is restricted or partly replaced by the planning principle, forecasting plays a quite exceptional role in comparison with its role in capitalist economy, and mistakes in forecasting, owing to the centralized conduct of the economy, can have graver consequences than mistakes made by the heads of a private economy, where tendencies in one direction are counter-balanced, often through the law of large numbers, by contrary influences. But if you are to direct and guide correctly, that means forecasting, and forecasting means illuminating with the searchlights of theoretical analysis that field of phenomena where those very causes are engendered of which we want to know the consequences beforehand⁷⁰.

He thus theorizes the plan as the government of forecasting. The science fiction expedient he used is significant: the «scientific prognosis [*prognozirovaniya*]]»⁷¹ in his work becomes the administration of the present *from the future*, where the «socialization of industry means by its very essence a transference of responsibility in economic leadership to science, to an extent quite unknown in capitalist economics»⁷². Governing is no longer only about the ability to deal with the problems of the present, but, as Hans Freyer would say a few years later, the possibility to «give shape to the future»⁷³ through technical skills and social objectivity, governed by the new development science. Foresight acquires a relevance that no longer depends on the estimation of material

⁶⁷ Y.A. PREOBRAZHENSKY *Outlook for the New Economic Policy* (1921), in D. FILTZER, *The Crisis of Soviet Industrialization*, pp. 3-19, p. 11.

⁶⁸ L. SZAMUELY, *First Model of the Socialist Economy*, Budapest, Akademiai, Köny Kiadó, 1974.

⁶⁹ Y.A. PREOBRAZHENSKY *Outlook for the New Economic Policy*, p. 17.

⁷⁰ Y.A. PREOBRAZHENSKY, *The New Economics*, p. 6.

⁷¹ *Ivi*, p. 273.

⁷² *Ivi*, pp. 6-7.

⁷³ H. FREYER, *Herrschaft und Planung. Zwei Grundbegriffe der politischen Ethik*, Hamburg, Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1933, p. 3.



consequences or on a political understanding of the past. Socialist regulatory organs become institutions of social forecasting: «this science is in a certain sense as distinct from political economy as the market of commodity economy is distinct from the future offices of the socialist regulatory organs, with their extremely complex and ramified nervous system of *social foresight* and planned guidance»⁷⁴.

The problem with socialist forecasting was its claim to make a prediction about subjects that did not yet exist. It aimed to predict something that was still in coming into being: the Soviet man. The rationality of the prognosis did not take into account the past, but made the present the absolute time from which it was possible to govern the future. The plan was both a final result – a future order – and a starting point that did not lie in the materiality of the present, but in the immaterial space of prediction that had to be constantly reproduced.

The political difference of Soviet planning was in the social power that it gave voice to and claimed to lead. The five-year plan was not only a way to organize economic development in a backward country, but the implementation of a political power that wanted to break the tyranny of classical economic science by administering the processes of social transformation through a new economic science. But this new science remained caught in the same traps as earlier economic sciences and was therefore incapable of producing new social practices. The principle of Soviet planning poses a problem that is still relevant today, as since the crisis of 1929 forecast became necessary for governing the complexity of global capitalism.

The administrative rationality that emerges from Preobrazhensky's plan-based thought reveals a specific conception of social evolution and is therefore primarily a discourse on its material effects and future consequences. It is no coincidence that the semantics of his work are analogous to those used by British advocates of administrative collectivism, Beatrice and Sidney Webb, who in the same years promoted a plan for the administration of society directed by the state, establishing the foundations of a new social science in Great Britain that aimed to transform the *social character of* individuals and businesses by creating a new «social efficiency» functional to the emergence of *industrial democracy*⁷⁵. The Webbs were the first, and obviously the only ones, to detect this convergence with some conceptions of the Soviet plan, reading in the scientific conception of the Bolsheviks the realization of their work on the definition of social science: «we see here, also, why “science”, to be useful in our command

⁷⁴ Y.A. PREOBRAZHENSKY, *The New Economics*, p. 55.

⁷⁵ R. FERRARI, *Beatrice Potter*.

over nature, must become “technology”»⁷⁶. Defining Soviet communism as «a new civilisation», the Webbs referred not only to the economic plan, but to the transformation that it could impress on Soviet power and on the function of the party, «an entirely new and original type of social institution [...] Soviet Communism [...] is whole-heartedly based on science, the newest and most up-to-date science, meaning man’s ever-expanding knowledge of the universe»⁷⁷. On the other hand, as Leontief noted, «Soviet planning procedures do not differ much from those [of the] War Production Board, British Supply Ministries and their equivalent in Germany»⁷⁸. Planning was always a highly technical task, and even more so in the USSR. These same procedures were developed and used in the form of «logistical analysis» and management techniques primarily by the United States⁷⁹.

As shown in the numerous texts written by the first neoliberals criticising the planned economy and planning thought⁸⁰, there was not only a clash between two models of society, capitalist and communist, but on a global level, the spread of plan-based thought opened up a more complex debate on how to respond to the end of *laissez faire* liberalism⁸¹, and to the problem of the relationship between the economy, social conflict and political power. From the 1920s and 1930s “*to plan or not to plan*” was the dilemma that expressed the crisis of the anthropological model of the economic individual and that called into question Western political thought, as well as Western borders and institutions. The plan became the instrument for the production and reproduction of an increasingly mobile order and its abstract time⁸². The neoliberal use of planning thus had a certain continuity with the problem of imposing social rationality. Nascent neoliberalism had to deal with the problem that plan-based thought wanted to solve, that of the conquest of time in a global society that had taken on new forms.

Today capitalism is rethinking itself around the problem of how to predict social behaviours through developing technologies that are increasingly involved in the management of time. While in the USSR it was a question of imposing the future in the present, today neoliberalism uses an updating of the past to stabilize an order necessary for its reproduction and its domination over

⁷⁶ B. WEBB – S. WEBB, *Soviet Communism. A New Civilization* (1935), London, Longmans, Green and Co., 1947, pp. 768.

⁷⁷ *Ivi*, p. 321. B. WEBB, *A Vital Discovery in Social Science: Planned Production for Community Consumption as the Alternative to the Profit System*, «Soviet Russia Today», 9/1940, 8-33.

⁷⁸ W. LEONTIEF, *Essay in Economics*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1966, p. 231.

⁷⁹ J. LEVY, *Planning in the Post-World War II United States*.

⁸⁰ F.A. HAYEK (ed), *Collectivist Economic Planning*, London, Routledge, 1935.

⁸¹ M. RICCIARDI, *Tempo, ordine, potere. Su alcuni presupposti concettuali del programma neoliberale*, «Scienza & Politica», 29, 57/2017, pp. 11-30.

⁸² Si veda a tal proposito D. VAN LAAK, *Zukunft konkret. Historical remarks on the actions of practical planners*, in M. BERNHARDT – B. SCHELLER – S. BRAKENSIEK (eds), *Ermöglichen und Verhindern: Vom Umgang mit Kontingenz*, Frankfurt, Campus, 2016, pp. 191-208.



the future. In this way, while not planning centrally, the neoliberal order produces a future horizon. Even in the absence of a *project to plan society*, neoliberal planning takes the form of a governance of time, where the conflict between economics and politics is constantly neutralized, and technological rationality, the algorithm as the logistics of forecasting, commands the organization of work and the hierarchical administration of differences. The neoliberal plan lacks a project to plan society but exerts an invisible but concrete tyranny over the possibility of its transformation.