

*To the memory of my friend and colleague Ernst Posner—
In appreciation of his penetrating observations about the ties between revolution and archives, and his encouragement of my own historical analyses of Soviet archival developments.*

Lenin's Archival Decree of 1918: The Bolshevik Legacy for Soviet Archival Theory and Practice

PATRICIA KENNEDY GRIMSTED

THE DECREE SIGNED BY LENIN on 1 June 1918 providing for the reorganization of archives under Bolshevik rule has attained a monumental status in the Soviet Union. Sooner or later every foreign archivist visiting the Soviet Union will hear about the Lenin decree. Sooner rather than later every Soviet archivist will learn about the decree in the course of his studies, just as he has been learning about its sponsor since childhood. There has hardly been a director of the Soviet Archival Administration who has not written on the subject. There has hardly been a decennial anniversary overlooked.² Western archivists accordingly have good reason to inquire about

the reality out of which this document emerged and its actual significance in terms of Soviet archival theory and practice. The decree itself indeed deserves further examination in terms of the politics of the period, in relationship to prerevolutionary Russian reform proposals, and in the broader context of European archival theory and practice.

Recently the literature has multiplied, because the 50th anniversary of the decree was celebrated in 1968. For that occasion several appropriate articles by Gennadi Arkadevich Belov, then the director general of the Main Archival Administration, were published.³ The same anniversary was marked by a series

¹An earlier version of this paper was presented at the national conference of the Society of American Archivists, 2 October 1980, in Cincinnati, Ohio.

²For example, V. Maksakov, "Na poroge novogo desiatiletia," *Arkhivnoe delo* 15 (1928): 3-9, and the lead article in the 1938 dedicatory issue, "20 let arkhivnogo stroitel'stva," *Arkhivnoe delo*, 1938, no. 3 (47), pp. 1-19, with a facsimile of the text of Lenin's decree as a frontispiece.

³G.A. Belov, "50-letie sovetskogo arkhivnogo dela," *Sovetskie arkhivy*, 1968, no. 3, pp. 3-8; "Piatidesiatiletie sovetskikh arkhivov (1918-1968 gg.)," in *Problemy arkhivovedeniia i istorii arkhivnykh uchrezhdenii. Materialy iubileinoi nauchnoi konferentsii arkhivistov Leningrada, 13-14 iunia 1968 g.* (Leningrad, 1970), pp. 5-18.

The author is an Associate of the Ukrainian Research Institute and a Fellow of the Russian Research Center at Harvard University. She is currently directing a project funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities to provide a directory, bibliography, and study of development of archival and manuscript collections throughout the Soviet Union. NEH support in the preparation of this article is gratefully acknowledged.

of other laudatory articles,⁴ by dedicatory issues of Soviet archival journals,⁵ by a commemorative edition of the decree itself together with some samples of subsequent Soviet archival legislation,⁶ and by an analysis of the Lenin decree in the context of early Soviet archival development, written by Sigurd Ottovich Shmidt, the head of the Archeographic Commission of the Academy of Sciences.⁷ The 60th anniversary was feted with another round of anniversary articles, including one by the current director general of the Soviet Archival Administration, Filip Ivanovich Dolgikh,⁸ and a series of reports from an anniversary colloquium, which included a further brief analysis by S. O. Shmidt of the genesis of archival reform in 1918.⁹

Theory and practice in the Soviet Union are intricately related, to the extent that even practical archival developments are often presented in a theoretical context with references to Lenin that are meshed with elements of strong idolatry and hero worship. It is no surprise in the Soviet Union to find constant, obsequious citations of Lenin, yet in many cases citations are made with much less direct and significant documentation. For in the Soviet archival realm, Lenin affixed his signature

in 1918 to a decree that has every right to be cited as the most significant in terms of Soviet archival legislation. When archivists look for a theoretical basis for their work in Marxism-Leninism, they can find Lenin's basic text on archives. When they look to Marxism-Leninism in practice, they can find specific provisions well spelled out in a decree bearing Lenin's signature. Hence, for archival development, the mythical component that raises a Lenin pronouncement to the level of ideological imperative contributes to and promotes practical achievements. Not only do archivists have every reason to cite Lenin, they can turn to Lenin's pronouncements as further incentive for pursuing and continuing the precepts of the revolutionary decree. The archival decree of 1918 thus provides at the same time both a theoretical framework and a justification for actual developments in the archival realm throughout the Soviet world.

On first examination, the decree of 1 June 1918 appears to be a basically practical document. Yet on further reflection, the theoretical implications are strong and are readily apparent in the main provisions. First, and perhaps most significant, is the provision for the nationalization of all documentary

⁴For example, K.G. Mitiaev, "Leninskii dekret 1 iunია 1918 goda i sovetskoe arkhivovedenie," *Sovetskie arkhivy*, 1968, no. 3, pp. 9-15. I.V. Kuteiniakov, "K 50-letiiu arkhivnogo dela v SSSR," *Voprosy istorii KPSS*, 1968, no. 6, pp. 150-52; L. M. Landa, "Po dekretu V.I. Lenina. (K 50-letiiu arkhivnogo dela v SSSR)," *Obshchestvennyi nauki v Uzbekistane* (Tashkent), 1968, no. 7, pp. 51-54; M.I. Naidel', "50 let sovetskogo arkhivnogo stroitel'stva," *Arkhivy Azerbaidzhana*, 1969, no. 2(8), pp. 14-20. Similar articles were published in Armenian in the Armenian archival journal, *Vestnik arkhivov Armenii* (Erevan), 1968, no. 2(20), pp. 5-8, and in Georgian in the Georgian archival journal, *Nauchno-Informatsionnyi biulleten'* (Tbilisi), no. 17/18 (1969), pp. 8-21 (the available Russian-language titles are cited for the last two items).

⁵For example, *Sovetskie arkhivy*, 1968, no. 3; *Arkhivy Ukrainy*, 1968, no. 3.

⁶*K 50-letiiu sovetskogo arkhivnogo dela. Osnovnye postanovleniia Sovetskogo pravitel'stva* (Moscow, 1968; GAU pri SM SSSR).

⁷S.O. Shmidt, "K istorii arkhivnogo stroitel'stva v pervye gody Sovetskoi vlasti," in *Problemy arkhivovedeniia i istorii arkhivnykh uchrezhdenii*, pp. 19-35.

⁸F.I. Dolgikh, "Istoricheskoe znachenie leninskogo dekreta," *Sovetskie arkhivy*, 1979, no. 1, pp. 3-8. See also *Sovetskie arkhivy*, 1978, no. 2, pp. 5-38.

⁹"Tikhomirovskoe chteniia 1978 goda," in *Arkheograficheskii ezhegodnik za 1978 god* (Moscow/Leningrad, 1980), pp. 122-26. See especially the opening article by S.O. Shmidt, "Vstupitel'noe slovo," pp. 122-26.

records of government institutions. State proprietorship over all archives is extended through the conception and introduction of the legal entity the Single State Archival Fond (Edinyi gosudarstvennyi arkhivnyi fond). A corollary to this provision is the abolition of all independent agency archives, for all institutions and agencies dissolved or abolished by the revolutions of 1917—that is to say all historical records predating the revolution. The provisions were to apply as well to the records of current or future ongoing institutions. Records management is to be carefully coordinated with traditional archival functions, with provisions clearly stated that all closed files were eventually to be transferred to the State Archival Fond. Ongoing agencies are permitted to retain their records only as needed in the conduct of their business according to schedules to be specified in subsequent legislation. Furthermore, and of particular importance, the unauthorized destruction of any records or even individual documents is forbidden.

Second, the decree calls for the establishment of a central administrative agency with supreme legal as well as administrative authority over archival matters and over state records themselves, even those remaining in the hands of their creating agencies. This archival agency is to be immediately entrusted with the right of decision in matters archivists today might speak of as “appraisal”—that is to say any agency has to seek written permission from the Archival Administration for the destruction of records or individual documents. The Archival Administration is designated to be under the administrative authority of the Commissariat of

Enlightenment (later, the Ministry of Education); the appointment of its director requires the approval of central government authorities as well. And that individual, while a member of the governing administration of the Commissariat, also has the right of direct report to the central government.

Third—and largely through the implementation of the first two aspects—the decree calls for the complete centralization of archival records through the organization of archival institutions, the better scientific utilization of records, and their ultimate preservation, once they are appropriated by central authorities.

These provisions are presented only in the barest outline in the 1918 decree, but a series of later decrees spells out various provisions in greater detail. Specific measures have been subsequently amended, and the provisions have been subsequently expanded, but the basic three aspects have been retained as hallmarks of the Soviet archival system. For example, the Single State Archival Fond was modified in name to simply the State Archival Fond. Independent “State Archival Fonds” were established and organized for each separate union republic of the USSR, following the organization of the union structure in the early 1920s and following the annexation of additional nations—such as the Baltic republics at the beginning of the Second World War.¹⁰

The State Archival Fond has been greatly expanded beyond basic government records to include all types of manuscript treasures and miscellaneous archival materials. For example, in 1919 control was extended to military records of World War I, provincial government

¹⁰For narrative details about Soviet archival developments to the Second World War, see V.V. Maksakov, *Istoriia i organizatsiia arkhivnogo dela v SSSR, 1917–1945* (Moscow, 1969). See also the brief English-language survey in my chapter, “The Development and Organization of Archives since 1917,” in *Archives and Manuscript Repositories in the USSR: Moscow and Leningrad* (Princeton, 1972), pp. 23–60. For text of archival decrees to 1941, see *Sbornik rukovodiashchikh materialov po arkhivnomu delu (1917—iun’ 1941 gg.)* (Moscow, 1961; GAU/MGIAI).

records, papers of deceased scientific and cultural figures in libraries and museums, and to records of trade unions and cooperatives.¹¹ In subsequent years control extended to records of religious institutions, business records, and broader categories of personal papers, as well as films and photographic documentation. Refinements in the concept and specifications have continued.¹²

The archival administrative agency has also been reorganized, its place in the bureaucratic hierarchy changed, and its functions greatly enlarged and specified. In 1922 the archival agency was shifted from the Ministry of Education (then still the People's Commissariat) to a position directly subordinate to the Central Executive Committee of the Russian Federation. In 1929 it was reorganized to be directly subordinate to the Central Executive Committee of the USSR. In 1938 it was subordinated to the People's Commissariat (later Ministry) of Internal Affairs (NKVD, later MVD), which meant close bureaucratic ties with the secret police. In 1961 it was again shifted to independent executive status as a separate agency under the Council of Ministers.¹³ Its functions and powers were likewise shifted, but today it retains vast control over all aspects of archival affairs, including organization and control of records within ongoing state agencies, as

well as control over state records, publication guidelines, documentary publications, cataloging, and finding aids. It even assists with the running of archival training programs, the archival education institute, and an all-union research institute for archival affairs.

The provisions for archival institutions to house the collected documentary legacy were not spelled out in the initial 1918 decree but rather were worked out in the course of succeeding years. Initially organized as subject-oriented sections of the Single State Archival Fond, the Soviet state archival institutions as we know their organization today gradually evolved into distinct archives for specific categories of documentation.¹⁴ Likewise, developments took place in the realm of provisions for documentary publication efforts, fulfilling the Leninist call for the scientific utilization of archival materials. And parallel provisions evolved in other aspects of archival administration and records management in ongoing agencies of government and society.

The actual decree of June 1918 appears as only one in a series of regulations for archival affairs in the newly created Bolshevik regime. To be sure, much of its subsequent importance stems from the fact that it was signed by Lenin himself. It is impossible, however, to dismiss the later attention given to the decree—as some observers might be pre-

¹¹See the additional archival decrees signed by Lenin on 27 March 1919, 31 March 1919, and 29 July 1919, included in *K 50-letiiu sovetskogo arkhivnogo dela*, pp. 13–20. Other related documents are reprinted in *Sovetskie arkhivy*, 1978, no. 2, pp. 6–14.

¹²The most recent comprehensive decree detailing the legal components of the State Archival Fond, "Polozhenie o gosudarstvennom arkhivnom fonde Soiuza SSR," dated 13 August 1958, is included in the collection *K 50-letiiu sovetskogo arkhivnogo dela*, pp. 26–41. See also the historical survey by G.A. Dremina, "Osnovnye periody organizatsii Gosudarstvennogo arkhivnogo fonda SSSR (1918–1970 gg.)," in *Trudy Moskovskogo gosudarstvennogo istoriko-arkhivnogo instituta* 29(1972): 9–30.

¹³See "Polozhenie o Glavnom arkhivnom upravlenii pri Sovete ministrov SSSR," 28 July 1961, in *K 50-letiiu sovetskogo arkhivnogo dela*, pp. 42–48.

¹⁴See Dremina, "Osnovnye periody," pp. 11–13, and more details in the description by Maksakov, *Istoriia i organizatsiia arkhivnogo dela v SSSR, 1917–1945*, pp. 64–69, as well as the summary by V.I. Vialikov, "Arkhnovoe stroitel'stvo v RSFSR v 1917–1925 godakh," *Sovetskie arkhivy*, 1968, no. 1, pp. 30–38, and in his monograph, *Arkhnovoe stroitel'stvo v SSSR (1917–1945). Uchebnoe posobie* (Moscow, 1976).

pared to do—as simple evidence of hero worship. It may have been only one brief step in a long-term process, but it was clearly the first official step and is more important in retrospect than its provisions were at the time.

Indeed it was the first step in a revolutionary archival process that has now transformed the documentary legacy not only in Soviet Russia itself and the non-Russian union republics of the Soviet Union, but also in the “fraternal republics” of the entire East European Communist bloc as well. The same principles and patterns have been used to reorganize the archival legacy and administrative practices in East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, and to a large extent Yugoslavia. The Lenin archival legacy is seen as well as the cornerstone of archival organization and current administrative practice in the People's Republic of China.¹⁵

The June 1918 decree gains its importance not only from its practical steps in providing for complete nationalization and state control over documentation, a state agency for the administration of archival affairs, and the principle of centralization applied to the management of the national documentary legacy. The

decree gains theoretical significance as its provisions are closely meshed with the basic tenets of Marxist-Leninist ideology.

Clearly, the Bolshevik Revolution that overthrew the earlier provisional revolutionary regime in Russia in 1917 had as great an impact in the archival realm as it did on most other aspects of the economy, society, and culture of the Russian world. As I have suggested in more detail elsewhere,

The establishment of Bolshevik power stands as the single most important turning-point in the history and organization of Russian-area archives, for it brought to Russia the most highly centralized state archival system and the most highly state-directed principles of preservation and management of documentary record which the world had seen.¹⁶

The Bolshevik action, it is worth pointing out, was taken 15 years before the much less extensive National Archives Act in the United States.¹⁷ The extent to which my appraisal has been quoted in subsequent Soviet archival publications gives added authority to this interpretation.¹⁸ However, Soviet writers pay much less attention to what Western commentators would be more prone to

¹⁵This point is based on my tour of archives in the People's Republic of China with the Society of American Archivists (April–May 1982), numerous presentations to our group by leading Chinese archivists, and my own interviews with archivists there. See the report by William Moss in this issue of the *American Archivist*, pp. 385–409.

¹⁶*Archives and Manuscript Repositories in the USSR: Moscow and Leningrad*, p. 23. See also my earlier article, “Archives in the Soviet Union: Their Organization and the Problem of Access,” *American Archivist* 34 (January 1971): 27–31. These publications cite additional English-language analyses as well as relevant Russian-language publications.

¹⁷On the establishment of the U.S. National Archives, see the initial chapter by Donald R. McCoy, *The National Archives: America's Ministry of Documents, 1934–1968* (Chapel Hill, 1978), pp. 3–12. The National Archives Act, passed by Congress in 1934, appears as *U.S. Statutes at Large* 48:1112–24.

¹⁸My own appraisals have been quoted by Soviet archivists in several instances. Most recently, the exact lines quoted above have been cited in connection with the Lenin decree by Iu. M. Grossman and V.N. Kutyk, *Spravochnik nauchnogo rabotnika: Arkhivy, dokumenty, issledovatel'* (Lviv, 1979), p. 29, in their historical introduction to a new general directory of archives and manuscript repositories in the USSR; curiously, my interpretation of the effect of the Bolshevik Revolution on archives is the only page of my own general directory to be mentioned in theirs. My similar interpretation of the revolutionary Soviet archival developments was cited in a two-paragraph quotation from my article, “Regional Archival Development in the USSR: Soviet Standards and National Documentary Legacies,” *American Archivist* 36 (January 1973): 44–45, by the Director-General of the Ukrainian Archival Administration, O.H. Mitiukov, *Radians'ke arkhivne budivnytstvo na Ukraini, 1917–1973* (Kiev, 1975), pp. 4–5.

recognize as the ideological and political implications of archival centralization and control.

As ideological underpinning for the new Soviet regime, Marxism-Leninism gave both philosophical justification and crucial political importance to documentary control. The combination of historical determinism as philosophical background and ideological orthodoxy as reinforcement for centralized, rigorous political control gave unprecedented importance to the national documentary legacy. If the ideologically orthodox were the only ones to write history, then the sources on which that historical writing was to be based must be carefully controlled by ideologically orthodox authorities. Is it little wonder then that a comprehensive archival system would be a prime necessity for the new revolutionary regime?

Yet Lenin's imperative for state appropriation, nationalization, and preservation of the national archival legacy would not have been the only alternative open to the new Bolshevik regime. Bakunin, in an alternate, anarchist—but still communist—tradition, had several decades earlier suggested that revolutionaries should destroy all historical records of the previous regime as part of a total annihilation of the past.¹⁹ History is replete with examples of instances where destruction rather than preservation and state control has been undertaken for reasons of political expediency. In Russia itself in the early days of the revolution, there were numerous examples of destruction of archives, such as those in the Petrograd

Police Department and Circuit Court. A prominent Russian historian, A. E. Presniakov, noted the prevalence of Bakunin's attitude among many revolutionary authorities at the time:

Far more dangerous, however, to the safety of the archival treasures than such isolated outbreaks, has been the fact that the new authorities viewed these treasures with absolute indifference or even suspicious prejudice. In their view, the governmental archives appeared as the repositories of the hateful traditions of the old political and social order, which therefore did not deserve to be saved from destruction; nay, more, they should really be done away with, in so far as they were liable to serve as a documentary basis in case of a reactionary restoration.

Presniakov further explains the serious disruptive effects of the revolutionary period on the nation's archival legacy and the extensive transport of archival materials to pulp mills in the face of the serious paper shortage in the immediate postrevolutionary years.²⁰

In contrast to such tendencies the new Bolshevik government decreed the necessity of retaining, preserving, and controlling of archival documentation. Thus the decree signed by Lenin called for the total appropriation and nationalization of historical records, provided the basis for the extension of state control to all of the records of both the prerevolutionary regime and the newly created Bolshevik institutions, and affirmed the need for the systematic retention of archives under a coordinated and

¹⁹*The Confessions of Mikhail Bakunin*, Robert C. Howes, trans.; Lawrence D. Orton, ed. (Ithaca, 1977), pp. 110–11. In his "confession" to Emperor Nicholas I in 1851, Bakunin was explaining his plans for "a decisive, radical revolution in Bohemia" in 1848.

²⁰A.E. Presniakov, "Historical Research in Russia during the Revolutionary Crisis," *American Historical Review* 28 (January 1923): 249. In a longer Russian-language article, Presniakov had earlier covered these same points in somewhat more detail: "Reforma arkhivnogo dela," *Russkii istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1918, no. 5, pp. 205–22. The description of archival destruction in Petrograd and the quoted passages are found on pp. 206–08.

highly centralized administrative system. Lenin's reasoning in calling for preservation rather than destruction has never been adequately explained and still needs further consideration. Certainly, it is in keeping with his personal scholarly concerns, as revealed in the careful documentation used in his own writings.

Not enough details are available about the actual composition of the decree itself and the immediate advisors who might have been most closely involved in its final formulation. No information is available, nor has there been any mention of a manuscript draft or other handwritten version in any Soviet archives.²¹ In his article published in 1919, Presniakov describes the decree in laudatory terms as a product of the Council of People's Commissars, without any mention of Lenin. Presniakov's account details the concern among historians and other intellectuals for archival reform already under the Provisional Government. Under the direction of the noted historian A. S. Lappo-Danilevskii a "Union of Archival Specialists" (Soiuz arkhivnykh deiatelei) was formed in March 1917 and drew up plans for archival reform and centralization. They met with some success in working out organizational plans and bringing together a conference in

December 1917 under the auspices of the Academy of Sciences and the Russian Historical Society, but further revolutionary momentum following the October Revolution saw archival efforts take a more radical turn.²²

In his account written that year, Presniakov gives most credit for initial archival reform to the energetic efforts of D. B. Riazanov (Goldenbach), the energetic Marxist historian, and "one of the most prominent revolutionary leaders," who had worked extensively in Western European archives in connection with his edition of the posthumous publicistic works of Marx and Engels.²³ Riazanov headed the Committee for Archival Administration, organized in April 1918, which assumed an important role in planning the reform and, it would appear, in drawing up many of the details included in the June decree. The most detailed studies of the work of this committee emphasize its prime role in drafting the reform, and the participation of many prominent political and intellectual leaders in preparing for the June decree.²⁴ After the June decree, Riazanov became the first director of the Main Archival Administration.²⁵

Practical and university-level training programs for archivists, instituted already in 1918 both in Petrograd and

²¹The decree is included in the exhaustively edited collection *Dekrety Sovetskoi vlasti*, vol. 2: 17 marta—10 iulia 1918 g. (Moscow, 1959), prepared by the Institute of Marxism-Leninism and the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR.

²²Presniakov, "Reforma arkhivnogo dela," pp. 209–10. See also V. V. Maksakov, *Arkhivnoe delo v pervye gody Sovetskoi vlasti* (Moscow, 1959), pp. 17–21.

²³Details of the 1918 developments are presented in Presniakov's article, "Reforma arkhivnogo dela," pp. 210–22, and in the article by A. S. Nikolaev, "Glavnoe upravlenie arkhivnym delom (aprel'-oktiabr' 1918 goda)," *Istoricheskii arkhiv*, 1918, no. 1, pp. 1–64. Nikolaev also credits Riazanov with the 1918 leadership (pp. 5–8). Riazanov, a leading Bolshevik theorist, later founded and directed the Institute of Marxism-Leninism until 1930. He was expelled from the Party in 1931 and disappeared in the purges. Together these articles all provide considerable details about the individuals who were active in the early archival efforts after the Revolution.

²⁴See Maksakov's later account of the work of the committee based on some of its records, *Arkhivnoe delo v pervye gody Sovetskoi vlasti*, especially pp. 21–41. S. O. Shmidt refers to additional archival sources and discusses preparatory steps in the spring, "Vstupitel'noe slovo," pp. 122–26.

²⁵For a more recent comment on these developments, see the 1968 article by S. O. Shmidt, "K istorii arkhivnogo stroitel'stva," especially pp. 19–29. Shmidt places considerably more emphasis on Lenin's role than any of the contemporary accounts. He mentions Riazanov only in passing with no suggestion of his important role. However, in his 1978 article, Shmidt gives Riazanov and others more credit—"Vstupitel'noe slovo," pp. 122–26.

Moscow, represented another decisive step in the direction of comprehensive archival reform. Archival training had started in 1877 at the St. Petersburg Archaeological Institute, and it was there that the program was centered when it was refurbished in 1918. The Moscow counterpart also had prerevolutionary roots, in a program started there in 1907. A 1920 publication of some of the program lectures gives considerable insight on the ideas, plans, and procedures about archival affairs that were current at the time among leading historians and archivists.²⁶ The historian A. S. Nikolaev headed the Petrograd program and was involved in the first issue of a professional archival journal, organized and published by the Main Archival Administration in 1919. Nikolaev's own article on the transformation and organization of the Main Archival Administration well demonstrates the extent to which the principles in the Lenin decree were immediately put into practice.²⁷

The June 1918 decree itself was countersigned—as were subsequent ones in 1919 and 1920—by Lenin's secretary and friend, V. D. Bonch-Bruevich, as representative of the Council of People's

Commissars (Sovnarkom). Bonch-Bruevich was one of Lenin's closest personal advisors and at the request of Lenin prepared a widely-circulated, popularized brochure calling upon the country to protect and preserve its archives.²⁸ In a short, undated memoir, apparently written in the late 1940s, and published with his collected writings in 1963, Bonch-Bruevich recalls a conversation with Lenin "three nights after the Great October Socialist Revolution," in which he claims Lenin expressed his concern that all original manuscripts of literary classics be gathered and preserved (so they could be published in uncensored versions). According to this later account, Lenin went further in the conversation to suggest the necessity of gathering and protecting all of the nation's cultural and archival legacy. Bonch-Bruevich was requested to prepare the brochure, which was in 50,000 copies after having been summarized in various newspapers and periodicals.²⁹ Apart from this popularized appeal, however, there is no evidence of Bonch-Bruevich's activities in actual archival administration and there are no other examples of his writings on archival subjects.³⁰

²⁶*Arkhivnye kursy. Lektsii, chitannye v 1918 godu*, 3 vols. (Petrograd, 1920). Presniakov gives some details about the program and lists the major historians involved together with the subjects taught, "Reforma arkhivnogo dela," pp. 219–21.

²⁷A. S. Nikolaev, "Glavnoe upravlenie arkhivnym delom," pp. 1–64. A chronicle of archival developments appeared as part of this volume, "Letopis' arkhivnoi zhizni," pp. 437–515. The Lenin decree occupied the opening two pages. Only one large number of this journal appeared, but a professional journal was again started in 1923, *Arkhivnoe delo*.

²⁸Vladimir Bonch-Bruevich, *Sokhraniate arkhivy* (Moscow, 1920; facsimile reprint by University Microfilms). A somewhat fuller version is printed in the collected works of V. D. Bonch-Bruevich, *Izbrannye sochineniia*, 3 vols. (Moscow, 1961–63), edited by N. A. Smirnov et al, vol. 3: *Vospominaniia o V. I. Lenine 1917–1924 gg.*, pp. 32–35. The editor indicates in a note (p. 439) that the brochure was first presented in "Agit-Rosta," 12 October 1919, no. 97.

²⁹"Kak byla napisana broshura, 'Sokhraniate arkhivy,'" in *Izbrannye sochineniia*, 3: 336–38. The supposition of the late 1940s as composition date comes from the reference to "already 30 years of Party rule" in the last paragraph.

³⁰In his 1968 article Shmidt places a high importance on the role of Bonch-Bruevich in his account of early archival developments, "K istorii arkhivnogo stroitel'stva," pp. 21–22, but Bonch-Bruevich's single brochure and later memoir on the subject are the only reference to archival affairs in his published writings. In his later 1978 pronouncements, Shmidt hardly mentions Bonch-Bruevich, and appropriately puts more emphasis on the contributions of others in the months prior to June 1918: "Vstupitel'noe slovo," pp. 122–26.

The archival role of a number of other leading intellectuals deserves further study. The noted historian S. F. Platonov became director of the Archival Administration when Riazanov left to organize the Socialist Academy, and later the Marx-Engels Institute. The Marxist historian and political leader M.N. Pokrovskii headed the early organizational work of archives in Moscow.³¹ As a leading official of the Commissariat of Education, Pokrovskii was one of the most highly placed political and cultural leaders closely involved in early archival organization and early documentary publications. His own scholarly attainments contributed to his archival concerns, which were apparent on an official level already in April 1918.³² He became the director of the Archival Administration along with his many other posts in 1921. Pokrovskii's lecture "On the Political Significance of Archives" presented at the opening of the 1924 archival course in Moscow emphasizes the importance of archival preservation and control.³³

In the course of the early 1920s, V. V. Maksakov came to the fore as one of the most important archivists of the period. His early summary of developments to 1924 was published in the journal of the

Main Archival Administration, which had been revived in 1923 under the title *Arkhivnoe delo*.³⁴ Maksakov's later history of the early period gives many factual details regarding the archival reform and outlines bureaucratic developments but provides relatively little sense of the intellectual background.³⁵

The political and intellectual background of the system envisaged by Lenin still merits further exploration. Even the most detailed Soviet accounts of the early Soviet archival developments ignore the intellectual roots and fail to point out the theoretical implications of the development. To some extent, the origins of the early Bolshevik archival development can be sought in certain Russian reform projects proposed and even developed before 1917. Most significant and far-reaching in terms of affirming state responsibility for historical documentation and the need for a centralized historical archives were the published reform plans of D. Ia. Samokvasov, director of the prerevolutionary Moscow Archive of the Ministry of Justice.³⁶

Traditions for the careful retention of official state documentation can be found throughout the Russian lands in

³¹Presniakov's 1923 American-published article summarizes and updates the details presented in his earlier Russian publication; see "Historical Research in Russia," pp. 249–50, 252–53.

³²See, for example, Pokrovskii's letter to S.P. Mel'gunov dated 16 April 1918: "Pis'mo M.N. Pokrovskogo k S.P. Mel'gunovu," *Sovetskie arkhivy*, 1968, no. 3, pp. 53–54.

³³M.N. Pokrovskii, "Politicheskoe znachenie arkhivov," *Arkhivnoe delo* 2 (1925): 1–7. See also his 1925 speeches, "Arkhivnoe delo v raboche-krest'ianskom gosudarstve," *Arkhivnoe delo* 3/4 (1925): 1–10. For a general appraisal of Pokrovskii's activity in the historical realm, along with other aspects of his career, see George M. Enteen, *The Soviet Scholar-Bureaucrat: M.N. Pokrovskii and the Society of Marxist Historians* (University Park, PA, 1978).

³⁴V. Maksakov, "Nekotorye itogi, 1918–1924," *Arkhivnoe delo* 3/4 (1925): 11–33.

³⁵The short monograph *Arkhivnoe delo v pervye gody Sovetskoi vlasti* (Moscow, 1959) was for the most part included in his posthumously published *Istoriia i organizatsiia arkhivnogo dela v SSSR, 1917–1945* (Moscow, 1969).

³⁶For a summary of reform proposals, see D. Ia. Samokvasov, *Arkhivnoe delo v Rossii*, 2 vols. (Moscow, 1902), vol. 1, pp. 95–114, and appendix, pp. 11–15, 23–27. Samokvasov's own proposal was published separately as *Proekt arkhivnoi reformy i sovremennoe sostoiianie okonchatel'nykh arkhivov v Rossii* (Moscow, 1902). See also the influential essay by another important 19th-century Russian archival director, N.V. Kalachov, "Arkhivy, ikh gosudarstvennoe znachenie, sostav i ustroistvo," in *Sbornik gosudarstvennykh znaniy* 4 (1877): 181–219. Kalachov surveys developments in Russia in comparison with Western Europe and presses the need for more extensive archival establishments in the Russian Empire.

early centuries.³⁷ A recent scholarly reconstruction of the Muscovite state archives in the sixteenth century provides more information about early recordkeeping practices.³⁸ However, compared to archival practices in the neighboring lands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Swedish Empire, recordkeeping and archival development in Muscovy remained much less sophisticated, reflecting the general power level of bureaucratic development. Such deficiencies were clearly recognized in the reform plans of Peter I in the early 18th century.

Indeed, intellectual roots for post-1917 development can be traced back as far as certain far-reaching but unfulfilled reform plans of Peter I, and most particularly to his archival reform statute of 1720, which emphasized the need for the systematic and centralized state preservation of historical records.³⁹ Peter himself had looked to Sweden for many of his administrative reforms, and further study might yield a Swedish connection with his archival reform.⁴⁰ Sweden had organized a National Archives already in the 17th century, which had a profound effect on

recordkeeping practices as well as on archives themselves. Swedish archival influences were strong in the Swedish-ruled Baltic provinces of Estland, Livland, and Ingria, which Peter annexed in the course of his successful Great Northern War.⁴¹

Other precedents and influences can be found in archival developments on the European continent during the 19th century. In the late 18th century significant archival innovations were introduced during the French Revolution, when a similarly historically conscious—and self-conscious—government, imposed by revolutionary means, sought to preserve the records of its own predecessors as well as the records of its own achievements. Ernst Posner pointed out three major effects of French revolutionary legislation in the archival realm: establishment of “the framework of nationwide public archives administration,” state acknowledgement of “its responsibility respecting the care of the documentary heritage of the past,” and “the principle of the accessibility of archives to the public.”⁴² Of these, the first two were likewise central in the Lenin decree. The patterns

³⁷See for example the detailed study by the late L.V. Cherepnin, *Russkie feodal'nye arkhivy XIV-XV vekov*, 2 vols. (Moscow/Leningrad, 1948–51).

³⁸See the 3-volume study by the late A.A. Zimin, *Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossii XVI stoletia. Opyt rekonstruktsii* (Moscow, 1978).

³⁹The text of Peter's archival regulations, which were issued as part of his *General'nyi reglament* of 1720, is printed in many places. It is reprinted in the important collection of prerevolutionary archival regulations, *Sbornik materialov, otnosiashchikhsia do arkhivnie chasti v Rosii*, 2 vols. (Petrograd, 1916–17), vol. 1, pp. 76–77.

⁴⁰The impressive recent study by the Swedish historian Claes Peterson documents the extent of Swedish influence on Peter's reforms: *Peter the Great's Administrative and Judicial Reforms: Swedish Antecedents and the Process of Reception*, Michael Metcalf, trans. (Stockholm, 1979). However, as Peterson mentions, further study is required for a full analysis of the *General'nyi reglament* of 1720 (p. 118); Peterson suggests its strong Swedish precedents, but does not mention the archival provisions specifically.

⁴¹More details about 17th-century archival developments in the Baltic provinces—with references to contemporary archival developments in Sweden—will be found in my directory of Soviet Baltic archives, *Archives and Manuscript Repositories in the USSR: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Belorussia* (Princeton, 1981), especially pp. 44–50, and pp. 167–70.

⁴²Ernst Posner, “Some Aspects of Archival Development since the French Revolution,” in *Archives and the Public Interest: Selected Essays by Ernst Posner*, Ken Munden, ed. (Washington, D.C., 1967), pp. 25–26 (originally published in *American Archivist*, July 1940).

developed in France during the revolutionary and Napoleonic era had spread well beyond French frontiers across Europe in the 19th century.⁴³ And the historical consciousness and romantic strains of nationalism of the early 19th century had had ramifications and direct bearings on the increasing historical scholarship of the period. The later concerns of German historicism and the search for history as "what actually happened in the past" led to more interest in archives and more diligent scrutiny of documents.

Western European influence was strong in the Russian Empire at the end of the 18th century, and under Catherine II some important steps were taken to improve Russian historical archives. Further plans for improvement were under way in the early 19th century. The extent to which archival leaders after 1917 were looking back and looking abroad was revealed in a 1918 discussion of the early 19th-century archival reform plan for the Russian Empire that had been proposed by Baron Gustav Rozenkamp. The plan was discussed by A.N. Makarov in a session of the December 1918 conference of the Union of Archival Specialists in Petrograd. A lengthy article setting forth the unrealized plan in the context of Western European archival development was published in the first and only issue of the initial Soviet archival journal, *Istoricheskii arkhiv* (Historical Archives).⁴⁴

Another session in the same conference was devoted to M. A. Polievktov's discussion of "Western Archival Law as Material for the Organization of Archival Affairs in Russia."⁴⁵ The French example was very much in the minds of the Russian historians planning their archival development, as was apparent from the additional lengthy session in the same conference devoted to Ek. Lappa-Starzhenetskaia's presentation of the paper "French Archives in Past and Present Perspective," which was also published in the journal.⁴⁶

Whatever may have been the prerevolutionary or Western influences, however, the move toward archival nationalization, centralization, and political and ideological control went much further in the Soviet Union than it ever had in prerevolutionary Russia, in France, or in other continental nations before the 20th century. The forms and their ideological tenets were more sweeping and revolutionary as nationalization and state control over archives became basic dogma in the new Soviet regime.

Nevertheless, Soviet studies with their laudatory tributes to the 1918 decree often fail to emphasize the strong elements of continuity as well as change between the archival systems of Imperial Russia and those of the Soviet Union. Had there not been this continuity, we would not enjoy the diversity and extent of prerevolutionary historical records that survive. And those we owe to traditions of recordkeeping in Muscovite

⁴³Posner discusses the spread of these principles through Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries, "Some Aspects," pp. 26–30; see also his article "Impressions of an Itinerant Archivist in Europe," in the same collection, pp. 78–86. Unfortunately, Posner died before completing his planned history of modern European archives.

⁴⁴A. Markov, "Proekt arkhivnoi reformy bar. G.A. Rozenkampfa (1820 g.)," *Istoricheskii arkhiv*, 1919, no. 1, pp. 101–42.

⁴⁵Polievktov's report, "Zapadno-evropeiskoe arkhivnoe zakonodatel'stvo, kak material dlia ustroeniia arkhivnogo dela v Rossii," was mentioned in *Istoricheskii arkhiv*, 1919, no. 1, p. 520, but was never published.

⁴⁶Ek. Lappa-Starzhenetskaia, "Frantsuzskie arkhivy v ikh proshlom i nastoiashchem," *Istoricheskii arkhiv*, 1919, no. 1, pp. 143–89.

Russia, to the bureaucratic reforms of Peter I, and to archival developments in the 18th and 19th centuries. Most especially the movement for archival centralization in the late 19th century was well known to some of the historians who surrounded Lenin and took over the direction of archival efforts in the early years of Soviet power.

There was even much institutional continuity in archival and manuscript repositories and even in certain elements of overall organization, despite the revolutionary innovations in centralization and modernization of management and control techniques. It is not surprising that in the early 1920s many of the early storage areas for the newly centralized state archival administration were structured around existing archives, and that vast quantities of records remained in buildings where they had been stored before the Revolution. A nation so deep in a state of economic and social crisis as existed during the years of revolution and civil war had little choice but to retain what it could from the past. And because a cardinal principle of Soviet archival theory was the preservation of records in their original organization and arrangement from their creating agencies, it is not surprising that many of the restructured archives preserved to the maximum possible extent their original internal arrangement.⁴⁷

Thus protected by the new forms and revolutionary new principles and ad-

ministrative practices, many records remained stored where they had been for centuries and in the same order in which they had been formed. Even today, more than 60 years later, the central executive offices of the Main Archival Administration in Moscow remain in the building constructed in the 1880s to house the Moscow Archive of the Ministry of Justice, which in its day had been the best established, most comprehensive, and most reform-oriented historical archive in the Russian Empire.⁴⁸

Further study will illuminate more fully the details, intellectual roots, and political ramifications of the Lenin archival reform. The present essay can only serve to indicate some of the important issues involved. Soviet archivists have good reason to point to the 1918 decree as the cornerstone of the Soviet archival system, and they have reason to take pride in its revolutionary conceptual and practical innovations. Western archivists in turn have good reason to examine Soviet developments as they try to assess the strengths and limitations of their own less centralized and less comprehensive systems. Archives may well be perceived as a mirror of a society as well as a mirror of the past. In refractions from that mirror archivists may find good cause to consider the theory and practice of Soviet archival development as it relates to and reflects the society and ideology out of which it emerged.

⁴⁷See more details and citations to relevant literature in the historical introduction to my *Archives and Manuscript Repositories in the USSR: Moscow and Leningrad*, especially pp. 35–52, and in the articles by Presniakov, Nikolaev, and Maksakov cited above.

⁴⁸The development of this archive is mentioned briefly in my own historical survey, *Archives and Manuscript Repositories in the USSR: Moscow and Leningrad*, pp. 11–12. For a description of that archive in the late 19th century, see its published guide, *Pamiatnaia knizhka Moskovskogo arkhiva Ministerstva iustitsii* (Moscow, 1890), and a briefer French-language review, "Les archives de l'Empire russe à Moscou," *Revue historique* 44 (1890): 56–68.

Протокол заседания комиссии № 4

ДЕКРЕТ

пухляк / кн

О РЕОРГАНИЗАЦИИ И ЦЕНТРАЛИЗАЦИИ АРХИВНОГО ДЕЛА
в

Российской Социалистической Федеративной Советской Республики.

1/ Все архивы правительственных учреждений ликвидируются, как ведомственные учреждения, и хранящиеся в них дела и документы отныне образуют единый Государственный Архивный Фонд.

2/ Заведывание государственным архивным фондом возлагается на главное управление архивным делом.

3/ Все дела и переписка правительственных учреждений законченные к 25 октября 1917 года, поступают в государственный архивный фонд.

- 2 -

9/ Заведующий Главным Управлением Архивным Делом утверждается по представлению Народного Комиссара по Просвещению Центральным Правительством. Он пользуется правами члена Коллегии Народного Комиссариата по Просвещению и является представителем Управления Архивным Делом в Центральном Правительстве с правом непосредственного доклада.

10/ Положение о главном управлении архивным делом и подведомственных ему областных управлениях будет издано дополнительно.

11/ С опубликованием настоящего декрета отменяется действие всех доныне изданных декретов и постановлений об организации архивного дела в России.

12/ С 1-го июля 1918 г. кредиты открытия различным ведомствам на содержание различных состоящих при них архивов, передаются в распоряжение Народного Комиссариата по Просвещению на нужды Главного Управления Архивным Делом.

Председатель Совета Народных
Комиссаров

В.И. Ленин

Управляющий Делами Совета Народных
Комиссаров

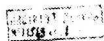
В.И. Ленин

Секретарь Совета

Турбин

1.12.1918 г.

Москва.



"Decree on the Reorganization and Centralization of Archival Affairs in the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic" (issued by the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR on 1 June 1918). The facsimile of the typewritten original signed by Lenin is reproduced from the frontispiece of the Journal, *Sovetskie arkhivy*, 1968, no. 3, bearing the additional stamp of the Central Party Archives of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism in Moscow.

Appendix

"Decree On the Reorganization and Centralization of Archival Affairs in the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic," (issued by the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR, 1 June 1918).⁴⁹

1. All archives of government institutions are abolished as department institutions, and the files and documents preserved in them henceforth form the Single State Archival Fond.

2. Management of the State Archival Fond is entrusted to the Main Administration of Archival Affairs.

3. All files and correspondence of government institutions closed on 25 October 1917, are to become part of the State Archival Fond. For a period of time to be specifically determined for each department in agreement with it, by the Main Administration of Archival Affairs, files which have not lost their importance for daily business remain on the premises of said department, and do not pass to the authority and direction of the Main Administration of Archival Affairs.

4. All currently active files and correspondence of government institutions remain with them for a period of time to be determined for each department by a special statute. After the stated term, all closed files are to be transferred to the State Archival Fond.

5. Government institutions do not have the right to destroy any files, correspondence, or individual documents without the written permission of the Main Administration of Archival Af-

fairs. Transgressors of this prohibition will be subject to judicial proceedings.

6. The Main Administration of Archival Affairs should immediately establish procedures for obtaining information from the State Archival Fond, with the primary right of obtaining information being given to the department which produced the given file.

7. With a view toward better scientific utilization, and also toward convenience of preservation and economy of expenditures, individual parts of the State Archival Fond, as far as possible, should be consolidated according to principles of centralization of archival affairs.

8. The Main Administration of Archival Affairs forms a part of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment (NarKomPros), constituting a special section therein.

9. The head of the Main Administration of Archival Affairs is to be nominated by the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment and confirmed by the central government. He shall enjoy the rights of a member of the college [ruling board] of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment, and is the representative of the Administration of Archival Affairs in the central government, with the right of direct report.

10. A statute concerning the Main Administration of Archival Affairs and the regional administrations under its jurisdiction will be published supplementarily.

11. With the publication of the present decree, the provisions of all previously-issued decrees and resolutions concern-

⁴⁹The Russian text, "O reorganizatsii tsentralizatsii arkhivnogo dela," is published in several places: *SU*, 1918, No. 40, pp. 514; *Sbornik rukovodiashchikh materialov po arkhivnomu delu (1917 — iun' 1941 gg.)* (Moscow, 1961), pp. 12–13; and *K 50-letiiu sovetskogo arkhivnogo dela* (Moscow, 1968), pp. 10–12. A facsimile plate of the typewritten, signed original is reproduced in part as a frontispiece in *Sovetskie arkhivy*, 1968, no. 3, and in full in O.H. Mitiukov, *Radians'ke arkhivne budivnytstvo na Ukraini, 1917–1973* (Kiev, 1975), between pages 48 and 49. The translation presented here follows, with some modifications, the text prepared for the U.S. National Archives by Dane Hartgrove.

ing the organization of archival affairs in Russia are rescinded.

12. As of 1 June 1918, accounts opened for various departments for the maintenance of the archives in their custody are transferred to the direction of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment for the needs of the Main Administration of Archival Affairs.

1 June 1918

Moscow

Chairman of the Council of
People's Commissars
(signed) V. I. Ul'ianov (Lenin)

Administrator of Affairs of the
Council of People's Commissars
(signed) Vlad. Bonch-Bruevich