

Staunton, March 12 – One hundred years ago today, Vladimir Lenin moved the Soviet government from Peter the Great's window on Europe to Moscow, a move taken because of the threat German forces represented to Petrograd but one that Lenin and the senior Bolsheviks recognized was and remains freighted with meaning,

Accompanying Lenin and Krupskaya in their car from the railroad station to the Kremlin was the Soviet leader's secretary, Vladimir Bonch-Bruyevich, a highly educated specialist on religious minorities and on Marxism, and in a pamphlet describing their entry into the Kremlin, he noted that "all were silent" because they recognized "a new Muscovite period" had begun.

For Marxists as the Bolsheviks professed themselves to be, that was no small thing given Karl Marx' observation that "the bloody mire of Mongolian slavery, not the rude glory of the Norman epoch, forms the cradle of Muscovy," Marx wrote, adding that "modern Russia is but a metamorphosis of Muscovy" ([marxists.anu.edu.au/archive/marx/works/1857/russia/ch04.htm](http://marxists.anu.edu.au/archive/marx/works/1857/russia/ch04.htm)).

On this anniversary, most Russian commentators, of course, are focusing on Lenin's desire to put his government beyond the reach of German forces – see for example [profile.ru/culture/item/125183-ot-pitera-do-moskvy](http://profile.ru/culture/item/125183-ot-pitera-do-moskvy). But as the Muscovite state approaches its pseudo-elections, the historiosophical meaning of the transfer of capitals may be more important.

An important contribution to understanding that meaning is provided by an article on the Nationalities Accent portal by Yuliya Bobkova on “how the peoples of Russia chose their fates,” that is, in her view, equivalent to their choice of leaders ([nazaccent.ru/content/26748-vybor-raznyh.html](http://nazaccent.ru/content/26748-vybor-raznyh.html)).

She begins by noting that “honest and just elections are the main sign of democracy, but democracy as is well-known, is ‘the worst form of government except for all the others.’ Over its more than a thousand-year history, the Russian state has known various types of rule, and with elections, some of our peoples were acquainted much earlier than residents of Western Europe.”

Bobkova points to Novgorod Veliki whose veche was more representative of the adult population for most of its existence between 862 and 1478 than was the city government of London, to the Setu who have elected a king for centuries, the peoples of the North Caucasus who have chosen councils of elders, and the Cossacks who also elected their atamans.

Sadly, she can't point to any democratic tradition in Muscovy and she doesn't point to the obvious: all of these democratic experiments were killed off not by their own people but by the centralized Russian state, most often in Moscow – yet another indication that the problem in this regard is not Russia but rather Moscow. That was something even Marx understood.

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## **Paul Goble: Today is the Centenary of Russia's Return to 'the Bloody Mire of Muscovy'**

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