

## Social Contract: Historical and Contemporary Realities in Soviet/Russian Society



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**Abstract.** The article provides an analysis of the currently little used concept – the social contract. For this purpose, a brief historical digression was carried out: an assessment was made of the contribution of thinkers of the Enlightenment, who were the first to substantiate the proposal to consider the relationship between the state and the people through the prism of reaching agreement on the arrangement of public and private life, calling it a social contract. After a break, interest in this phenomenon revived in the 20th century, which is given more detailed information on the example of the consideration of the essence and content of the social contract by foreign and Russian researchers. On this basis, it is concluded that the social contract is an independent scientific and social phenomenon that embodies various forms of social consent between the people and the state, given that they are not only open, but also latent, reflecting the underlying processes taking place in public consciousness. The article defines the criteria inherent in the social contract – goals, means of achieving them, ideological support, the effectiveness of feedback and participation of the people in managing the affairs of society and the state. A comparative analysis of the process of its functioning in the Soviet and modern Russian society is given, estimates and conclusions are made about the problems of its implementation at various stages of historical development. It is especially noted that the social contract has both explicit and latent characteristics, which, through the analysis of the state, trends and problems of social development, allows us to speak about the degree of its effectiveness and efficiency in preserving and strengthening the state.

**Key words:** social contract, state, society, people, public consciousness, consent, trust, USSR, Russia.

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### *Problem statement*

All countries, without exception have the following common trends: their governments have to organize interaction with people, search for ways in which the ruling class exists, convince people of the reliability of management decisions, involve them in active participation in the implementation of formulated projects and/or development programs.

To this end, the state adopts declarations, laws, resolutions, decrees and other policy documents. The pinnacle of these intentions and aspirations is the Constitution, which reflects the fundamental provisions on the basis of which the life of society is built in all its aspects.

In reality, the process of development and functioning of the state is embodied in the regulation (design or planning) of processes taking place in the economic, social, political, spiritual and cultural spheres of society. In other words, decisions are made, which in most cases are aimed at achieving the stated goals in a variety of ways: in the economy – regulating the market and its individual components; in the social sphere – ensuring a balanced state of the social structure, in the political sphere – providing support for political goals and eliminating social tension, in the spiritual and cultural sphere – creating ideological unity, promoting moral cohesion.

Despite the importance of the above directions in the life of the state and society, such a phenomenon as social contract does not always exist or adhered to; social contract makes it possible to identify and embody the deep, vital aspirations of the people; as a result, political power embodied by the state gets the right to exist, becoming a historically justified phenomenon.

In accordance with these provisions, the article aims to reveal the scientific and applied potential of the social contract, substantiate its relevance and reveal its role in the life of the Russian state and society. The social contract is not an official state document – it is a social construct that contains explicit and latent characteristics. The importance of the issue under consideration is also due to the ongoing events in the life of the country caused by the special military operation and unprecedented sanctions that test the strength of not only the economic and military system of Russia, but also the cohesion of the Russian people.

### **A brief historical insight**

The first experiences of understanding social contract were reflected in the works of English and French educators (Hobbes, 1991; Locke, 1988; Holbach, 1963; Montesquieu, 1955; Rousseau, 2000). Although scientists interpreted its essence and content in different ways, they all paid attention to the conditions of the stability of the state, believing that in addition to formal acts of building political life, there is an objective need to establish certain rules of interaction with the people, ensuring their agreement on the current and future directions in the development of the state and society. Their works substantiated a new scientific concept of “society”, which was of great practical importance and which defined the need to consider it as an independent social force. It was from the 18th century that the emerging trade unions, new political parties, and various voluntary associations began to personify society. The significance of a new phenomenon – society – needed to be understood, which was reflected in the ideas of social contract.

Considering the interpretations of social contract proposed by the thinkers of the Enlightenment, we can argue that they viewed social contract as a product of the reasonable will of the people, a human institution, or even an invention (result) of creative search, including spontaneous. At the same time, such an interpretation is often associated with the idea of the mechanical origin of social contract, which acts as an artificial construction of the conscious will of people who have agreed to unite for the sake of ensuring freedom and order that satisfies them.

At the same time, similar judgments appeared among Russian scientists, who drew attention to the possibility of a contractual agreement between the state and the authorities. Thus, A.N. Radishchev (1749–1802) believed that the state does not arise as a result of some divine providence, but as a consequence of an open or tacit agreement of members of society in order to jointly protect the weak and oppressed. In his reasoning, he proceeded from the fact that “the conciliar power of the people is the original power” (Radishchev, 1952, p. 10).

Later, in the 19th century, the ideas concerning social contract were developed to a certain extent by A. Tocqueville (1805–1859). Reflecting on the fate of the revolution, he wrote: “The main goal of a good government is to achieve the welfare of the people rather than establish some kind of order among the poor”. He criticized the American and then the French authorities for their policies that did not take into account the interests of all segments of society. At the same time, Tocqueville saw the basis of democracy in the traditions of the Puritans who stood at the origins of the New World colonies, so he considered equality of opportunities for all residents of the country to be the main advantage of any society (Tocqueville, 2008).

After the rise of interest in social contract in the 18th century, attention to this topic decreased, although some ideas about building a rational interaction between the people and the authorities

were not only substantiated, but even implemented on certain issues. It is worth mentioning that some European countries, for example, Germany under Bismarck, developed and implemented legislative acts on labor insurance.

However, it was only in the 20th century that the ideas of social contract were revived in full under the influence of the labor movement, which demonstrated its strength and showed that the existence of states is impossible without the participation of the people in deciding the fate of the country. The revival of interest in social contract was also due to the experience of the Soviet Union, which convincingly proved the possibility of realizing social progress on the basis of combining the interests of the people with the goals of the ruling Bolshevik party.

Among the newly formulated concepts of social contract, the most interesting are the ideas of J. Rawls (1921–2002), who considers the activity of individuals as rationally thinking people in the process of creation and functioning of the state they are creating on the principles of social welfare. According to this interpretation, public institutions formed as a result of such a contract are guided by the need to observe justice, and the people included in them build their relationships on the conditions to which they agreed, being equal in social and natural aspects (Rawls, 1995).

R. Nozick (1938–2002) challenged Rawls' ideas from a liberal standpoint. He defended the need for a “minimal state” (“night-watchman” state) and criticized the theory and practice of the “welfare state” for violence against individuals (Nozick, 2008).

The original contribution to the development of the problems of social contract was made by J. Buchanan (1911–2013) and O.T. Bogomolov (1927–2015). According to Buchanan, all people, regardless of whether they are private individuals or public figures, make decisions and act based on the rational pursuit of personal gain. If personal

interests contradict the interests of society, a person usually gives priority to personal interests, as a result of which the social contract may cease to exist<sup>1</sup>. The Russian scientist and academician O.T. Bogomolov proves that various noneconomic forces have a direct impact on the economic policy of each country. Therefore, the social contract is, in fact, a state construct which contains a description of the actions of the state in relation to its citizens (Bogomolov, 2010).

M. Olson (1932–1998) interprets the ideas of social contract in a peculiar way. He suggests that theoretically people can negotiate among themselves without coercion, but in such a situation there is a “stowaway problem” when people are ready to use the public good, but often do not want to participate in its creation or in every way avoid it (Olson, 2012).

Olson’s ideas are shared to a certain extent by the Russian economist A. Auzan, who believes that “two types of social contract are being formed” in the modern world. The first type is horizontal, “when people hire the state as an agency for the production of services, defense and justice”. In this case, as history shows, people can do without the state in the very public affairs (security, organization of new forms of management, creation of military institutions and even private prisons). The second type of contract is characterized by the fact that “no one hired anyone”, and the state “manages and creates the rules on its own”. This is due to the emergence and expansion of the circle of authoritarian states, the number of which, according to the World Bank, increased by more than 50% at the end of the 20th – beginning of the 21st century; and, most importantly, their effectiveness is not inferior to that of “democratic” states (Auzan, 2017). However, despite the originality of these statements, it is difficult to agree with them, since

<sup>1</sup> *Nobelevskie laureaty po ekonomike. Dzheims B'yukenen* [Nobel Laureates in Economics. James Buchanan]. (1997). Moscow: Taurus al'fa.

they reduce the interaction of the people and the authorities to only one, albeit the most important, function – protection against encroachments on property rights and individual freedoms.

Considering the evolution of theoretical concepts, let us pay attention to the fact that in the practice of implementing the social contract a significant role is performed by those groups that formulate its principles and are in most cases associated with the intelligentsia (according to the Russian tradition) or intellectuals (according to the Western tradition), but only if they have political power or significant public influence.

To sum up, we can argue that *social contract, as a form of social consent between the people and the state, characterizes the goals, means of achieving them, ideological support, the effectiveness of feedback and participation of the people in the management of society and the state.*

In our opinion, the social contract, its condition and its problems are one of the most important indicators of the stability of the state, what it really is, what its strengths and weaknesses are in the existing reality.

Let us focus on this in more detail on the example of Soviet/Russian history.

### **Realities and lessons of the social contract in the Soviet Union and Russia**

The basis that regulates the state structure is the Constitution, which formulates the foundations of existence of the state and society. In the history of the Soviet Union, there were three versions of the Constitution: 1924, 1936 and 1977 (if we do not mention their predecessor, the 1918 Constitution of the RSFSR). It is worth noting that, according to universal recognition, including even the opponents of the Soviet system, the Constitution of 1936 was acknowledged as a standard of proclaimed human rights and freedoms, at that time having no analogues in the world.

Modern Russia lives according to the Constitution of the Russian Federation adopted by popular

vote on December 12, 1993 with amendments approved during the all-Russian vote on July 1, 2020. The Constitution has the highest legal force, consolidating the foundations, powers of representative, executive, judicial authorities and local self-government, human and civil rights and freedoms.

Therefore, it is quite natural that the social contract is based (or should be based) on the Constitution of the country. However, according to a sociological survey conducted by VCIOM in December 2017, only 61% of Russians considered the Constitution of the Russian Federation to be a document that fully or rather fully meets the needs of the country and its people. At the same time, a significant number of people believe that this fundamental document does not fully or at serious cost solve their civil and personal problems, that they doubt the ability of the government to provide for and meet their needs and interests. This means that there is a discrepancy between what the state considers important and necessary for its existence, and what the people think about this importance and necessity. In other words, in reality there are disagreements between the state and part of the people. This means that the state, represented by political authorities, needs not only to comprehend this discrepancy, to know about it, but also to minimize it, so as not to bring the situation to social tension, conflict and even a possible social explosion.

In this regard, in order to coordinate the interests of the state and the people (its main classes, communities and groups), there is the social contract – the product of *conscious coordination of the actions of two main forces – the state represented by political power and the people represented by nongovernmental associations, movements, the effectiveness and efficiency of which is manifested not only at the open, but also latent level in the form of trust, consent, the desire to build a “common destiny”*.

Social contract is an independent social phenomenon, which is characterized by a special structure. In order to present the social contract in action, we will consider its operation in the Soviet Union and Russia, carry out a comparative analysis of its criteria, reserves and resources, as well as the possibility of its effective existence in the present and future. We consider it very important to review the lessons, both positive and negative, accompanying the implementation of this strategically important phenomenon.

*First, the essence of the social contract is represented by a goal that unites the fundamental, main aspirations of the people and the intentions of the state.* On the one hand, it reflects the aspirations of the people, which nurture the beliefs of the majority of people on the desired structure of society, the achievement of group and personal welfare. On the other hand, the state, represented by the political power, develops its goals, claiming not only to solve urgent, current tasks, but also those it will face in the future. Therefore, the more majestic and at the same time more concrete the goal of the development of society and the state, the more people accept it, agree with it and are even inspired by it. At the same time, it should be real, perceived by people as achievable, even in a problematic situation. The goal also means that it holds together and coordinates what the main classes, social communities and groups wanted (want) and strive for, and what the authorities offered (are offering), without excluding possible costs and miscalculations in the process of its implementation. The state has a high responsibility to formulate a strategy for the development of the country that would satisfy the people not only in reality, but also allowed them to see their future life, the idea of which would seal this agreement. I.e., the ability to formalize mutual aspirations and intentions in the current reality and for the future is the key to the sustainable existence of the social contract and, respectively, society and the state.

Let us recall that when coordinating the interests of political power and the value orientations of the people, Hobbes' goal was security, Locke's – freedom, Rousseau's – democracy, Montesquieu's and Radishchev's – social equality, Rawls' – justice. In other words, social contract is designed to ensure constant, regular and mobile social agreement based on the achievement of the main goal, as well as to offer means and methods for its implementation in order to achieve mutual understanding and support.

The history of the existence of the Soviet Union shows that the Bolsheviks who came to power managed to convince and captivate the majority of the people with the idea of a new just society. It was embodied in the call for the construction of a socialist (and then communist) society unknown to history, in which the principle that was clear to many was formulated as follows: “From each according to his ability, to each according to his work”. This formulation of the way of life and, first of all, labor relations satisfied the majority of workers and peasants, although there were a lot of costs in the process of implementation, such as, for example, in the form of equalization in the remuneration of workers in different industries and different professions or the ratio of wages of a worker and an engineer in the early 1980s in the proportion of 1 to 1.04.

The importance of coordinating the goals of the state and the people was shown at the stage of the collapse of the social contract in the Soviet Union, which occurred during the so-called perestroika. The goals of perestroika, which were met almost with delight, quickly faded in people's minds, as they were immediately followed by hastily formulated subgoals for solving dramatic problems of the economy, social and political life. These subgoals reflected the ideas and intentions of those in power, but not the people and not even the scientists, its responsible representatives. And it is quite natural that the people began to demand significant adjustments to the officially conducted

policy. At the same time, we note that criticism of the Soviet government meant demands not for its liquidation (as the neoliberals convince us), but for its reform, according to the results of the All-Union referendum in March 1991 (but the same neoliberals do not like to mention this), when 76.1% of the population voted for the continuation of the existence of the USSR, but with serious changes in its policy.

As for modern Russia, the coordination of the goals of the state and the people is largely uncertain. It is still unclear to many Russians what kind of state, what kind of society they are building. The welfare state proclaimed in the Constitution of the Russian Federation, whose policy is aimed at creating conditions that ensure decent life and free human development (Article 7.1), and means a certain general mindset that is not specified so as to be understood and implemented in current daily life. In this regard, let us provide an example of modern China, where, against the background of a common goal – construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics – the principle of achieving average prosperity in comparison with world standards was proclaimed. More specifically, this meant that an average-income society is a stage of development between solving the problem of food and clothing for the population and achieving full prosperity. This has not only satisfied, but also inspired millions of ordinary Chinese, about 100 million of whom have stepped out of the poverty zone over the past 10 years (Zhang Tian, Romanenko, 2009).

In Russia, attempts to overcome the low level of welfare still remain unsuccessful: since 2012, the number of Russians living below the poverty line remains about the same – about 20 million people, or 12% of the population. The intentions recorded in national projects and aimed at solving such pressing socio-economic problems as labor productivity, employment, reducing unemployment and poverty have not been implemented. Moreover, many decisions in the fields of education, science,

and culture turned out to be erroneous, which was fully or partially recognized at the official level. References to following the requirements of the fourth industrial revolution and the sixth economic paradigm are still found in speeches, resolutions and other documents, which, for all their importance, do not correlate with the basic target aspirations of people and the actual socio-economic situation. As a result, according to Rosstat, while labor productivity in 2012–2018 was intended to have grown by 50% (in the years of the first national programs), it turned out to be only 5% in reality (Aganbegyan, 2019).

These and similar concrete results of development of the Russian society allow us to assert that the goals that would bring the people and the state together to the maximum extent have not yet been fully found.

*Second, social contract specifies the means of achieving the formulated goals;* this is reflected primarily in the instrumental methods, directions and ways of its implementation. The set of these means depends on the current state of affairs, the socio-historical situation in the country. In Soviet Russia during the civil war, the main means was armed struggle against various supporters of the tsarist regime and foreign intervention, during the NEP years – implementation of the slogans proclaimed during the revolution, “factories to the workers”, “land to the peasants”. Then there were five-year plans aimed at creating a socialist economy, the years of the Great Patriotic War aimed at defeating German fascism. In the post-war years, there were attractive and promising means to foster pride (or just involvement, direct or indirect) for participation in space exploration, achieving parity in the nuclear confrontation, as well as in solving more specific economic problems: plowing up virgin soil, constructing new cities and enterprises in Siberia and the Far East, exploring oil and gas fields. All these projects required millions of new workers, provided an opportunity to show

one’s worth (this relates to young people as well) and, most importantly, to feel part of a common great cause, instilling confidence in the successful achievement of not only common, but also personal goals. We would like to emphasize the latter, since personal understanding of what is happening and its acceptance as concerning one’s life created a latent socio-psychological ground that embodies confidence in the future and makes a person a participant in the social contract.

In modern Russia, the social contract has long been based on a liberal attitude: the state should limit itself to the role of “night watchman” as much as possible, and the person themselves is responsible for their present and future life. Capital, financial means or simply the money was proclaimed the main means of achieving welfare. At the same time, no economic and social projects were proposed that would testify to the importance and role of Russia. Moreover, neoliberal policies have destroyed such industries as machine tool construction, aircraft construction, automotive and others that occupy leading positions in the global economy. As a result, significant human, social, scientific and technical potential was lost, which led to a dramatic weakening of the Russian state and by the end of the 1990s called into question its existence, there was a threat of collapse, as happened with the USSR. And although in the early 2000s this trend was partially reversed, but not as successfully as the objective needs of social development demanded. Russia is still facing the urgent issue of radical change in economic policy and the social unity of the people associated with it, without which the social contract cannot exist. The fact that the social contract requires improvement is indicated by the data of All-Russian studies conducted by sociologists from the Russian State University for the Humanities in 2018–2022 in various sectors of the economy and socio-cultural life (industry, construction, transport, agriculture, services, healthcare, culture, education and science). They showed that from 42.5 to 50% of

the population believe that the country is developing in the right direction, almost every fifth (from 18 to 22.9%) – that development is going in the wrong direction, and every third (up to 35%) preferred not to answer (Intelligentsia ..., 2023, p. 263). Such actions carried out by the state as privatization, the tax system, and the growth of social inequality are seriously criticized. They are rejected by more than every second Russian. All this allows us to conclude that the means of implementing economic and social policy call into question the strength of the existing social contract. Obviously, drastic changes need to be made in politics, which is what not only many representatives of scientific thought, but also practical workers say<sup>2</sup> (Glazyev, 2011).

*Third, the most important structural element of social contract is the ideology, which in the Soviet Union was embodied in the concept of the “common destiny” of the people and the state on the basis of the unity of ideological and socio-political guidelines for the organization of public and private life. The Soviet ideology was embodied in the policy of forming such theoretical and practice-oriented innovations as the “Soviet people” and the “Soviet individual”. It was a unique historical experiment, the idea of which was previously demonstrated by the great bourgeois revolutions, which also set the task of creating a new type of person and forming such qualities as conviction, pride, hope, confidence, traditionalism, taking into account the interests of the main social communities and groups. The implementation of this experiment in Soviet times provided a solution to the toughest economic problems and at the same time formed the ideological and worldview foundation that made the state a responsible body for fulfilling its historical mission (Toshchenko, 2021).*

<sup>2</sup> Babkin K.A. (2008). Reasonable industrial policy, or How we get out of the crisis. Available at: <https://www.kakprosto.ru/kak-980254-konstantin-babkin-biografiya-tvorchestvo-karera-lichnaya-zhizn#ixzz81KWjWHMG>

Regarding the specifics of ideology in the Soviet Union, we should note that the ideology was aimed at implementing the principle of serving the people, although this process was ambiguous, with serious costs and even mistakes. But, despite the miscalculations, the orientation of the Soviet government toward the interests of the main classes – workers and peasants – contributed not only to the assimilation of the socialist worldview by the majority of people, but also to the development of fundamentally new attitudes – the cult of labor and the cult of education.

Speaking about the *cult of labor*, let us pay attention to the process of its inclusion in the ideology of “common destiny”. On the one hand, the glorification of labor was based on folk traditions of deep respect for creative activity, high appreciation of its bearers, criticism of those who were not involved in its implementation. On the other hand, orientation toward labor became increasingly highly appreciated and encouraged not only within the framework of specific industries, but also (which is fundamentally important) by the state. This was reflected in the official state support and encouragement of such initiatives as *udarnichestvo* (exemplary performance in labor discipline; with the beginning of industrialization), the Stakhanov movement (during the first five-year plans, starting in 1935 after the labor feat of A. Stakhanov who over-fulfilled the coal mining plan by 14 times). In the late 1950s, the desire to get the title of a participant in the movement for a communist attitude toward labor became widespread.

Such as attitude toward labor began to consolidate in connection with the course on improving its conditions and organization (Russia launched a mass movement on the scientific organization of labor, the movement of innovators and inventors). At the same time, a system of incentives was introduced and subjected to numerous experiments in the form of various

methods of material remuneration and moral encouragement (honors boards at all enterprises and at the place of residence; awarding diplomas, certificates of honor, etc.). We should point out that the glorification of labor was brought to the state level, manifested in constant attention and improvement of the practice of awarding state awards. We should note that such measures were initiated already at the end of the civil war: the 8th All-Russian Congress of Soviets on December 28, 1920 established the Order “Red Banner of Labor” of the RSFSR, and somewhat later similar orders were established in other Soviet republics. In the 1920s, it was widely practiced to award Red Banners to production teams that showed outstanding labor performance. In 1928, the Order of the Red Banner of Labor was introduced. Then, with the beginning of the first five-year plans, medals and orders for achievements in labor were established. The year 1938 was marked by the appearance of the title of Hero of Socialist Labor, as well as the medals “For Labor Valor” and “For Distinguished Labor”. In the summer of 1945, the medal “For Valiant Labor in the Great Patriotic War” was established. In 1970, in connection with the centennial anniversary of the birth of Vladimir Lenin, the medals “For Valiant Labor” were established. Later, the Order of Labor Glory (1974) was created. In general, the award system of the USSR was democratic, every citizen of the Soviet Union could receive any, even the highest, award for valor and perseverance in work.

As part of the labor policy, the emphasis was placed (along with the focus on achieving high production indicators) on developing a sense of duty and responsibility to society. This was facilitated by various forms of incentives and awards for high achievements in labor; this convinced people of the importance of such an attitude toward labor, which strengthened the sense of personal dignity. However, with a high assessment of the role and importance of labor, we must not forget that in the 1960s and 1980s, imbalances in the use of human

resources were revealed, which led to a slowdown in solving problems related to labor productivity growth. Awareness of these obstacles in the context of changes in public life led to the fact that the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of May 24, 1955 established the State Committee of the Council of Ministers of the USSR on Labor and Wages. The Labor Scientific Research Institute and the Central Bureau of Labor Standards were established under the Committee. It was a new and fundamentally important step to improve labor relations, an attempt to strengthen social contacts between the state and all workers. In the 1960s, there was a revival of interest in the scientific organization of labor: scientific conferences were held with discussions of the goals and objectives of labor organization, a network of relevant departments at enterprises was created, numerous experiments were carried out, for example, at the Shchelkovsky plant, at the Iliysky state farm, etc. (Kravchenko, 1987; Changly, 1973).

Unfortunately, this trend faded quite quickly as a result of the cancellation of the so-called Kosygin economic reform, which began to be carried out, when state bodies decided to follow a well-worn development track that justified itself in the 1930s, but turned out to be erroneous in the 1960s and 1970s with difficult to predict consequences. In such conditions, dissatisfaction with the policy in the field of labor organization increased, which manifested itself in the emergence of apathy, discontent and an increase in critical attitude toward political power (Toshchenko, 2005).

In modern Russia, there have been no significant qualitative changes in relation to labor, despite the introduction of private property and proclamation of opportunities to use market relations. Labor productivity is still not growing or is growing weakly. The attitude of the majority of employees toward labor has not changed. We should also note that in the 2000s, the priorities of the work of the Labor Scientific Research Institute changed

dramatically. While earlier it was engaged in the scientific organization of labor, now the problems of unemployment (“employment of the population”), poverty (“standard of living”) and insecurity of people (“social insurance”) are coming to the fore. In other words, the ground for social tension in the labor sphere remains, which does not contribute to the effective functioning of the social contract.

As for the *cult of education*, it was launched after the 111th Congress of the Komsomol in 1920, during which Lenin called on the people to “study, study, study”. Thus, starting with the policy of eliminating illiteracy and deployment of primary, secondary and higher education, Russia managed to achieve a high level of literacy compared to countries that had a more developed economic base.

It was the education system that played a significant role in strengthening the social contract, as it created significant multimillion social communities – the Soviet intelligentsia and skilled workers, who in fact became convinced that education was becoming a powerful means of social and professional mobility that provided them with a new and higher standard of living and better lifestyle (see, for example: Sitarov, 2019).

Speaking about ideology in modern Russia, we should note the following: traumatization of the modern spiritual and moral sphere of Russian society is largely explained by the provision contained in the Constitution of the Russian Federation: there is no state ideology in Russia. The negative attitude toward the word “ideology” may be due to the fact that only one ideology was officially recognized in the Soviet Union – the socialist one. Therefore, associating the concept of “ideology” with the word “socialist” (in some cases “communist”) has formed a prejudice against it, sometimes turning this word almost into a swear word. However, as life shows, many disagree with this position. “How can one live without ideology, without clear public administration? After we decided to free ourselves from the Soviet past, we

created nothing but ephemeral hopes” (Shirvind, 2022, p. 101).

The real historical process shows that ideology, no matter what, returns (Slavin, 2009), while the absence of a state ideology has become one of the vices of the emerging Russian statehood. This omission was noticed already under Boris Yeltsin. But, not wanting to return to the rejected notion of “ideology”, the authorities put forward a proposal – to find a national idea. The meaning of what has been undertaken is obvious – the people must be united around socially significant landmarks that are understandable to everyone and arouse the desire to participate in their implementation. As a result, a whole boom of initiatives broke out in the 1990s, starting with quoting the words of Uvarov (Minister of Education of the Russian government in the mid-19th century) “Orthodoxy. Autocracy. Nationality” to endless searches to find cherished appeals that suit everyone. However, it was a search that was doomed to failure in advance. These were the ideas of individual seekers of truth, scientists, politicians, just ambitious individuals. But their limitations and conditionality were determined by the lack of appeal to the opinion of the people, to their understanding of what should be achieved and how to build relationships in the existing society. This was reflected in the following: the situation in the country was described in many different ways, for example, “managed democracy”, “conservative modernization”, etc.

If we consider the current situation in Russia, we see that the real political and spiritual life of Russian society is like a kaleidoscope with a conglomerate of various ideological orientations, which reflect the aspirations of various social groups and communities in the most bizarre ways.

At present, it is extremely important to overcome the denial of state ideology as such. In fact, any state ideology is a formulation of the strategic goals of the state, which are shared by the masses; it is a value guideline that generates not only

acceptance, but also a desire to defend it. We emphasize that ideology exists in every state, regardless of whether it is proclaimed or not. *De facto*, it exists in Russia. As the results of sociological research show, the majority of the Russian population wants to have a strong, prosperous and influential state.

The absence of a strategic goal in the form of ideology in the state and society gives rise to various specific and controversial ideas about the “militarization of consciousness” (A.S. Tsipko) or about the transformation of the middle class from a pillar of society into a source of its division and destabilization (A. Shchipkov). We should point out obsessive and incomprehensible attempts and aspirations to build a “Slavic-Orthodox political culture” in Russia and to establish an “assembly and veche morality” (A.N. Asopov).

Thus, the analysis of opportunities for the consolidation of the Russian society shows that social contract is under threat if there is no state ideology and at the same time there exist ideological currents that reflect, as a rule, the interests, value orientations and attitudes of various social classes, communities, groups. The real situation requires formulating the strategic goal of Russia’s development, which finds its expression in the state-public ideology, with a clear designation of the means and methods to achieve it. Without such an ideology, Russia cannot fully recover from the traumatic state (Toshchenko, 2020).

*Fourth, social contract is a two-way road, which implies the existence of feedback* between the government and the people, a constant check of its effectiveness and efficiency. This means that the political power not only listens to the people, but also hears them. The fulfillment of these requirements was facilitated by the form of existence of the Soviet government – the soviets of people’s deputies. This form of coordination of interests, born during the 1905 revolution, proved itself during the revolution, during the civil war,

and then at all stages of socialist construction. Its effectiveness manifested itself in various forms of contacts understandable to the people: in addition to elections, these were regular reports and speeches by officials, the labor movement, systematic work with appeals to the authorities, analysis of workers’ letters and, most importantly, mandatory official reaction to all proposals, signals and criticism from the field. However, gradually, especially in the 1950s and 1980s, the functions of the soviets began to be replaced by the actions of the apparatus of the CPSU, which contributed to the weakening of people’s influence on the affairs of society and the state and, accordingly, the growth of discontent with state policy. Moreover, the work increasingly acquired the features of formalism, and was carried out without proper control from the public.

N.A. Berdyaev writes about how important it is to listen and hear the people and then act according to their wishes. Being critical of the October Revolution, he at the same time saw the essence of why the people followed the Bolsheviks. “Lenin could not have carried out his plan of revolution and seizure of power without a revolution in the soul of the people. This revolution was so great that the people, who lived by irrational beliefs and submitted to irrational fate, suddenly became almost obsessed with rationalizing their whole life, believed in the possibility of rationalization without any irrational residue, believed in the machine instead of God” (Berdyaev, 2004, pp. 274–275).

The Soviet government demonstrated the ability to communicate with the people for a long time; however, during the period of perestroika, the government was unable to detect significant changes in people’s consciousness, in understanding their pressing aspirations.

Thus, the essence of the feedback between the people and the government is that the state takes into account main orientations and needs of the people and on this basis creates the “rules of the game” – guarantees the conditions for a decent

existence of the people and ensures their fulfillment. The people, in turn, agree to the requirements related to the protection of their identity, rights and freedoms. At the same time, there is often a voluntary submission to restrictive laws if people see that their basic interests and needs are taken into account or at least taken into consideration and fulfilled to some extent.

The loss of permanent ties with the people is a loss of connection with reality and a threat to the existence of a political regime. It will necessarily manifest itself in the emergence of points of tension, which was clearly felt during certain periods of the USSR's existence (during the policy of *prodrazverstka*, during the years of collectivization, as well as during *perestroika*).

The feedback between the authorities and the people in modern Russia in the early 1990s was based on radical and outwardly attractive promises. But huge social costs – rising inequality, falling living standards, rising unemployment, weakening of social protection – became apparent, and trust began to decline.

The inability and unwillingness to take into account the demands of the population manifested itself in such conflict situations as the monetarization of benefits (replacement of benefits in kind with monetary compensation) in 2005, pension reform initiated in 2019, optimization of education and healthcare, dismantlement of the former organization of science since 2013, and other conflict situations, including in the regions.

One of the indicators for measuring feedback is trust assessed with the help of opinion polls. Currently, according to the All-Russian research of 2021–2022, it looks like this: the president, depending on the branch of economy and culture (industry, construction, transport, agriculture, services, healthcare, education, science), is trusted by 38 to 63% of the population (not trusted by 8.2 to 13%); the government – from 16.5 to 41.2% and from 14.5 to 28.8%, respectively; the State Duma

– from 10.7 to 26.8% and from 30.9 to 49.5% (Intelligentsia..., 2023, pp. 293–296). It is obvious that such a socio-psychological indicator as trust is formed on the basis of many circumstances of people's lives, but primarily through awareness of their social status. In other words, the reserves for strengthening the social contract are still considerable.

*Fifth, social contract also seals such a criterion as the involvement of the people in the management of the affairs of society and the state.* Moreover, this characteristic should not be understood literally, only as the personal participation of each individual in the activities of management bodies at various levels of the social organization of society. Therefore, in addition to direct participation in the work of governing bodies, in our opinion, it is worth talking about the possibility of influencing the decision-making of all governing bodies without exception. At the same time, it is the awareness of being part of and the actual involvement in the management process that makes people themselves more responsible in their social and working life. In our opinion, the course of the Soviet government to attract as many people as possible to the administration through a wide network of soviets of people's deputies (in the early years of Soviet power – soviets of workers', soldiers' and peasants' deputies) contributed to strengthening mutual trust. We also note such a way of strengthening harmony between the people and the state as mass involvement of the grassroots to (co)participate in governance. This demand, expressed in Lenin's appeal, has so far been actively ridiculed by representatives of liberal circles and anti-Soviets: the Bolsheviks recognized (or declared) that “a cook can run the state”. Although a careful reading of Lenin's words suggests that he focused the efforts of the Soviet government on the need to “teach” people, including the cook, to participate in the management of state and public affairs: “*We are not utopians. We know that any worker and any cook*

*are not capable of running the state right away... We demand that the training in the cause of public administration should be conducted by conscious workers and soldiers and that it should be started immediately, i.e. all the working people, all the poor, should be immediately involved in this training”* (Lenin, 1981, p. 315).

There is a lot of talk about attracting Russians to various forms and methods of management in modern Russia. However, as the all-Russian sociological studies of 2020–2022 show, even with such a “gentle” formulation: “Can you influence decision-making?”, mostly negative answers were received: 90.5% of respondents say that it is impossible to influence at the state level, 89.3% – at the level of republican, krai, and regional authorities, 83.9% – at the city, district level and 57.8% – at the level of an industrial organization (Toshchenko, 2022, p. 103).

*Sixth, social contract implies ensuring consensus and a balance of interests not only between the people as a whole and the authorities, but also between the strata, social communities and groups within any society that make up this people, in other words, taking into account the diversity of interests.* Moreover, this consent is intended to be implemented not only at the political, economic and social levels, but, most importantly, at the *moral and spiritual level*, as it is the most fundamental one, ensuring the true essence and nature of social contract. Such moral unity arises in the course of observing and maintaining trusting relationships that eliminate all attempts at confrontation, rivalry, prejudice and are built on the basis of the fundamental value orientations of the main social forces, the coordination of which largely depends on the responsibility of the state authorities. However, this does not mean that value orientations remain unchanged: the search for agreement in the whole society and between its main actors is a constant requirement for the preservation and maintenance of a social contract.

Finally, it is important to take into account the interests of territorial, including ethno-national and confessional, features and their role in strengthening the social contract at each stage of the country’s historical development. In this regard, it is relevant to assert that forgetting the interests of institutional entities leads to a loss of connection with reality, contributes to the emergence of tension points and, as a result, creates a threat to the existence of the state and its political regime (see, for example, Uskova et al., 2022).

When interpreting the essence and content of social contract, it should also be taken into account that a social contract cannot remain unchanged for a long time. It is constantly in need of refinement, reconfiguration in accordance with changing living conditions. This is evidenced by the development experience of all countries, including Russia, when the reference points of the social contract were changed, clarified or replaced by other criteria. The demands to ensure the observance of social justice, the sovereignty of the individual, as well as people’s confidence in their future and the future of their children are becoming increasingly important.

### **Conclusion**

Social contract is a unique social phenomenon. In modern conditions, it guarantees the existence of the state, provides an opportunity to effectively solve economic, political, social, spiritual and moral problems. The two sides of social contract – the state and the people – should ideally be its equal participants, otherwise two mutually exclusive processes may occur – either the growth of authoritarianism (totalitarianism), which leads to the deformation of human freedoms and rights, or the establishment of ochlocratic tendencies, which, as a rule, are used by destructive forces. In modern Russian reality, the social contract has significant reserves for its improvement in terms of coordinating development goals, means of achieving them, ideological support, establishing regular feedback

and, finally, effective participation of all social communities and groups in managing the affairs of society and the state. However, at present, solutions to specific state and social problems in a considerable number of cases represent deformed processes and phenomena that do not always embody equal unity, which leads to various forms of tension reflecting the weakness of the existing social contract.

An analysis of the content of the social contract at all stages of Soviet/Russian history shows that its stability was influenced by the observance of such an important landmark as justice, because in the public consciousness, people's perception of their lives according to specifically perceived laws of justice always (often implicitly) retains its value. This was especially clearly manifested in the people's idea of social equality, the possibility of achieving it, or its partial absence, but for reasons understandable to most. It is the violation, especially egregious, that serves as the reason and cause of all the conflicts that have occurred or are brewing, when real gaps in the social status of higher and lower communities, strata and groups have been created or are emerging in society.

The existence of social contract depends on whether people have the opportunity to compare their aspirations and interests with understanding and acceptance of where the state calls them to go, and how much they agree with what they need to do and what to strive for. In this regard, the statement of A. Tocqueville deserves attention: in all critical processes of the development of the state, the people will prefer the achievement of social equality rather than democracy.

All of the above allows us to conclude that the concept of "social contract" has never been formalized as an official document. It is the most important theoretical and applied construct for analyzing and explaining the evolutionary or revolutionary development of the state and/or society. This concept includes a policy coordinated with the people to transform the surrounding socio-economic and political environment, approved methods and forms of state and political governance, acceptable ideological impact on public consciousness. Ultimately, in the process of implementing the social contract, ideas, beliefs and actions are formed to achieve the common goals of the people and the state.

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