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Experiences of War and Revolution: Vladimir Socoline's Long Road to Damascus

Korine Amacher

In 1981, the Russian Vladimir Socoline, born in Geneva in 1896 and a resident of Switzerland since 1939, received a letter from the Swiss authorities notifying him that he was denied the Swiss citizenship for which he had applied a few years earlier.[1] Socoline had an illustrious biography. During the Civil War, he had served the Bolshevik leader Lev Kamenev as secretary. Between the two world wars he was a Soviet diplomat and the Soviet undersecretary-general of the League of Nations in Geneva.[2] The official Swiss notification of 1981 stated:

> It is clear from the information obtained that you have been active in movements with guiding ideas that are irreconcilable with the democratic conceptions of our State. Under these circumstances, we have not been able to acquire the conviction that you would become a citi-

[1] We have chosen to use the spelling Socoline as opposed to Sokolin, because it was the spelling that Socoline used when he wrote in French, in his private life and as a writer.

[2] Socoline has aroused the interest of historians mainly because of his diplomatic activity during the interwar period. Sabine Dullin, for example, often mentions him in her book on Soviet diplomats. Other researchers, mostly in Switzerland, have been interested in him as part of their work on cultural diplomacy or on Swiss Communists and their networks during the interwar period. Sabine Dullin, *Des hommes d'influence: Les ambassadeurs de Staline en Europe, 1930–1939* (Paris: Payot, 2001); Sophie Pavillon, *L'ombre rouge: Suisse-URSS 1943–1944. Le débat politique en Suisse* (Lausanne: Antipodes, 1944); Jean-François Fayet, *VOKS: Le laboratoire helvétique. Histoire de la diplomatie culturelle soviétique durant l'entre-deux-guerres* (Geneva: Georg, 2014); Peter Huber, *Stalins Schatten in die Schweiz: Schweizer Kommunisten in Moskau. Verteidiger und Gefangene der Komintern* (Zurich: Chronos, 1994); Christine Gehrig-Straube, *Beziehungslose Zeiten: Das schweizerisch-sowjetische Verhältnis zwischen Abbruch und Wiederaufnahme der Beziehungen (1918–1946) aufgrund schweizerischer Akten* (Zurich: H. Rohr, 1997).

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> zen respectful of our institutions, therefore we decided to reject your request.[3]

This answer was the price that the 85-year-old Vladimir Socoline had to pay for his commitment to Bolshevism more than half a century earlier. It was the price for serving the USSR for 20 years with, as he wrote, "faith and truth,"[4] and for his eternal refusal to disavow his support of the Soviet regime, even though he never returned to the USSR after 1939. Socoline died in Geneva in 1984 as a stateless person. (See the photograph of Socoline, figure 9 in the gallery of illustrations following page 190.)

The purpose of this article is to shed light on Socoline's life during the Great War and the Russian Revolution and to pay close attention to the ways in which Socoline described the turning points of his own biography. How did the war and the events of 1917 shape personal lives, and specifically, Socoline's life? How were individual choices made? In what conditions? How and why did Socoline convert to Bolshevism? This article will first reconstruct the biography of Socoline until 1918 by focusing on his motivation to join the Bolsheviks. It will then show the transformation of a young Russian man from Geneva into—in his own words—an "aggressive and convinced"[5] revolutionary. Finally, it will analyze the impact of his adherence to Bolshevism on his own life after 1918.

In 1949, Socoline published his personal memoirs in Switzerland under the title *Soviet Sky and Land* (*Ciel et terre soviétiques*).[6] However, this text deals only with the period from 1915 (his departure to Russia) to 1939 (his refusal to return to the USSR). The facts are often recounted with great precision and one can imagine that it was based on notes taken at the time of the events, or on a diary that has been, unfortunately, impossible for historians to find so far. Furthermore, in his published writings Socoline was always very discreet about his private life, as one can particularly notice in his *Soviet Sky and Land*,

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[3] Archives fédérales suisses, E4260-03#2005-268#30453*#14, K-134698, Dossier Socoline-Welsch (1977–1992) (letter from the Federal Department of Justice and Police of Switzerland, 5 June 1981).

[4] Bibliothèque de Genève (BGE), Département des manuscrits, Fonds Vladimir Socoline, Ms.fr.7919 ("Je suis un des rares survivants parmi ceux qui participèrent à la révolution…," undated).

[5] "1917. Russie. Empire," 1972 (BGE Ms.fr.7929, env.13).

[6] Vladimir Socoline, *Ciel et terre soviétiques* (Neuchâtel: À la Baconnière, 1949). On Socoline's memoirs, see Georges Friedmann, "Vladimir Socoline, Ciel et terre soviétiques," *Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 4 (1950): 560–61.

where there is no mention of the fact that he had established a family in Russia (Socoline's son was born in November 1918 in Moscow).

Despite the fact that Socoline apparently did not keep a diary and that his personal memoirs focus on only a part of his life, documents in several different archives allow us to reconstruct his biography in detail. A large number of his manuscripts, part of which are unpublished and were written after 1940 (articles, drafts of talks he gave in Switzerland, novels, autobiographical accounts, incomplete and sometimes undated manuscripts, etc.) are kept in Swiss libraries.[7] While dealing with various topics, most of them are connected with life and politics in the USSR. Correspondence before and after 1917, various notes and drafts, administrative papers, autobiographical fragments, and other papers are also kept privately by his grandchildren in Moscow. They provide a better understanding of how, after the long years of silence that followed World War II, family ties were restored in the early 1960s, and then continued, despite the Iron Curtain, until Socoline's death.[8] Since Socoline was under police surveillance in Switzerland for many years, numerous traces of his life can also be found in the Swiss Federal and Cantonal Archives.[9] These files illustrate the difficulties that a man who had served the Soviet regime encountered in a deeply anticommunist Switzerland. Moreover, the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), and the Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (AVPRF) hold several files that correspond with different periods of Socoline's life.[10] Finally, the plays that he wrote in the Soviet Union during the 1920s are kept in the Russian State Archive of Literature and

[7] BGE département des manuscrits (Fonds Vladimir Socoline); Bibliothèque de la Ville de La Chaux-de-Fonds, département des manuscrits (Dossier Équipes de la Paix).

[8] I would like to thank Socoline's family in Moscow, who generously gave me access to their archives ("Personal archive of Vladimir Socoline"). Their accounts allowed me better to understand certain episodes of Socoline's life.

[9] The various files kept in the Swiss archives contain many different kinds of documents, such as documents on the surveillance his parents were subjected to in Switzerland before the revolution, residence permit requests, administrative correspondence, police reports on his activities, his wife's file, etc. Archives d'État de Genève: Dossier 111991 (Vladimir Socoline); Archives fédérales suisses, E4001C#1000-783#995 (1942); E4260-03#2005-268#30453* (K-134698, Dossier Socoline-Welsch, 1977–1992); E4320B#1975/40#459* (Dossier Sokoline [-Chapiro], Vladimir, 1920–1959); E4110A#1000/1830#1296* (Dossier Socoline, 1945).

[10] Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial′no-politicheskoi istorii (RGASPI) f. 495 (Ispolkom Kominterna), op. 205, d. 9580 (personal file of Ivan Socoline); f. 17 (Tsentral′nyi komitet KPSS, op. 100, d. 168254 (personal file of Vladimir Socoline); Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF) f. A2306 (Ministerstvo prosveshcheniia RSFSR), op. 69, d. 1588 (correspondence with the Central Committee for the

Art (RGALI), while the novels he published in Switzerland after 1939 are of interest while analyzing his personal life trajectory.[11]

Between Switzerland and Russia

Vladimir Socoline was born in Geneva under the name of Vladimir Schapiro in 1896. His parents, Olga Levina and Abraham Schapiro, both Russian Jews, were students of medicine and antitsarist militant activists. Four months after his birth, Socoline was entrusted to a Swiss family with whom he spent all his childhood and adolescence. In an unpublished autobiographical text from the early 1970s, Socoline described his childhood as happy. His Swiss "father," Emmanuel, was a worker and a labor activist whereas his Swiss "mother," Marie, was a former factory worker. Socoline depicted her as a "guardian angel more revered than a mother."[12] Although they no longer resided in Geneva, his biological parents had not abandoned him. His father, Abraham, never returned to Russia and settled in London, where the young Vladimir spent his holidays. As for Olga, his mother, she seems to have spent her life between Geneva, London, and Russia: the archives of the University of Geneva suggest that she was enrolled as a medical student for more than ten years, between 1891 and 1903, with several semesters of absence. Socoline often mentioned memories of his childhood linked to Russia and his mother, who was close to the Socialist-Revolutionaries (SRs) at that time. In 1905, when he was nine years old, he spent some months with her in Nikolaev (in southern present-day Ukraine), where he attended a Russian school and where his mother cared for and hid people "who had every reason not to go to the hospital" (i.e., opponents of tsarism).[13] During his stay in Russia, Socoline witnessed political and especially antisemitic violence, which seem to have been the first shock of his life. In a personal testimony—an undated manuscript—he recalled:

Control of Repertoire and with the direction of the Theater of the Revolution, concerning the ban on the production of the play by V. A. Socoline/Spletenie/"Skvozniak").

[11] Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva (RGALI) f. 3048 (personal fond of Alpers Boris Vladimirovich [1894–1974], producer); f. 656 (General Administration for the Control of Repertoire, Committee for Arts for the SNK of the USSR [Glavrepertkom], Moscow, 1923–1952). Jean Colin, *Une douce petite vie* (Geneva: Grivet, 1941); Jean Colin, *L'horreur du péché* (Geneva: Grivet, 1942); Jean Colin, *Roman de Sœur Rose* (Geneva: Grivet, 1942); Vladimir Socoline, *Éloge de trois kopecks* (Paris: André Laffont, 1966).

[12] "Limbes et brisures," November 1972 (BGE Ms.fr.7915).

[13] Autobiography, 1956 (personal archive of Vladimir Socoline).

> The most important memories concern my work as a 9-year-old male nurse with my mother, who was head of a secret medical station. As a watchman, I was in charge of observing the movements of the patrols, and of informing the revolutionaries who had found refuge in our home. I distributed leaflets in stores, on avenues and in public offices. Since that time, a curious phobia has haunted me: more than once I observed processions of the Black Hundreds, who were hunting down my revolutionaries; they sang hymns, carried portraits of the Tsar, but above all, they were accompanied by religious banners and by members of the clergy wearing chasubles. For many years I had a real phobia of priests.[14]

Socoline remembered "horrific scenes on the streets." He also recalled promising his mother, who had asked him "never to forget all the blood and atrocities" that he had seen, to become a "good revolutionary" or a "good priest, who would not walk at the head of these dreadful processions of murderers." The nine-year-old boy he was did not understand the meaning of his mother's smile, which was probably a response to his childish words.[15] In another manuscript, Socoline wrote that even though "he was born into an intellectual environment that was a great supplier of people for the gallows and political convicts," he remained very "eclectic" politically until 1917.[16] Marxism, he remembered, did not attract him at all:

> The little I knew about Marxism put me off. I only saw "iron laws," universal determinism.… When I heard around me that Trotskii was a kind of demiurge and that this demiurge was a Marxist, I did not feel drawn to such a strange hybrid. When I would read the *Communist Manifesto*, the Marxist text book for people who do not know Marxism, I would use the term "intellectuals" instead of "proletariat." Marxists considered that this "social stratum" did not exist as a class. It did not bother me.[17]

In another autobiographical text also dating from the early 1970s, Socoline recalled how his mother had tried to convince him to embrace the revolutionary struggle but achieved quite the opposite:

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[14] "Pour bien des gens…" undated document (BGE Ms.fr.7929, env.12).

[15] Ibid.

[16] "1917. Russie. Empire," 1972 (BGE Ms.fr.7929, env.13).

[17] "Le feu prométhéen et la peine des hommes: Témoignage sur la Révolution soviétique," 1964 (BGE Ms.fr.7909).

> My mother read *Revolutionary Russia*, printed on tissue paper like most underground publications.[18] My father studied assiduously the editorials of the Social Democratic press, preferably Bolshevik. One was either an S-R [Socialist Revolutionary] (optional red shirts, like Garibaldians), or an S-D [Social Democrat] (black shirts, optional, of course). When talking about somebody, the first question was about his or her political affiliation: S-R or S-D? The KaDety [Constitutional Democrats, i.e., liberals] came later, in 1905. I felt antipathy towards the S-Ds, and I did not understand anything of their discussions. I knew they were never sentenced to death, and that they were rarely sent to penal colonies. I preferred the S-Rs with their bombs, their executed heroes, their convicts' tragedies.… But my mother pushed me too hard on this side, so I ended up falling for the emperor and his family. In Russia, I sang the imperial anthem and the appropriate prayers every morning.… Afflicted to see me sinking into an abominable conformism, my mother inundated me with abstruse pamphlets whose darkness paradoxically uplifted me in my own eyes and provided me with arguments against my poor mother-preacher.[19]

After his stay in Russia, Socoline returned to Switzerland, and completed his schooling in Geneva in June 1915. Four months earlier, in February 1915, the Russian mission in Bern had announced that any Russian subject of conscription age had to return to Russia within fifteen days. But only a few Russians living in Switzerland answered the tsarist government's call to arms. Some asked for a medical certificate of their incapacity for military service, while others preferred to serve in the French army. Some were also political émigrés who openly refused to serve the autocracy, as well as some pacifists.[20] Socoline was 18 years old, which at that time fell below the minimum age for conscription. However, he decided voluntarily to join the tsarist army.

Socoline's decision to return to Russia voluntarily during the war was rather surprising. In *Soviet Sky and Land*, Socoline explained that his decision to go to the army was greeted with incomprehension by his Genevan family, his Russian comrades, and also by the Russian consul in Geneva, who tried to

[18] *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia* was an illegal publication of the Socialist-Revolutionaries, published in Russia, and then in Geneva until 1905.

[19] "Limbes et brisures," November 1972 (BGE Ms.fr.7915).

[20] Alfred Erich Senn, *The Russian Revolution in Switzerland: 1914–1917* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1971); Alfred Erich Senn and Nancy Hartmann, "Les révolutionnaires russes et l'asile politique en Suisse avant 1917," *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique* 9, no. 3–4 (1968): 324–36.

dissuade him from crossing Europe while the war was raging. Some explanations for Socoline's decision can be found in personal archival documents. In an undated draft, he mentioned his "immoderate pride." He explained that he had always wanted to be "strong" and that, at that time, he thought that war would become a "school of strength" for him.[21] In 1974, he stated in a radio interview: "I left the Genevan pleasures of a protected adolescence with the goal to rescue an invaded motherland.… I swapped my slippers and my mountain boots for the boots of the Russian infantry."[22]

Socoline arrived in Russia after a long and complicated journey. After hearing Socoline explain that he had just arrived from Switzerland, the recruiting officer said, "[I]f it's true, you are a fool." Another officer who assigned him a place in a tent in the military camp at Khodynka near Moscow put it even more bluntly: "All Russia is getting the hell out of here and this crafty person does just the opposite."[23]

Indeed, the young man who grew up in the quiet city of Geneva went to the front with no idea of what was awaiting him there. This is suggested both by his letters to his Swiss family in 1915 and in 1916 and by the detailed account of his war experience that he gave in *Soviet Sky and Land*.[24] Socoline had to learn survival techniques very quickly in the immensely brutal world of the Russian army that did not spare him at all: his civilian clothes were immediately stolen, as well as the cigarettes that he was naively offering his comrades.[25] At the front, he also discovered, through the Ukrainian case, the importance of the nationalities question within the Russian Empire. Indeed, as Socoline served in a Russian infantry regiment near Rovno (Rivne), his company was mainly composed of "Ukrainians," as some of his comrades called themselves, to his great surprise:

> I had known many southerners, but this was the first time I came across people calling themselves *Ukrainians*. I loved Malorossian (Little-Russian) folk operas, I understood the spoken language quite well,

[21] Draft, undated (BGE Ms.fr.7919, env. 6, dos. 8, fol. 5).

[22] Vladimir Socoline, interview on French-language Swiss radio, 28 September 1974, http://www.rts.ch/archives/radio/divers/emission-sans-nom/3970058-a-la-sdn-1-.html (accessed 20 February 2021).

[23] Socoline, *Ciel et terre soviétiques*, 10.

[24] Ibid., 9–46; letters from the front, 1915–16 (personal archive of Vladimir Socoline).

[25] Socoline, *Ciel et terre soviétiques*, 11.

> I had flipped through the *Eneyida* translated by [Ivan] Kotliarevskii,[26] I loved [Taras] Shevchenko and his admirable testament,[27] but all this, as well as my knowledge of history, had never made me think about the existence of a Ukrainian problem outside Galicia, Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia, and Austrian Bukovina.[28]

On the Southwestern Front, Socoline quickly understood that the "Ukrainian problem" did not only concern [Habsburg] Western Ukraine, but also the Russian region of "Malorossiia," whose denomination, as one of his Ukrainian interlocutors explained to him, had been "invented by the tsars." It was also there that Socoline was confronted with Russian antisemitism for the second time in his life. In *Soviet Sky and Land*, he remembered how the Russian soldiers openly expressed their antisemitic sentiments without bothering anyone. On one occasion a doctor at the front promised an injured Jewish soldier who had lost his legs that he could return home soon. Socoline's comrade commented on this episode harshly: "The Jew is made in such a way that he can get out of any mousetrap."[29]

Notwithstanding the brutality, the vulgarity, the antisemitism, and the intolerance of these men at the front, it was here in the trenches that Socoline discovered the fraternity of the Russian soldiers who shared the same terrible living conditions. Unlike many other comrades, Socoline survived what he described as a real massacre game. However, his time at the front was interrupted by long stays in military hospitals due to injuries and sickness, followed by leaves, during which he went near Moscow, where his mother lived.[30]

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[26] Ivan Kotliarevskii (1769–1838) did not actually translate Virgil's *Aeneid*, as suggested by Socoline, but wrote a parody of it. In his text, the Trojan heroes are transformed into Zaporozhian Cossacks. Kotliarevskii's *Eneyida* (1798) is the first book written in the modern Ukrainian language. Kotliarevskii is thus considered as founder of modern Ukrainian literature.

[27] Socoline refers here to the most famous poem of the Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko, *The Testament* (*Zapovit*), written in 1845, in which he expresses his desire to be buried in the steppes of Ukraine.

[28] Socoline, *Ciel et terre soviétiques*, 27–29.

[29] Ibid., 35–36.

[30] Letters from the front, 1916 (personal archive of Vladimir Socoline).

Socoline's Path to Bolshevism

It was in the trenches of the Great War that Socoline began distancing himself from the tsarist government. In *Soviet Sky and Land*, he depicted the difficult situation of the Russian army, the lack of military equipment worthy of a modern army, and the growing resentment of soldiers towards officers over time. The war was turning into a slaughterhouse, soldiers were progressively overwhelmed by the feeling that they were victims of a senseless massacre, and were dying without knowing whether they were being killed by a Russian or a German bomb. Actually, the war experience seems to have played a more decisive role in his rejection of the tsarist power and ideology than his above-mentioned experiences of antisemitic violence near Odessa in 1905 or the revolutionary narratives of his parents. In 1947, during a talk in Switzerland he stated:

> The dreadful images of the massacre at the front and the no less frightening impressions of a miserable society that was maintained and tormented by a regime and its supporters … were sufficient to let me take a stand when the revolution began. I have often thought and continue to believe that if I had not known the sweetness of Switzerland in my youth, I would not have felt the unacceptable horror and the immense decay of Russian life of that time as such an insult.[31]

However, it was not in the trenches where the revolt against the tsarist regime took shape. In *Soviet Sky and Land*, Socoline did not mention revolts of soldiers against officers or instances of refusal to fight. It was behind the lines that there was more time to think than during the battles at the front. There, soldiers became increasingly aware of their aversion to war, their disgust for the tsarist regime, and their hope for radical political change, which they translated into the Ukrainian saying "May it be worse, may it be otherwise."[32]

Indeed, it was on the eve of the February Revolution, during a leave, following his hospitalization due to a serious injury, that an event occurred, which Socoline described as a turning point in his life. Once, a foreman he had met and who had occasionally provided him with clandestine revolutionary newspapers, asked him to join a secret political meeting of workers that was organized in a nearby forest. Socoline felt an immense pride. At this clandestine meeting he first got in touch with workers, who were all employees of local factories. He also delivered his first speech in public: "For the first time,

[31] "Est-Ouest (Conférence chez les Francs-maçons)," 1947 (BGE Ms.fr.7925, fol. 293).

[32] Socoline, *Ciel et terre soviétiques*, 34.

I heard myself saying things that I was unaware of knowing and I expressed them with passion." Socoline was so moved that he began to tremble. Choked by tears, he had to stop speaking: "I think I listened to other speakers very badly. I questioned myself, I answered myself, I discovered myself."[33] Socoline depicted this experience as a personal revelation.

The February Revolution had just broken out. Socoline was "drunk" with the atmosphere of freedom that followed the end of the tsarist regime and everything he saw in Moscow.[34] It seemed to him that the world had suddenly been overthrown, that something totally new—the beginning of a new epoch—had taken place. As he explained much later to a journalist, in contrast to the October Revolution, which was "much more complicated and less universal," the February Revolution "was welcomed by the entire people… Everybody was happy.… Many people were kissing in the streets," and everything quivered for the revolution.[35] Undoubtedly, Socoline shared this revolutionary "joy."

Soon after February Socoline was promoted to the rank of second lieutenant and got a second decoration, but had not yet received any assignment.[36] However, he never returned to the front, due to his physical condition. It was at that time that he took his first steps in journalism, specializing in labor issues and trade unions. In a short unpublished autobiographical text, he mentioned that in 1917, he wrote articles for the newspaper *Trud*, "which was then dominated by the SRs."[37] This information is confirmed in an administrative document,[38] but Socoline himself avoided, for obvious reasons, mentioning this fact in the CVs and official autobiographies written in the USSR.[39] At the same time, he took some exams in order to get a qualification equivalent to his Swiss diploma. Subsequently he enrolled as a student at the University of Moscow, where he started to study law. He sometimes met with "Muscovites from Geneva," all of whom belonged to a world to which he did not feel close, nor support. Indeed, they did not share his revolutionary "joy" at all. "They were very depressed" and some tried to find analogies between the February

[33] Ibid., 39.

[34] Ibid., 40.

[35] Socoline, interview on French-language Swiss radio, 28 September 1974.

[36] Socoline, *Ciel et terre soviétiques*, 40.

[37] Autobiography, 1956 (personal archive of Vladimir Socoline).

[38] Undated and untitled document (Personal file of Vladimir Socoline, RGASPI f. 17, op. 100, d. 168254; pagination not available).

[39] *Trud* was the newspaper of the Moscow committee of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party in 1917.

Revolution, which they called a "riot," and the stages of the French Revolution.[40] However, as he repeated in different accounts, Socoline was far from expecting the events that were about to happen in the autumn of 1917. The day after the October Revolution, he went to a metalworker union to collect information on wages and working hours. The man who welcomed him, a Bolshevik activist, asked him how he dared to bother him with his "little stories of labor rates and statistics," when such an important event, "the seizure of power by the workers' councils" had just occurred. Socoline remembered that it was only at that moment that he became aware of what was going on around him and started thinking about its meaning.[41]

Socoline was certainly not an indifferent bystander. However, he had not yet chosen the Bolshevik side. Furthermore, the joy that he felt after the abdication of Nicholas II had disappeared and given way to anxiety. He remembered that the "atrocious poverty" that he saw everywhere, the "fervent hopes of the crowds" on the one hand, and the "relevant arguments of the Socialist opponents of the [Bolsheviks'] coup d'état" on the other, caused "mixed feelings" in him. In January 1918, Socoline, imbued with Swiss democracy, clearly disagreed with the forcible dissolution of the Constituent Assembly. At a political meeting in the street, where he tried to justify his disagreement and to set Swiss democracy as an example for Russia's political future, he was verbally attacked by a worker who knew him vaguely, and a woman accused him of "hesitating between the revolution and the counterrevolution."[42]

As a matter of fact, Socoline needed a few more months before definitively choosing his side. In a short text, written in 1972, presumably a draft of a speech, he explained the huge impact that the Left SR uprising against the Bolsheviks in July 1918 had had on him and his political mindset. The insurrection broke out during the 5th Congress of Soviets, after the ratification of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk during the 4th Congress in March 1918, which made the Left SRs leave the government as a sign of protest. One of the Left SRs' goals was the annulment of the ratification of the Brest-Litovsk treaty, a step that would have inevitably led to the resumption of the war with Germany.

Back then, Socoline was not at all "indignant" at "Bolshevism being in power." Nevertheless, Bolshevism seemed to him a "temporary anomaly" for two reasons: first, because of its "technical and administrative incompetence," and second, because he was at that moment convinced that a "patriotic burst" was about to trigger war again. As Socoline remembered, various anti-So-

40 Socoline, *Ciel et terre soviétiques*, 32, 40.

41 Ibid., 44; Socoline, interview on French-language Swiss radio, 28 September 1974.

42 Socoline, *Ciel et terre soviétiques*, 45.

viet military formations in different places in Russia were already launching armed attacks, and the disorganization was total. The general atmosphere and future perspectives were gloomy. At an improvised street meeting, Socoline heard a delegate to the Soviet Congress explaining to a group of workers that "the situation was very bad" and that they had "to save the revolution immediately." Seeing the worried, exhausted, and dejected expressions of the workers, Socoline realized that he "no longer had the right to abstain." As he had during his secret meeting with workers during his military leave, overwhelmed by emotions, he began to speak, as he wrote, "without asking permission." The threat that seemed to weigh on the fate of the revolution suddenly appeared to him in all its magnitude and made him go over to Bolshevism: "it was during this dreadful [SR] uprising that [he] found [his] way to Damascus" and became "an aggressive and convinced militant, with ups and downs for a long time." What he also called his "road to the Bolsheviks" was, he asserted, a "thunderbolt."[43] He had once and for all chosen a side.

To how many men and women living in revolutionary times in Russia can this type of "conversion" be applied? It might seem rather hazardous to make any biographical generalizations based on the case of one individual. However, the study of Socoline's life until 1918 reminds us that political conversions are not always grounded on rational acts or deliberate decisions. As a young man, Socoline was not a very "ideological" person, and never mentioned in his different accounts the influence of political writings or of a political program that he would have felt close to before July 1918. Besides, it would be too easy to determine the reasons that led him "almost naturally" to the Bolshevik camp. Having revolutionary parents is not always a guarantee of becoming radical, and even less of becoming a Bolshevik if one of the two parents stood close to the SR movement. Furthermore, as Socoline himself stated, his main political childhood experience before the war had exerted rather the opposite effect on him. In autumn 1915, he decided to join the tsarist army for patriotic reasons, to defend his "motherland." As he wrote later, the "dreadful images" of wartime slaughter were enough to let him "take a stand when the revolution began"—i.e., definitively to turn away from tsarism—but his turn to Bolshevism in July 1918 took place only after he experienced a revelation, under the influence of a strong emotion. This is exactly how he described it in different accounts at different times. His "road to Damascus," like any conversion, could have taken other paths.[44]

[43] "1917. Russie. Empire," 1972 (BGE Ms.fr.7929, env.13).

[44] About commitment to communism, see, for instance, Bernard Pudal and Claude Pennetier, *Le souffle d'Octobre 1917: L'engagement des communistes français* (Ivry-sur-Seine: Les Éditions de l'Atelier, 2017).

An "Aggressive and Convinced Militant"

The autumn of 1918 undoubtedly marked a turning point in Socoline's life, and not only in terms of political orientation. His son Leonid was born in Moscow in November 1918;[45] the same month, he became a member of the Bolshevik Party.[46] Shortly after, Socoline started to work in the secretariat of a Politburo member. With a letter of introduction in his pocket, Socoline went to the Metropol´ Hotel, where Lev Kamenev was living at the time. Kamenev asked whether Socoline could help with correspondence. Socoline spent his first working day sorting Kamenev's papers, which were contained in a big suitcase, to allow the Bolshevik leader to have a better overview of his files.[47]

This is how Socoline described the starting point of his collaboration with Kamenev in *Soviet Sky and Land*. Other unpublished autobiographical texts allow us to understand how he found himself so quickly and easily at the heart of Bolshevik power. It was his mother who put him in contact with one of her close friends, the "old party member" Serafima Gopner. Like Socoline's mother, Gopner was active in the revolutionary circles of Odessa and Nikolaev on the eve of the 1905 Russian Revolution. From September to October 1918, she was the secretary of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Ukraine, before being succeeded by Emanuel Kviring, a socialist activist and then Soviet politician, who was also a friend of Socoline's mother. Serafima Gopner recommended the young man to Lev Kamenev, whom Socoline remembers as "Lenin's favorite" at the time. From then on, Socoline's life changed radically: "the brutal passage from the horrors of the front and the moans of the military hospitals to the height of power took up all my energy."[48]

Indeed, the young Bolshevik soon entered the core of Soviet power in the Kremlin where Kamenev, like most other Bolshevik leaders—Lenin, Trotskii, Grigorii Zinov´ev, Stalin, Nikolai Bukharin, and Viacheslav Molotov, for instance—quickly settled with their families. Socoline therefore spent part of his days in the Kremlin, and the other part in the Moscow Soviet, whose president was Kamenev. He took part in two expeditions charged with guaranteeing food supplies to Moscow and the major industrial centers. During one of these expeditions with Kamenev and Kliment Voroshilov in May 1919,

[45] In *Soviet Sky and Land*, Socoline did not speak about his personal life at all. However, information about his private life can be found in other personal texts, in administrative documents, and in police reports.

[46] Personal information (in RGASPI f. 17, op. 100, d. 168254; pagination not available).

[47] Socoline, *Ciel et terre soviétiques*, 48.

[48] Autobiography, 1956; letter to his son Leonid, 16 April 1979 (personal archive of Vladimir Socoline).

Socoline met the anarchist leader Nestor Makhno in his village—Guliai-Pole (Ekaterinoslav region), right before the rupture of relations between the Bolsheviks and Makhno. Today the only remaining testimony of this meeting is Socoline's detailed description of Kamenev's expedition, which was published in the Soviet journal *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia* in 1925.[49]

Between 1919 and 1922, Socoline carried out various semiofficial missions abroad on behalf of the young Soviet Government—in Switzerland, France, and Germany. During this period, like other revolutionaries of Jewish origin, the young man changed his name, a decision that he never mentioned in his own texts. Much later, however, in 1977, when he applied for Swiss citizenship, he had to explain his decision to the Swiss administration: "in the beginning, Socoline was only a pseudonym. Legalized in 1922 in Moscow, according to the simplified procedure of the time, this name became mine."[50]

Socoline returned to the USSR in 1923, where he worked once more for Kamenev until the end of 1924. He then asked to join the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, but the Party first sent him to the provinces, especially to the Caucasus, where he was in charge of propaganda and organizational missions.[51] In 1927, he finally began to work in the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, led by Georgii Chicherin and then Maksim Litvinov from 1930. After several missions abroad, notably in Germany, Switzerland, and Turkey, he was appointed secretary in 1931 and then counsellor at the Soviet embassy in France. Finally, in 1937, Socoline moved to Geneva, where he was appointed Soviet undersecretary-general of the League of Nations, an appointment that represented the pinnacle of his diplomatic career. He returned to the USSR only for short stays, notably in 1935, when, because of his perfect knowledge of Russian and French, he was appointed to accompany Pierre Laval, the French political leader and president of the Council of Ministers, on his trip to Moscow. During that period, Socoline's personal life also changed: indeed, he remarried in France in 1937. Stationed in Geneva, he did not know,

[49] V. S. Sokolin, "Ekspeditsiia L. B. Kameneva dlia prodvizheniia prodgruzov k Moskve v 1919 godu," *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia* 6, 41 (1925): 116–54. It is this text that historians use when referring to the Bolshevik expedition in Ukraine and the meeting between Kamenev and Makhno. For more details, see Korine Amacher, "Lev Kamenev chez Nestor Makhno (Guliai-Pole, mai 1919): Un récit en quatre temps," *Quaestio Rossica* 5, 3 (2017): 738–56.

[50] Letter to the Federal Department of Justice and Police of Switzerland, 22 October 1977 (Archives fédérales suisses, E4260-03#2005-268#30453*#25 K-134698, Dossier Socoline-Welsch, 1977–1992).

[51] For more details, see *Ciel et terre soviétiques*, 142–97. See also his personal file at RGASPI (f. 17, op. 100, d. 168254).

when the Second World War broke out in September 1939, that he would never again see his first wife and his son, who were living in Moscow.

Socoline mostly described himself—in *Soviet Sky and Land*, as in other accounts—as a young man who, before 1918, was carried away by a succession of unexpected events, encounters, and circumstances, overwhelmed by emotions and feelings. What clearly emerges from his texts is not the influence of a political program, but the weight of emotions that he felt at certain moments in his life, later described as turning points. After his "conversion" to Bolshevism, all these "mixed feelings" seem to have vanished. Because now the Bolsheviks were for Socoline the only ones able to guarantee the survival of the Revolution, his loyalty to them became total and unfailing. From that point on, nothing could prevent him from reaching his goals. His mission was the defense of the besieged Soviet fortress, both during and after the Civil War. His faith in the Bolshevik regime was so deep that it often blinded him, as his writings, published and unpublished, amply testify. Socoline's comments about the "passive resistance of the peasants against collectivization" in the early 1930s provide a good example here:

> The little surplus of crops was taken by force in order to give to those who had nothing. The tragedy became complicated because of the Japanese aggression.… All this happened at the time of the peasants' passive resistance to collectivization. My supply brigade witnessed heartbreaking scenes when underfed peasants begged us to leave them the bags that they had hidden. Nowhere did we resort to force, but on several occasions our speeches to persuade them were not enough and we had to resort to threats.[52]

Aside from the fact that Socoline did not say a word about the violence of collectivization in this account, he also showed that the time for emotions, tears, and exaltations had passed, as well as the time for pity. Likewise, a Soviet leader he met at the beginning of the 1930s explained to him: "we must clench our teeth and not let ourselves be carried away by pity, which embraces all of us, otherwise we are lost."[53]

Many other Soviet memoirs and ego documents echo Socoline's justification for the requisitions he claimed to take part in during the 1930s—in *Soviet Sky and Land* and in other texts—as well as his rejection of feelings of pity,

[52] Socoline, *Ciel et terre soviétiques*, 238.

[53] Ibid.

considered after the Bolshevik Revolution to be a "bourgeois" feeling.[54] It is enough to mention the memoirs of the Soviet author Lev Kopelev, published in *tamizdat* in the 1970s. A participant in the grain requisitions in Ukraine, Kopelev remembered how he was convinced at that time that "we should not yield to a weakening pity." As a young Bolshevik, Kopelev had strongly believed that "we were fulfilling a historic necessity. We were doing our revolutionary duty. We obtained grain for the socialist fatherland for the five-year plan."[55]

When Kopelev published his memoirs in the 1970s, he had already turned into an outspoken critic of the Soviet regime.[56] Therefore, he offered a poignant testimony of his own communist activities in a starving Ukraine. He tried to explain, or rather to understand, the former "blindness" that was now haunting him. By contrast, both in 1949 and later, Socoline never stopped defending the project of Soviet collectivization. In 1949 for instance, Socoline gave a talk in Switzerland. It was three years after the French publication of Viktor Kravchenko's well-known book *I Chose Freedom*. Like Socoline, Kravchenko had refused to return to the USSR during World War II. His book described his life as an official in the Communist Party of the USSR, and mentioned the famine that he directly witnessed in his native Ukraine during 1932–33. As Socoline explained during his talk, Kravchenko's "harmful intention" was obvious, because "the book described the requisitions solely as an initiative of sadistic and stupid fools, without making any attempt to talk about their real reasons." After justifying the grain requisitions and trivializing the "famines in Russia," Socoline then defended the need for collectivization and the successes of industrialization:

> Famines in Russia are a phenomenon that started long before the revolution. But they will gradually disappear thanks to the gigantic irrigation and forestry works under way. At that time [i.e., beginning of 1930s], huge stocks had been sold abroad in order to speed up the industrialization without which the country could neither have raised the level of general and special education, nor stood up to the invader. It was precisely when the advent of Nazism and the invasion of China

[54] See, for instance, Jochen Hellbeck, "Fashioning the Stalinist Soul: The Diary of Stepan Podlubnyi (1931–1939)," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, N.F., 44, 3 (1996): 344–73.

[55] Lev Kopelev, *I sotvoril sebe kumira* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1978), http://www.belousenko.com/books/kopelev/kopelev_kumir.htm (accessed 20 February 2021).

[56] Reinhard Meier, *Lew Kopelew: Humanist und Weltbürger* (Darmstadt: Theiss, 2017).

> by the Japanese became an immediate danger. We had to rebuild the stocks.[57]

In none of his texts did Socoline comment about the human suffering generated by the requisitions. He remained deeply convinced that collectivization had improved the lives of Soviet peasants. He always considered the policies of the Soviet government to be determined and justified by the international situation, the rise of Nazism, and the growing danger of war. While Socoline never criticized Soviet foreign policy in his writings, in *Soviet Sky and Land*, published before Stalin's death, he also said very little about the Stalinist terror and purges or the execution of his former boss, Lev Kamenev, in 1936. This text shows that Socoline considered political violence fully acceptable, even if he admitted that it was difficult to reconcile the "necessities of the moment" with the "moral difficulty to approve them."[58] Similarly, the way he spoke about some of his colleagues, whose arrests are mentioned in *Soviet Sky and Land*, shows that he considered that they had most probably committed anti-Soviet actions. He wrote about one of them: "the crimes attributed to him were of the highest gravity. He was tried behind closed doors and sentenced to death."[59] In 1953, in the letter he sent to the Soviet Legation in Bern on the day after Stalin's death on behalf of Les Équipes de la Paix (Peace Teams), the peace organization that he created in Switzerland in 1946, he still praised the *vozhd'*:

> Sorely afflicted by the death of the great Stalin, the International Peace Team Center expresses its deepest condolences to the friends, disciples, and comrades of the person who stirred up the struggle for peace. His era goes down in history under the light of his immortal name. The memory of his greatness will never perish. May his fundamental cause of true peace and brotherhood of peoples live and progress evermore. President, V. Socoline.[60]

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[57] "Procès Kravtchenko-Lettres Françaises," 19 February 1949 (BGE Ms.fr.7925, fol. 349).

[58] Socoline, *Ciel et terre soviétiques*, 186.

[59] Ibid., 205. Socoline evokes here Boris Sergeevich Shteiger (1892–1937), who during the 1920s and 1930s worked in Moscow for the People's Commissariat for Enlightenment, where he was responsible for external relations. He was arrested and executed in 1937.

[60] V. Socoline to Soviet Legation, Bern, 6 March 1953 (Bibliothèque de La Chaux-de-Fonds, Fonds des Équipes de la Paix, Correspondance, 1953–1954, EQUP/102/1-10).

It was only after Stalin's death, and in particular after the 20th Party Congress, that Socoline finally began to criticize both Stalin's Terror and Stalin himself. Indeed, unlike his earlier writings, especially *Soviet Sky and Land*, many texts written after Stalin's death—for instance his most important novel, *Praise for Three Kopeks*, published in France in 1966—depict the atmosphere of terror that reigned in the USSR during the 1930s. As for Stalin, whom Socoline frequently saw while working in the Kremlin and whom he portrayed in *Soviet Sky and Land* as a simple, rather sympathetic, reasonable, and moderate man, he became, in the 1950s, "hard and brutal," a "crusher of men" ready to do anything to consolidate his power. Socoline wrote that Stalin sometimes had "an expression of frightening cruelty, which accentuated the yellow reflection of his pupils and the purple mark at the corner of his lower lip."[61] Yet Socoline faithfully aligned with the new Soviet political discourse: he became critical of Stalin, in line with the official process of de-Stalinization that was taking place in the USSR, but he never questioned the general course of Soviet politics—whether domestic or foreign.

A note, written in 1956, revealed Socoline's submission to the Soviet regime in the late 1930s: "until the end of 1939, [I felt] an enthusiastic devotion, faith, love, and I was ready to make any sacrifice."[62] How then can we understand why a man with such an apparently unshakeable faith in the Soviet regime since his conversion to Bolshevism in 1918 refused to return to the USSR in 1939?

A Non-Returner (*Nevozvrashchenets*) but Not a Dissident

After the USSR's expulsion from the League of Nations in December 1939, in response to the Soviet attack on Finland, Socoline, a Soviet citizen, should have returned to Moscow to be assigned to other functions. However, he ignored his superiors' instruction to return[63] and became in effect a *nevozvrashchenets* (non-returner).[64] The fact that he got married in France in 1937 may

[61] "En 1918 et 1919, je voyais souvent Staline…," February 1954 (BGE Ms.fr.7924, fol. 167).

[62] Draft, 1956 (personal archive of Vladimir Socoline).

[63] Cf. Ingeborg Plettenberg, *Die Sowjetunion im Völkerbund 1934 bis 1939: Bündnispolitik zwischen Staaten unterschiedlicher Gesellschaftsordnung in der internationalen Organisation für Friedenssicherung: Ziele, Voraussetzungen, Möglichkeiten, Wirkungen* (Cologne: Pahl-Rugenstein Verlag, 1987), 95.

[64] The definition of "non-returner" was formulated in November 1929, with the adoption of a resolution from the Praesidium of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR on Soviet citizens abroad who refused to return to the USSR. For further in-

have played a role in this decision. His wife, a Russian born in England, held a British passport until she married him. Now, as Socoline wrote, "being born abroad was perceived at that time as an original sin." But Socoline most certainly feared for his life, or at least feared arrest after returning to the USSR. This is what he wrote very clearly in several unpublished texts, and this is what he admitted many years later, in 1982, during one of the last talks he gave before his death. While, as usual, he was defending the Soviet system, one of the participants asked him why he had refused to return to the USSR. After a long silence, Socoline replied: "I was afraid."[65]

Indeed, after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in August 1939, the situation of the Soviet diplomats who had successfully escaped the Stalinist purges in the 1930s and were working in Western Europe became increasingly difficult. A lot of them were gradually dismissed by the Soviet authorities,[66] a fact that Socoline knew very well. But more generally, as he wrote in 1956, "the ranks of honest fighters, friends, and acquaintances had thinned considerably" since 1937 due to arrests. In reality, from the mid-1930s, while continuing faithfully to serve the Soviet regime, Socoline had had the feeling that he could be arrested at any time, like many other comrades: "the worst part was that people who legally and sometimes heroically used ruse and bitterness in the fight against enemies, began to use them against their comrades, increasingly appearing to be not the fearless and noble ideological knights they were before, but cynical and spiritually devastated janissaries." In 1938, Socoline was called to Moscow for professional reasons. However, he replied evasively: "I replied that I would come if my coming was really and absolutely necessary (it was just before the convening of the League Council). From that moment on, I understood that I had done something irreparable. I did not get any answer." His distrust, he wrote, then intensified.[67] Finally, the death sentence of his former boss, Kamenev, during the first of the Moscow Trials in 1936, must have affected him, or even weighed on him in a determined way, all the more since some of Kamenev's collaborators were also arrested and executed.[68] In an interview given in 1966, when a journalist asked why he had not returned

formation, see V. L. Genis, *Nevernye slugi rezhima: Pervye sovetskie nevozvrashchentsy (1920–1933). Opyt dokumental´nogo issledovaniia v 2-kh knigakh* (Moscow: 2009–12).

[65] For this information I am grateful to Professor Georges Nivat, who invited Socoline for this talk at the University of Geneva.

[66] Dullin, *Des hommes d'influence*, 239–77, 321–31.

[67] Autobiography, 1956 (personal archive of Vladimir Socoline).

[68] For more details, see Korine Amacher, "Lev Kamenev, issledovatel´ tvorchestva Aleksandra Gertsena: Intelligent mezh dvukh beregov," *Vestnik Sankt-Peterburgskogo universiteta* 14, 4 (2017): 625–42.

to Moscow in 1939, Socoline replied that this was the time of the Great Purge and that most of his friends and acquaintances, including Kamenev, felt as if they were evil beings—a feeling that Socoline well knew was "devoid of all truth."[69]

Of course, Socoline mentioned none of this when he explained his decision to stay in Switzerland during a public talk he had given, in 1949, during which he had spoken about himself in the third person:

> Due to a serious illness that prevented him from going back to Moscow after the exclusion of the USSR from the League [of Nations], he finally decided to stay in Geneva, his birthplace. This circumstance, as well as personal reasons, took away from him, for various reasons, most people to whom he had proven his friendship. He does not pose here either as a victim or as an unknown hero. He simply takes responsibility for his setbacks, just as he took responsibility for the tasks which brought him success.[70]

As a matter of fact, Socoline was very sick at the beginning of 1940, and it was this reason that he gave officially for not going back to Moscow.[71] However, his main reason was fear. Yet Socoline was deeply torn because he had left part of his life in Moscow, especially his son Leonid. Moreover, he continued to believe firmly in the "bright future" and tried to stay on good terms with the Soviet government. His personal archives show that in 1946, Socoline took steps to return to the USSR, but changed his mind at the last moment, for the same reasons as in 1939: out of fear.

He was not wrong. A Soviet diplomat in France summarized Socoline's situation after 1939 as follows: "it would be the first time that Moscow ever forgave a diplomatic agent who refused to obey an order."[72] Indeed, from the Soviet point of view, refusing to return to the USSR meant betraying the Soviet homeland. Socoline thus became a "non-returner."[73] It is significant that

[69] Interview with Socoline, conducted by Daniel Cornu, *Journal de Genève*, 8–9 October 1966.

[70] "Procès Kravtchenko-Lettres Françaises," 19 February 1949 (BGE Ms.fr.7925, fol. 339).

[71] Correspondence with the Department of Justice and Police, 1939–1940 (Archives d'État de Genève: Dossier 111991, Vladimir Socoline).

[72] Gehrig-Straube, *Beziehungslose Zeiten*, 369.

[73] His party membership was cancelled on 21 April 1941 owing to his designation as a "non-returner" to the Soviet Union. Letter from the RGASPI director to author, February 2019.

Soviet Sky and Land ends with a reflection on those Soviet civil servants who refused to go back, who were formerly loyal "mercenaries" and now were turned into "pariahs."[74]

Certainly, until 1939, Socoline had held a prominent position in the Soviet apparatus, which makes it difficult to consider him as a "pariah." However, notwithstanding his prestigious career, in a certain way Socoline had always been a kind of "pariah" and would remain one until the end of his life because he was at the bridge between multiple worlds and because of the ambiguity of his "national" identity. In 1943, the Swiss diplomat Carl J. Burckardt tried to intercede for Socoline when the latter was threatened with expulsion from Switzerland. Burckardt had met Socoline during the interwar period in the course of work at the League of Nations. He described "Socoline alias Schapiro" as "a Russian Jew educated in Switzerland," a "Western Russian" who "belongs to a type of people that is becoming increasingly rare in the Soviet Union."[75]

Indeed, Socoline was in a permanent in-between situation, but not solely because of the Jewish origin mentioned by the Swiss diplomat—and about which Socoline never said anything in his texts. Unlike the French journalist and communist activist Jacques Sadoul, the French Slavist Pierre Pascal, or the American journalist John Reed, author of the famous *Ten Days That Shook The World*, Socoline was not a citizen of a Western country who had traveled, worked, and sometimes lived in the USSR. Rather, he was a Soviet citizen, never regarded as Swiss in Moscow, unlike, for instance, the Swiss Communist Fritz Platten, who was killed in a Stalinist camp in 1942. But at the same time, the Soviets never considered him as a "true" Russian and did not trust him, which Socoline felt clearly: "Russians with ties abroad have always been badly perceived in Russia."[76] On the other hand, in spite of his refusal to return to the USSR in 1939, he was never considered as a Soviet dissident in Switzerland. In fact, unlike dissidents, he never gave any accusing testimony about the USSR. But since he was born and raised in Geneva, but spent his adult career in service to the Soviet Union, he was never regarded as a "true" Russian in either Switzerland or the USSR. By the same token, however, this did not imply that he was automatically considered as Swiss in Switzerland.

[74] Socoline, *Ciel et terre soviétiques*, 274–75.

[75] Letter from Carl J. Burckardt to the Federal Department of Justice and Police of Switzerland, 22 January 1943 (Archives fédérales suisses, E4320B#1975/40#459* Dossier Sokoline [-Chapiro], Vladimir, 1920–1959).

[76] Socoline, *Ciel et terre soviétiques*, 258.

Living in Switzerland: The Price of Socoline's "Road to Damascus"

In 1943 and 1944, between the Battle of Stalingrad and the USSR's refusal to re-establish diplomatic relations with Switzerland,[77] some members of the Swiss Federal Department thought that Socoline, who personally knew Ivan Maiskii and Maksim Litvinov, might one day join the Soviet diplomatic service again, and could then be useful for the improvement of the two countries' bilateral relations.[78] This is probably the reason why Socoline was not immediately expelled from Switzerland. After the war and after the Swiss authorities confined him to a small town in Valais for several years, Socoline was finally allowed to settle in Geneva. It was there that his difficult quest to obtain a Swiss residence permit started.

In fact, the Swiss authorities suspected him of being a Soviet spy and watched him carefully. The Soviets, on the other hand, refused to renew his passport. Subsequently, Socoline, now a stateless person, remained for years in an uncertain position, without the right to work and to travel freely, and constantly subjected to the risk of expulsion. In 1966, a Swiss journalist who interviewed Socoline referred in his article to his painful and strange situation: "in the middle of the twentieth century, despite all the proclamations of UNESCO and other institutions on the free flow of cultural goods and ideas, it still happens, even in our country, that a writer, because of a particular legal situation, is condemned never to be able to cross a border.… At a time when, before human rights commissions, individuals who have violated them can win their case and regain freedom of movement, the situation of Socoline is too absurd not to be a subject of scandal."[79] (See figure 10.) But the journalist's cry of anger had no effect on Socoline's situation: he had to wait until the late 1960s to receive a Geneva residence permit.

Socoline never complained about his situation in public, and no criticism of Switzerland can be found under his pen either. His life was divided between his writing activities—novels, essays, articles—the creation and management of a peace organization, the lectures he gave in various places, and his teaching of Russian, particularly at the United Nations. He continued, tirelessly, wherever he went, to defend the Soviet regime. After 1953, he firmly repudiated and condemned Stalin's tyranny, but he still highlighted Soviet

[77] Diplomatic relations between the two countries were restored in 1946.

[78] Correspondence, Federal Department of Justice and Police of Switzerland, 1943–1944 (Archives fédérales suisses, E4320B#1975/40#459* Dossier Sokoline (-Chapiro), Vladimir, 1920–1959); Gehrig-Straube, *Beziehungslose Zeiten*, 366–69.

[79] Interview with Socoline, conducted by Armand Gaspard, *Tribune de Genève*, 29–30 October 1966.

achievements in areas such as education and science, and maintained that the building of socialism in the USSR meant an acceleration of the trend towards a more egalitarian society. This attitude was the source of many misunderstandings, as his Swiss interlocutors did not understand that one could defend the USSR, state the superiority of the Soviet system, criticize the capitalist one, and yet be afraid of going back to the USSR.

Socoline never returned in Moscow, and never saw his son Leonid again. But after long years of silence, he was able to reconnect with him. In the 1960s, a correspondence was established, which lasted, uninterrupted, until his death in 1984.[80] His son died on the other side of the Iron Curtain at the age of 67, one year after his father.

In the 1970s, Socoline had the acute feeling that he was "one of the few actors of the [Russian] revolution who was still alive,"[81] the survivor of an era that those who had not lived through could no longer understand. The revolutionary period seems to have been the most beautiful and the most intense period of his life. In his *Soviet Sky and Land*, Socoline expressed very clearly the feeling of happiness he had during the revolutionary years: "Villainous acts of all kinds ruined the enthusiasm and we were sad and we were tired and we were immensely poor, but we were rich, alert, happy, proud like indescribable winners, radiant with the sun, covered by mud and rags."[82] He never renounced his loyalty to the October Revolution, and in Switzerland, every 7 November, he commemorated the birth of the Bolshevik regime with "fervor." As he asserted on the radio in 1974, "we cannot put an end to the revolution."[83] For him, the Russian Revolution, embodied by the Soviet regime, always remained the promise of a better future. This promise, for which he was committed to continue his fight, often blinded him, but in the meantime, helped him overcome the difficulties and the isolation that surrounded him in Switzerland. In a December 1948 letter to Jules Humbert-Droz, former member of the Swiss Communist Party, former secretary of the Comintern and after World War II, one of the leaders of the Swiss Socialist Party, Socoline described the various "pitfalls" and "ambushes" of his life: "This cordon of asepsis that accompanies me everywhere is especially ridiculous, because it

[80] Correspondence of Vladimir Socoline with his son Leonid Sokolin, 1966–1984 (personal archive of Vladimir Socoline).

[81] Draft note, undated (BGE Ms.fr.7919, env. 5, dos. 3, fol. 4).

[82] Socoline, *Ciel et terre soviétiques*, 55.

[83] Socoline, interview on French-language Swiss radio, 28 September 1974.

will not make me move away from the way I want to go."[84] This "cordon of asepsis" would stick to Socoline until the end of his life.

Socoline died at the age of 88, three years after his application for Swiss citizenship was rejected. Feeling both deeply Swiss and deeply Russian, he perceived this refusal as an act of terrible injustice. As he wrote to the Swiss authorities after receiving their letter, it was for him a "dreadful blow."[85] His long road to Damascus, a trajectory full of strong emotions, his transformation into an "aggressive and convinced" Bolshevik, resulting from what he called his "thunderbolt" in July 1918, can better be appreciated when knowing the high price that he had to pay for it during the second part of his life.

A question remains open: how would Socoline have reacted to the collapse of the Soviet world in 1991? In any case, his death on the eve of perestroika prevented him from witnessing the desacralization of the "Great October Socialist Revolution." It also prevented him from witnessing the desacralization of Lenin, whom he had frequently met in the Kremlin when he was Kamenev's secretary, and for whom he felt a real veneration until the end of his life.

[84] Letter to Jules Humbert-Droz, 13 December 1948 (Bibliothèque de La Chaux-de-Fonds, Fonds Jules-Humbert Droz, 004451).

[85] Letter to the Federal Department of Justice and Police of Switzerland, 5 June 1981 (Archives fédérales suisses, E4260-03#2005-268#30453*#11 K-134698, Dossier Socoline-Welsch, 1977–1992).