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The Crown and Parliament. The Tragic Fates of English King Charles I and Russian Tsar Nicholas II: a Comparative Study

This paper examines a very acute problem—the relationships between crowns and their parliaments in history as personified by two political figures: English King Charles I and Russian Tsar Nicholas II. In spite of the three centuries which divide these two monarchs, their fates were strikingly similar, mainly because of their attitudes to national parliaments and constitutional rule in general. This comparative essay provides a basis for understanding the role of individuals in history and their influence on the course of events—the cases where monarchal prejudices, biases, foibles, or obstinacy led to personal as well as national tragedies: to revolutions, civil wars and dictatorships (let it be those of Cromwell or Stalin). Lastly, the paper offers an opportunity to appreciate the national peculiarities of those great tragedies: while England could quite promptly repair the ravages of revolution and restore its monarchy, Russia, on the contrary, lost—evidently, forever—the chance to establish a constitutional monarchy and suffered a long period of political totalitarianism in the twentieth century.

The paper includes two main sections, a conclusion and an appendix. The first part concentrates entirely upon Charles I's reign, while the second one deals with Nicholas II's policy. Both sections demonstrate their respective personal responsibilities for civil wars and the fall of the monarchy in their countries.

I. King Charles I

The first decades of the seventeenth century were very complicated and tense in Britain. The new Stuart monarchy could not easily adapt itself to the traditions and customs of England and, moreover, attempted to play its own

and provocative game. The statements of James I, the founder of this dynasty, in favour of the divine authority of kings[1] were understood in the country as the manifestation of this monarch's personal absolutist sympathies and his intention to establish an absolute monarchy based on the French model in Britain. The Parliament of England openly came out in defence of the ancient British constitution and against all of James I's attempts to violate it. "The Apologia of the Commons" (1604), "Commons' Petition of Grievances" (1610) and "The Great Protestation of the Commons of England" (1621) were the first documents of growing ideological and constitutional divergence between the Crown and Parliament, the Court and the Country. James I died in 1625 of a painful and incurable disease, and in the same year Charles I, his son, ascended the British throne.

Charles was born in 1600 and was the second son of James I. After the death of his elder brother Prince Henry in 1612, he became the heir apparent at the age of twelve. His education was a highly religious one: he was brought up within the Anglican Church and distanced himself equally from Catholicism and extreme Protestantism. He was well educated not only in theology but also in the secular humanities. In 1620, when Charles wooed a Spanish princess, the Conde de Gondomar wrote to Philip III: "The Prince is of good disposition and ability. He knows several languages well and particularly Latin. He is a good horseman and daily, after hearing Divine service, occupies himself in the exercises suitable for a Prince."[2]

Charles was not a man of strong character, and so he needed other people to whom he could turn for advice. Two persons had the most influence with him: his father's favourite George Villiers (1592-1628), the Duke of Buckingham and his wife, the French Princess Henrietta Maria. Buckingham managed to win over young Charles while his father was still alive. After the death of James I he became Charles's most intimate favourite and his chief political adviser.[3] Buckingham's career was dizzying and brilliant under the early Stuarts but he had none of the necessary abilities for successful statesmanship: both in home and foreign affairs his policy was hopelessly incompetent and disastrous. Moreover, Buckingham's defiant wealth and luxury, his clan's covetousness as well as his monopoly of patronage and the sale of honours and titles—all of those evoked profound indignation among all strata of English society. He was "the great usurper," as Lord Percy once called him.[4]

Following Buckingham's death the influence exerted by Henrietta Maria over her husband began gradually to grow. She converted to Roman Catholi-

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[1] *Works of James I*, edition 1616, 527-537, 556.

[2] *King Charles I 1649-1949*, London 1949, 12.

[3] In his letters to Buckingham, Charles signed invariably "Your loving, faithful, constant friend". See Ch. Petrie (ed.), *The Letters of King Charles I*, London 1935, 40-45, 52-57, et al.

[4] K. Sharpe (ed.), *Faction & Parliament. Essays on Early Stuart History*, Oxford 1978, 242.

cism, which always provoked strong fears and suspicions among the English Protestants. The second negative factor was also connected to her French origin: she adhered to absolutist principles in politics and blindly encouraged them in Charles's government. Her interference with the home and foreign affairs of England was in fact ruinous for the Stuart regime. So, both Buckingham and Henrietta Maria played a very negative part in the fate of Charles and his monarchy.

II. Charles I and his parliaments

After the tense relationship between James I and his parliaments the new King's accession to the thrown in 1625 was appreciated with some hopes. Disappointment came very soon: Charles adopted altogether his father's temper and did not intend to change anything. At least, two main traits dominated his politics: firstly, he was very impatient of any opposition and, secondly, he deeply believed in his absolute and unlimited power which was legitimised by some divine right of monarchy. It is no mere coincidence, therefore, that the canon on 16 June 1640 on behalf of the King gave the following explanation of regal power:

> The most high and sacred Order of Kings is of Divine Right, being the ordinance of God himself, founded in the prime Laws of nature, and clearly established by express texts both of the Old and New Testaments. A supreme power is given to this most excellent Order by God himself in the Scriptures, which is, that kings should rule and command in their several dominions all persons of what rank or estate so ever, whether ecclesiastical or civil, and that they should restrain and punish with the temporal sword all stubborn and wicked doers.[5]

Certainly, for Charles the most "stubborn and wicked doers" were the members of parliament in opposition to his Majesty and therefore he could use "the temporal sword" to "restrain and punish" them. Charles first parliament met in 1625 when the country waged a very unsuccessful war against Spain: all of Buckingham's naval expeditions failed and they witnessed once more the absolute incompetence of the Lord Admiral and the awful corruption in his office. It is therefore not surprising that the Commons refused to authorise expenses higher than a quarter of what the King requested for the prolongation of the war. The second, and more painful, blow which parliament struck against the King concerned the custom duties known as 'tonnage and poundage': they were granted him not for life as usual but only for one year. Lastly, between Charles and parliament there arose also contradictions in religious matters; the King dissolved his first parliament very soon.

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[5] J.P. Kenyon (ed.), *The Stuart Constitution 1603-1688. Documents and Commentary*, Cambridge 1966, 167.

Meanwhile, the royal government could not consolidate its position either in home or in foreign affairs and in 1626 the King assembled the second parliament of his reign. It proved more stubborn than the first. The disastrous naval campaign against Spain ended in the fiasco at Cadiz. This gave occasion to raise again all the old accusations against the government in general and Buckingham in particular. The two leading parliamentary opponents were Sir John Elliot in the Commons and the Earl of Bristol in the Lords. They blamed the Lord Admiral for all state crimes and called for his impeachment. "I accuse that man, the Duke of Buckingham, of high treason," said Bristol, "and I will prove it."[6] Charles ordered the Attorney-General to bring against the Earl himself a charge of high treason. Moreover, he arrested Elliot and imprisoned him in the Tower but after both Houses' vigorous protest, released him. Parliament denied the King the required subsidy and to save his favourite, Charles again dissolved it. Some modern British historians think that the lack of ability to manage parliament was the cause of Charles's misfortunes at the beginning of his reign.[7] But it is difficult to agree with these statements. Charles believed in his divine authority and saw parliament only as a mere instrument to fulfil his absolute will. Just this deep ideological divergence was the basis of the conflict between the Crown and parliament. And the subsequent events convincingly testified to that.

The period between the second and third parliaments was very hard for the government. While Britain waged war against Spain, it had also become involved in a war with France and for that, naturally, it required more money. The King ordered the collection of custom duties without parliamentary consent and, moreover, he began levying a forced loan on a large scale. As a result, there were many who refused to contribute and were imprisoned. The five knights' case was an evident example. In England most people distrusted both the King and Buckingham. In London's streets circulated leaflets with the following slogan:

> Who rules the Kingdom?
> The King.
> Who rules the King?
> The Duke.
> Who the Duke?
> The Devil."[8]

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[6] Ch. Hibbert, *Charles I*, London 1968, 64.

[7] Cf. "The King had shown himself incapable of managing Parliament." Ibid., 65; "It is probably true that there was an element of suspicion and ignorance on both sides which better liaison might have dispelled; the Commons were unnecessarily suspicious of the King's foreign policy, and the King did little to take them into his confidence." G.E. Aylmer, *The Struggle for the Constitution. England in the Seventeenth Century*, London 1968, 68.

[8] Ch. Hibbert, *Charles I*, 67.

The utter defeat of the British expedition to the Isle of Rhé off La Rochelle (France) in 1627 forced the King to summon parliament again. It opened on 17 March 1628 and at once rushed into a severe criticism of the government. The most significant document of the third parliament was "The Petition of Right" passed on 7 June 1628. It brought many accusations against the royal government and demanded of the King to keep strictly to the established order according to which no man in England could be compelled to "make or yield any gift, loan, tax, or such like charge, without common consent by Act of Parliament"; no freeman in any such manner could be imprisoned or detained; the commissions for proceeding by martial law should be revoked and annulled; and hereafter no commissions of like nature were to "issue forth to any person or persons whatsoever to be, to be executed as aforesaid", and the subjects could not be "destroyed or put to death contrary to the laws and franchises of the land."[9] It was still more important that "The Petition of Right" reminded the King of "the good laws and statutes of this realm" by which his subjects had inherited their freedom. It referred to the Great Charter of the Liberties of England and to King Edward III's statues which "declared and enacted by authority of Parliament, that no man, of what estate or condition that he be, should be put out of his land or tenement, nor taken, nor imprisoned, nor disherited, nor put to death without being brought to answer by due process of law."[10] Charles signed the Petition though neither he nor Buckingham intended to respect it. Meantime, the rage of the people against Buckingham continuously grew and on 23 August 1628 he was assassinated by his former officer John Felton.

Buckingham's death would have given Charles an opportunity to change his politics and open up new perspectives. But he decided to continue his bankrupt deal. During the parliamentary session of January through March 1629 the MPs criticized the ecclesiastical as well as the financial policies of the government, protesting against an arbitrary levying of taxes. Faced with fierce opposition, Charles dissolved parliament on 2 March 1629. In his proclamation issued on 10 March 1629, he again claimed that "princes are not bound to give account of their actions, but to God alone."[11] Here he charged the Commons "to create a new privilege" of a Parliament–man against the King.[12] Charles could not accept that parliament was able to pass laws without his approval. A little earlier he had warned in his speech at parliament that "no one of the Houses separately or together has the right to make or explain laws" without his consent.[13] In response to its dissolution, the Commons for its part

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[9] J.P. Kenyon (ed.), *The Stuart Constitution*, 84.
[10] Ibid., 83.
[11] *The Letters of King Charles I*, 63.
[12] Ibid., 75.
[13] J. Rushworth, *The Historical Collections (1618-1648)* I, London 1659, 631.

adopted a resolution that everyone who sought to bring in an innovation of religion or to extend or introduce Popery or Arminianism and who paid the subsidies that had not been granted by Parliament, would become a capital enemy of the Kingdom and a betrayer of the liberties of England.[14] As a result, the King arrested and imprisoned in the Tower some of the Commons' members, including Sir John Eliot.

Charles's non-parliamentary government lasted eleven years and was called the "Personal Rule". In the nineteenth century Whig historians unanimously described it as Charles's "tyranny." In his book *The First Two Stuarts* S.R. Gardiner, in particular, wrote: "Charles was practically absolute in all matters in which he cared to be absolute."[15] Modern British historians are not as explicit.[16] The absence of parliament allowed Charles to pursue a tough policy. He well remembered his father's motto "No bishop, no king" and in 1633 promoted William Laud to the archbishopric of Canterbury. The latter with zeal defended Charles's absolutism and persecuted the Puritans. The other staunch adherent of the royal prerogative was Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford from 1640, who had been in Ireland since 1633 and terrified the whole country. These names evoked permanent hatred among various strata of British society. Political and religious repressions began soon after parliament had been dissolved. In 1630 the Star Chamber sentenced the author Alexander Leighton to a savage punishment for his book against the bishops. In 1632, Sir John Eliot, the great English parliamentarian and foe of absolutism, died after three and a half years of imprisonment in the Tower. In respect of Eliot, Charles showed his heartlessness in full: he refused not only all requests to release the condemned man because of his serious illness but even denied him to be buried in his Cornish home. In 1637 three anti-episcopal Puritans, William Prynne, Henry Burton, and John Bastwick, who represented the learned professions of law, divinity, and medicine, were sentenced to the cutting off of their ears and life imprisonment. But these and many other repressions could not save Charles's regime: by the end of the thirties he encountered numerous difficulties. The government's fiscal extortion, especially regarding ship money, aroused general resentment. But what was even more dangerous was the Scottish question. Laud's attempts to unify the English and Scottish Churches led at first to a rebellion of the Scots and then to war with them in February 1639. The King had no money to wage war and, after all, was forced to assemble his last parliament.

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[14] J.P. Kenyon (ed.), *The Stuart Constitution*, 85.

[15] S.R. Gardiner, *The First Two Stuarts and the Puritan Revolution 1603-1660*, 2nd ed., London 1877, 74.

[16] See, for example, G.E. Aylmer, *The Personal Rule of Charles I, 1629-40*, London 1989, 20-21; K. Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I*, New Haven–London 1992. The most detailed volume of 983 pages!

Parliament met on 13 April 1640 and was very short. The King was impatient of the severe criticism addressed to his government, and on 5 May again dissolved the assembly. But the royal army could not get the better of the Scottish rebels, the King's finances were completely exhausted and in autumn, Charles agreed to call parliament once more. The second or Long Parliament of 1640 opened on 3 November and was the most momentous in the history of royal absolutism. In spite of the King's conciliatory tone at its opening, the debates were very ardent. John Pym, the leader of the parliamentary opposition, delivered a brilliant speech on 7 November. He rejected Laud's innovations in matters of religion, accused the Papists' party of undermining law and religion in the country, and defended the liberties and privileges of parliament, having condemned an illegal course of the government.[17] The debate on 7-9 November showed a wide opposition to the King's regime in parliament. Strafford proposed that Charles dissolve parliament and was immediately arrested on the charge of high treason. Soon some other ministers of the government followed him. In December Archbishop Laud also shared their fate. Strafford's trial was very long and only on 7 May 1641 did parliament pass a death sentence on him by Act of Attainder. Five days later he was executed. In May parliament gained one more victory: in a special Act the King agreed that thenceforth it could be dissolved only by its own consent.

Under pressure of parliament the King was compelled to make one concession after another. In July parliament abolished the Star Chamber and the Court of High Commission—the most sinister instruments of autocratic monarchy. The Privy Council was also deprived of its judicial powers. The peak of parliamentary activity in 1641 was its passing of "The Grand Remonstrance" on 22 November. In its 204 articles were revealed all the abuses of the King's government, and they proposed some political and economical reforms of the state.[18] It demanded, in particular, that parliament should have a right to approve the King's government (his councilors, ambassadors and "other ministers," article 197). Charles did not sign the Remonstrance and, moreover, in January 1642 made an attempt to arrest the leaders of parliament, but failed. After that he left the capital and began to prepare for a war with parliament. It was clear that his sole wish was to restore an obedient assembly and get back all lost privileges. On 22 August 1642 Charles raised his standard at Nottingham and from this moment in England a long and bloody civil war broke out, in which the army of parliament, led by Oliver Cromwell, utterly defeated the royalist forces. The King was taken captive and put on trial. Charles would have had an excellent opportunity to become the first constitutional monarch in the history of Britain and Europe because the leaders of parliament wished to find a compromise with him, but he preferred to be a martyr and rejected all

[17] Kenyon (ed.), *Stuart Constitution*, 203-205.
[18] Ibid., 231-240.

parliamentary propositions. On 26 January 1649 the High Court of Justice sentenced him to death as a tyrant, betrayer and enemy of the state. On 30 January he was publicly beheaded and England had lost its King for a time.

III. Tsar Nicholas II

For centuries Russia remained one of the most autocratic states in the world. In 1913 the ruling dynasty, the Romanov family, magnificently celebrated its 300th anniversary. By that time Russia was a huge and multinational empire and the Russian Tsar had plenty of diverse titles: Emperor of all Russia; Tsar of Kazan, Poland, Siberia, and Georgia; Grand Duke of Finland and Lithuania; Sovereign of Turkestan and Armenia, and so on. The unity of this vast empire relied upon an official principle of state, "Autocracy, Orthodoxy and Nationality." This principle secured the absolute power of the Tsar, the primacy of the Russian Orthodox church and of the Russian nation on the whole.

Nicholas II was born in 1868 and was the oldest son of the Russian Tsar Alexander III. He grew up as a gentle, kind and modest youth. To make him more strong-willed and courageous, his father sent him to serve in the Guards of Preobrazhensky regiment, the commander of which was his uncle Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich Romanov. Moreover, Alexander III appointed the aged Konstantin P. Pobedonostzev, the Supreme-Prosecutor of the Synod (the supreme Council of the Russian church) as a tutor for his son. Pobedonostzev had the notorious reputation of a reactionary and conservative. He came out against all liberal reforms in Russia and for the preservation of the obsolete system of autocracy. He taught the heir that tsarist authority was given by God Himself; that autocracy was the only possible form of government for Russia; that parliamentarism was a great lie. Nicholas firmly learned these lessons from his teacher and they remained with him for life. Thus it is sure that the influence of the Russian "Great Inquisitor" upon the future emperor was extremely negative. But in general, Nicholas received quite a respectable education in the classics: he studied Russian history and literature; spoke several foreign languages including German, French and English; took interest in art (music, ballet and opera). The only sphere in which Nicholas had little interest was state affairs. In the words of Count Segrei Witte, one of the most eminent tsarist ministers, the Sovereign never opened a page of the Russian laws and their commentaries.[19] Certainly, this was not a good sign for the future.

Tsar Alexander III died suddenly in 1894 and Nicholas immediately succeeded him as the Russian tsar. In the same year he married the German Princess Alix of Hesse and by Rhine, who was four years younger than her husband. Nicholas was devoted to his family and was a pleasant and attentive

[19] S.Yu. Witte, *Izbrannyi vospominaniya* [Selected Memoirs], Moscow 1991, 558.

spouse. Tsarina Alexandra had a stronger and more determined character than the Tsar and therefore she could easily lead him. She steadfastly believed in autocracy and held the view that the Tsar was responsible for his deeds to none but God. Living in the limited world of its palaces the Tsar's family undoubtedly comprehended nothing of the needs of ordinary people, including all the educated classes of Russia. They naively hoped that after the severe reign of his father, the young Tsar would do his utmost to improve the political life of the country and start a new era of liberal reforms. Alas, these hopes proved fully vain. Already at a reception of the delegations of Russian regional nobility, cities and local legislatures in January 1895, Nicholas described all plans to change the existing political system in Russia as "insensate dreams." To define his position once and for all, he said further: "I shall maintain the principle of autocracy just as firmly and unflinchingly as it was preserved by my memorable dead Father."[20]

This speech evoked a very negative response all over the country. It had become absolutely clear that the new Tsar was not prepared to change anything and that it was useless to expect reforms from him. The disappointment was strengthened in the next year when the Tsar was crowned. The solemn ceremony finished with an awful tragedy: about 1300 visitors perished and hundreds were wounded in Moscow on the Khodynskoye field, where huge mobs of people gathered to celebrate the coronation, as a result of a great crush for the traditional tsarist gifts. Despite these sorrowful events, the Tsar and the Tsarina opened and attended a gorgeous evening party for the same day, given by the French ambassador. This extreme insensitiveness of the Tsar would appear many times in the future and the "Khodynka" itself became forever a token of tsarist heartlessness.

The rapid economical growth of Russia at the end of the nineteenth century by no means corresponded to the tough politics of the tsarist court. Nicholas II continued the political repressions of his father, using, in particular, the secret police, the Okhranka, which exercised total control over all critics of Tsarism. Newspapers and books in the country were censored and the most irreconcilable opponents of the regime were arrested, imprisoned and exiled to Siberia. In 1903 tsarist field courts sentenced twelve times more political prisoners than in 1894! However, opposition was steadily growing: it united liberals, socialists and radicals. The most dangerous and extremist group were the Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs) who had proclaimed terror and violence the only ways to change the existing order. They assassinated many "detestable" tsarist ministers, governors, police officers and their agents. So, by the beginning of the twentieth century tension between the government and opposition reached its peak. In the words of Viacheslav K. Plehve, the Minister of the Interior, the Tsar needed "a small victorious war" to stop the revolution-

[20] A. Bohanov, *Nicholas II*, Moscow 1997, 128.

ary tide.[21] And thus the tsarist government chose a war with Japan in 1904 as a remedy for treating its home political crisis.

Nicholas II detested Japan after the "Otzu incident," in which a Japanese wounded him with a sabre during his visit to this country in 1891. Moreover, Russia successfully realized its economic expansion in the Far East, making its collision with Japan inevitable. But from the very beginning this war was unfortunate for Russia, which proved to be entirely unprepared for warfare. After the Japanese seized the Russian fortress Port Arthur and sank Russia's fleet in the battle of Tsushima in May 1905, the Tsar was forced to ask for peace. The Russo-Japanese war therefore became a humiliation for Russia and Tsar Nicholas's personal disgrace.

Meanwhile, in Russia itself there happened an event known as "Bloody Sunday" which sparked off the first Russian revolution. On 9 January 1905 a peaceful demonstration of about 150,000 workers—some holding icons and portraits of the Tsar—marched to the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg. Their aim was to present a humble petition to the Tsar asking for higher wages and better working conditions. Liberals joined the call for political rights, a constitution and an elected parliament. When the demonstration reached the palace, the troops who stood in front of it opened fire; soldiers also attacked the participants elsewhere in the capital. Observers reported that over 1,000 people were killed or wounded but the government claimed that 130 were killed and about 300 were wounded.[22] Anyhow, the bloody massacre undermined the people's belief in the Tsar as their good "Little Father" for ever. The following months of 1905 were marked with strikes, armed uprisings and riots throughout the country. In June there were mutinies on the Russian battleships "Potemkin" and "Ochakov." By October it became clear that the Tsar would be overthrown.

IV. Tsar Nicholas II and his parliaments

The deep political crisis in the country, provoked by the defeat in the war with Japan and the revolution, forced the Tsar to make some concessions. In October he appointed Witte as Prime Minister of his government to find a way out of the crisis. Witte prepared a programme, which was approved by the Tsar. On 17 October 1905, Nicholas II issued a decree called the *October Manifesto* which for the first time established parliamentary democracy in Russia. The *Manifesto* set up an elected parliament (the Duma) and granted civil rights and liberties such as freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and

[21] A.P. Shikman, *Dejateli Otechestvennoi istorii* [The Leaders of National History] II, Moscow 1997, 178.

[22] *Noveyshaya otechestvennaya istoria* [Newer National History. The 20th Century] I, Moscow 2004, 75.

unions, freedom of religion, universal suffrage and freedom from arbitrary arrest.[23] The Tsar's *Manifesto* split the opposition and soon the Revolution collapsed. To strengthen his authority Nicholas took some emergency measures. First, he dismissed Witte and appointed Peter A. Stolypin as Prime Minister. Stolypin was known as a rigid reformer and entirely loyal to tsarist autocracy. Secondly, in February 1906 Nicholas issued a decree changing the status of his State Council. Now it became the Upper House of the Russian parliament. The Tsar himself appointed half of its members and the others were elected by higher landlords, manufacturers, clergy, professors and members of the Russian Academy. Its supreme task was to control the Duma's activity. Thirdly, in April 1906 the government issued a new redaction of the "Fundamental Laws of the Russian Empire," in which the Tsar reinforced some autocratic prerogatives. In particular, the fourth article directly decreed that "the Emperor of Russia holds a supreme autocratic authority."[24] The other articles allowed the Tsar to suspend and dissolve the Duma at any time, to appoint and dismiss ministers and to use emergency powers until a new Duma was elected.[25]

On 27 April 1906 the first Duma was opened by the Tsar in a magnificent atmosphere at the Winter Palace. The election resulted in a triumph of the liberals, or Constitutional Democrats (Kadets), because most revolutionary parties boycotted the elections. When the Duma began its meetings, it at once expressed distrust of the government and demanded that its ministers be responsible to the assembly. Liberal MPs wanted further concessions from the Tsar, including the abolition of his emergency powers. But the keenest contradictions between the Duma and the government concerned an agrarian programme. Defending the peasantry, its deputies demanded the confiscation of all large estates in the country and the distribution of land holdings to the peasants. Faced by such an opposition, Nicholas dissolved the Duma on 9 July 1906. So, the first Russian parliament had lasted only 72 days, and the Tsar agreed to call for new elections.

The second Duma met on 20 February 1907. It proved more radical than the former because this time revolutionary parties participated in the elections. The Liberals lost many seats and the Left on their part became a leading parliamentary faction. They did not conceal their opposition to the government and immediately began to condemn the political repressions in the country. Once again agrarian laws proved the apple of discord in the sessions; all attempts to achieve any consent between the Duma and the government failed. The Okhranka accused some deputies of underground activity and demanded their arrest. The Duma refused to comply with this order and thereby signed its own

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[23] *Rossiiskoe zakonodatelstvo X-XX vekov* [Russian Legislation in the 10-20th Centuries] IX, Moscow 1994, 41.

[24] Ibid., 44.

[25] Ibid., 45-52.

death sentence. On 3 June 1907 the Tsar dissolved his second parliament and simultaneously issued a new electoral law which utterly changed the old electoral system. Now one vote of a landlord equalled 260 votes of peasants and 543 votes of workers! Consequently, landlords and big manufacturers elected far more deputies to the Duma than before.[26] In fact, it was a coup because this law had not passed the Duma. The Tsar considered the Duma a burden and claimed that its members were exclusively engaged in "chatter and abuse."[27] He dreamed of either reverting to the old non-parliamentary rule or creating an obedient assembly. His last electoral law was intended for just that.

The third Russian parliament opened its sessions on 1 November 1907. At last the Tsar obtained an assembly which fully met his desires. In the new Duma loyal deputies had 301 seats out of 442, the Liberals 108, and the Left only 33.[28] At a state reception for 300 members of the Duma (all of them were loyal deputies) on 6 January 1908 the Tsar called upon them to strengthen "order" in the country and to complete an agrarian reform. The third Duma lasted all five years of its term. It supported Stolypin's policy on the whole though it was extremely severe. The government continued to carry out political repressions in the country on a large scale. For three years of the Duma's activity (1907-1909) "ordinary" field courts sentenced 2,681 people to death for political crimes. Many thousand revolutionaries and suspects were imprisoned and exiled.[29] The atrocities of Stolypin's government of course aroused indignation all over the country but there was one more cause for the general resentment of the people against the tsarist regime. I mean Gregory Rasputin's influence over the Tsar's family. Rasputin (1865-1916) became quite a significant figure in Russian history and played a sinister part in the downfall of its monarchy. In 1908 he was introduced to the Tsar's family and soon gained their exceptional favour because of his ability to heal Alexis, their only son and heir to the Russian throne, who suffered from haemophilia. Rasputin was a semi-literate Siberian peasant and when he arrived at Petersburg, he pronounced himself a religious mystic and "holy man." Tsarina Alexandra was fascinated by him and always called him an "elder" and "my teacher, saviour and instructor." She was sincerely convinced that Rasputin had been sent by God to look after her family and the Russian people. Together with her, Rasputin encouraged the autocratic inclinations of Nicholas and, moreover, the Tsar asked his advice regarding the appointment of ministers and officials. As a result able ministers were replaced by corrupt and incompetent ones. So, from 1908 in Russia there reigned the so-called "Rasputinschina" which

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[26] Ibid., 57.

[27] A. Bohanov, *Nicholas II*, 251.

[28] V.A. Demin, *Gosudarstvennya duma Rossii* [The State Duma of Russia 1906-1917], Moscow 1996, 40.

[29] *Istoria Rossii XIX – nachala XX vv.* [The History of Russia. 19th – the Beginning 20th Century], Moscow 1998, 553.

undermined the moral reputation of the Tsar's family. Stolypin's efforts to crush any opposition by merciless hangings had a sad end for himself. In 1911 he was killed at an opera performance at Kiev theatre. His agrarian reforms also failed and thus the third Duma's success proved very scanty.

The fourth and last Duma of the Tsar, elected in 1912, began its sittings under uneasy circumstances. In the spring of this year governmental troops shot into a peaceful demonstration of workers in the gold-fields on the Siberian river, Lena. This event led to an outburst of protest all over the country: numerous strikes were held in the capital and other cities of Russia. The unrest also involved the army and the fleet. It seemed that hard times again came for the government. The Duma began to debate a matter concerning Rasputin; a scandal about his intimacy with the Tsar's family had been published in the press. Mikhail Rodzjanko, the chairman of parliament, visited the Tsar, asking him to remove Rasputin from the court, but without result. Tsarina Alexandra conceived a hatred for him and all members of the Duma. The next year however proved far luckier for Nicholas. From February onwards the Romanovs celebrated the 300th anniversary of their reign in Russia. The people's festivities took place all over the country and many thousands of people took part in them. Nicholas was happy and felt sure that the people loved him. But this year was the last favourable one in his reign.

In August 1914, Russia entered the First World War and soon its armies invaded Germany. The Duma and public opinion supported the Tsar and his government: as in much of Europe, there was a wave of patriotism and enthusiasm in the country. But hopes for rapid victories at the front were replaced with general disappointment. In 1914-1915 the Tsar's armies suffered heavy defeats; as a result, Russia retreated from Poland, the Ukraine and the Baltic territories. The Duma keenly reacted to major failures at the front: in August 1915 all leading factions united in the so-called "progressive bloc," which demanded the formation of a new government enjoying "the confidence of the people." The Tsar rejected the Duma's project, showing once more that he would not share his power with anybody. Instead, on Rasputin's advice, he appointed himself the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian armies and went to the front. The capital was left in the hands of the Tsarina. This was a grave blunder since Alexandra was incapable of ruling Russia and refused to work with the Duma. More and more she came to depend on Rasputin who gave his advice to her and Nicholas not only on how to govern the country but also on how to wage war! The Duma again brought up a question on Rasputin and required his withdrawal from all political and military affairs. The Tsar's court was divided: his mother, the former Empress Maria Fedorovna, and the Grand Dukes made an attempt to convince Nicholas to send Rasputin away and to grant Russia a constitution, but in vain. The Tsar remained firm and refused to compromise. The Tsarina on her part set Nicholas against the members of the Duma and in her letters to him she wrote: "Be firm ... remember that you

are the Emperor" (4 May, 1915) or "show them your fist ... present yourself as the Sovereign! You are the Autocrat and they don't dare to forget that" (11 September, 1915).[30]

In 1916 the state of affairs greatly worsened: the war was going badly and people suffered from the collapse of the economy, the shortage of food and high prices. Bread riots, hunger, and discontent spread everywhere in the country and opposition to the Tsar became more relentless. The Tsarina, who ruled Russia following Rasputin's advice, instructed Nicholas to be steadfast. "You are the Anointed Sovereign," she wrote to him in her letters. "Russia loves the lash ... Be Peter the Great, Ivan the Terrible, Emperor Paul—crash all of them!"[31] Facing the Tsar's reluctance to dispose of Rasputin, some members of his court set out to do that instead of him. On 16 December Rasputin was invited for an evening-party to the home of Prince Felix Yusupov where he was finally murdered. And so this shameful period of Russian history came to an end. Alas, that did not save the monarchy. At the beginning of 1917 the political situation in the capital became desperate. On 23 February the workers of its main plants went on strike, which soon involved the whole of Russia. People carried slogans such as "Down the Tsar," "Down the War," "Land and Freedom," "Down the government." The Tsar ordered the suppression of the disorders in the capital but the soldiers refused to open fire on the demonstrators. On the same day the Duma formed a Provisional Committee to take over the government, and its Chairman M. Rodzjanko addressed himself to the Tsar asking him to abdicate. His address was supported by the military headquarters and the Grand Dukes. On 2 March the Tsar abdicated and so, the long Romanov reign in Russia was over. The new Provisional Government however proved weak and short-lived. On 25 October the Bolsheviks made a *coup* and seized power in the capital. Soon Russia plunged into the abyss of a bloody civil war. The Bolsheviks conveyed the Tsar and his family to Ekaterinburg, an Ural city, where on 17 July 1918 they were shot dead by soldiers of the Red Army.

V. Conclusion

When we compare the fates of Charles I and Nicholas II, we see many striking parallels as for their personal and family virtues or their political and constitutional positions. Both were good family men, well-educated and keen on literature and arts but fully devoid of the necessary abilities which make the skilful rulers of their countries. "Had James I or Charles I had the intelligence of Queen Elisabeth or the docility of Louis XIII," wrote Professor H. Trevor-

[30] *The Correspondence between Nicholas and Alexandra Romanov*, Moscow 1926-1927, Letters № 305 and 351.

[31] Ibid., Letters of 5 November; 4, 13 and 14 December 1916. № 623, 631, 639 and 640.

Roper, "the English Ancient Régime might have adapted itself to the new circumstances as peacefully in the seventeenth century as it would in the nineteenth."[32] This remark of the eminent British historian is utterly relevant in the case of Nicholas II, too. In the words of Paul Miljukov, a leader of the Kadets in Russian parliament, "Nicholas II, undoubtedly, was a honest person and a good family man, but he had an extremely weak nature. He did not prepare himself for ruling and disliked it when this burden was put on him."[33] Both monarchs were not men of strong will and therefore they fell under the vicious influence of their wives and favourites. They both could not bear opposition and criticism of their policy. But the main causes of all misfortunes were their negative positions on parliament and constitutional government. They deeply believed in the divine origin of their authority and did not wish to share it. It was their guilt or ill luck—it does not matter—but they were responsible for revolutions, civil wars and dictatorships in their countries. Only in 1701 did Britain establish the constitutional monarchy. As for Russia, it suffered a long period of totalitarianism until 1991 when the USSR and its Communist government finally crashed.

APPENDIX
Political and ideological parallels

Charles I	Nicholas II
"The most high and sacred Order of Kings is of Divine Right, being the ordinance of God himself" (The canons of 1640).	"The Emperor of Russia holds a supreme autocratic authority" (The fundamental laws of the Russian empire, 1906).
"Remember that parliaments are altogether in my own power for their calling, sitting, and dissolution; therefore as I find the fruits of them good or evil, they are to continue or not to be" (1626).	"I will never and by no means agree on the representative mode of rule because I consider it harmful for the people, trusted to me by God" (1905).
"Princes are not bound to give account of their actions, but to God alone" (1629). "No one of the Houses separately or together has the right to make or explain laws without my consent" (1628).	"My God, how they are slow in dissolving the Duma. When at last they will be forbidden to chatter" (1912).
"No distance of place, nor length of time, can make me slacken, much less diminish my love to you" (to Buckingham, 1627).	"I like to talk with him and after such a talk I always feel myself light and calm" (on Rasputin, 1911).
"We shall find honorable and just means to support our estate, vindicate our sovereignty, and preserve the authority which God hath put into our hands" (1629).	"I have no right to renounce what my ancestors left to me and what I should hand over to my son safely" (1906).

[32] H. Trevor-Roper, 'The General Crisis of the 17th Century,' in: *Past and Present* 1959, 60.
[33] P. Miljukov, *Vospominania* [Memoirs], Moscow 1991, 257.