

## The USSR in the eyes of Camus: his political thought in his journalistic writings (1944-1945)

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## Abstract

This paper aims to study Albert Camus's political thought on the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics through his journalism. Using documentary research, it was observed editorials published by Combat that directly addressed the USSR. Therefore, it was discovered that Camus understood, between 1944 and 1945, the Soviet nation as an experience that should be observed with greater attention, in view of the international prominence that the country accumulated after the I World War. Furthermore, it was noted that, for him, the Soviet Union constituted a strong symptom of the changes in the political arena of that first half of the century.

### Keywords

Albert Camus; History of Political Thought; Political Thought; Political Thought: Opinion; Soviet Union.

## Introduction

Albert Camus (1913-1960) was consecrated in the world of letters with the Nobel Prize in Literature at the end of his life, in 1957. In addition to his occupations as a playwright and writer, he was also a journalist. As a press professional, he played the role of public intellectual, intervening and positioning himself in the debates of his time. As such, he recognized himself as a left-wing man, even going so far as to say: “I am left-wing, in spite of myself and in spite of it” (Meyer, 1961);<sup>1</sup> integrating the liberal, non-communist left (Rüdiger, 2023).

This fact reveals a divergence between the author and other leftists of his time that would be aggravated in the years following World War II. Because Camus would take a position against communism and socialism, particularly in reference to the Stalinist experience of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and its leader, Josef Stalin (1878-1953). This position was particularly emphasized on the occasion of the publication and subsequent repercussion of his philosophical essay, *The Rebel* ([1951] 2019).

The work contains several passages in which the writer directly criticizes the Soviet socialist regime, such as when he writes that “from Paulo to Stalin, the popes who chose Caesar paved the way for the Caesars who choose only themselves” (Camus, 2019, p. 88). This type of opinion, however, if it did not pay off, catalyzed the rupture between the writer and the French left of the time, epitomized by the famous split between him and Jean-Paul Sartre.

Thus, the accusation that Camus was basically a “fifth columnist” on the French left must be historicized. As can be seen, he, in fact, opposed communist and socialist ideologies after 1945. However, the investigation into his political thought during World War II must be taken into account, as a way of problematizing (or not) the label that was later attributed to him. It is understood that this examination must be carried out from the perspective of his journalism, as it was when he was at the helm of *Combat* that Camus wrote directly about the USSR (on three occasions, published in editorials). The subject, therefore, falls within the field of Social Communication as it is limited to the author's publicistic collection, even though it shares characteristics and interests with other areas, such as History.

Camus, it is worth noting, was an important public intellectual in his context. However, thinking about the influence of a public figure today, as it was then, is no less than childish — although this is not an isolated phenomenon. After all, since the second half of the 20th century, opinion journalism, as a business model, has lost space and influence in public debate and, consequently, the same has occurred with its main assets, that is, its publicists. In other times, this type of social critic disputed public debate to influence (and communicate with) “an educated and non-specialized audience” and, as a consequence, the direction in which national politics was moving (Jacoby, 1990, p. 18; Posner, 2003; Winock, 2000). Nowadays, on the other hand, these intellectuals have, for the most part, secluded themselves in universities, far from the mundane political debate, as in the past.

Given this, the study of public intellectuals, as is the case here, also gives rise to a partial observation of how such a role was played and, ultimately, how the press and journalism have succeeded since then. In addition, this goes beyond what concerns the subject under analysis itself.

With this in mind, it was decided to conduct the research using a historical and analytical method, which means that “it is adjusted to the case, but maintaining a connection with what transcends it from within: that is, the paradigmatic theme for the area of knowledge of this publication” (Rüdiger, 2023, p. 30) and its articulation with political thought. This means, then, that the corpus will be investigated without detaching it from its historical time, supplementing the necessary information in other sections of the work. Before moving on to the analysis process, therefore, (1) a summary of the relevance of the Soviet Union in the French public debate will be presented, in addition to a brief description of the profile of the

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1 All translations are the responsibility of the author.

publication analyzed, and (2) a brief outline of Camus' biography and the controversy of the philosophical essay cited above. Only then will the exegetical process on the editorials written by the journalist on the topic in question be elaborated.

## The USSR in the French public debate and *Combat*

To understand the French public communication scene in the 20th century, it is necessary to understand that, until the end of World War II, the vast majority of left-wing public intellectuals were, if not members, sympathizers of the Communist Party and, consequently, of the USSR and communist doctrine, generally speaking. Some of the most influential writers of that generation, such as André Gide and André Malraux in particular, frequently met not only in cafés and literary salons, but also at public events, giving speeches on French domestic and foreign policy, with an emphasis, from 1930 onwards, on the latter. The International Congress of Writers [1935] stands out among other events of this nature.

In short, this was a period marked by, among other things, a growing involvement of the *intelligentsia* in public life (in addition, with intellectuals also occupying government positions or becoming candidates). This participation also denoted objective positions regarding the rise of fascism in Europe, the possible new world war, and the Stalinism/anti-Stalinism dichotomy. In fact, “it can be said that the dominant ideology at the time was radical socialism, because of the party that was in government or participated in most cabinets”, wrote Lottman (2009, p. 89), “and the most respectable writers were also considered radical socialists”. It is no coincidence that many of these intellectuals traveled to Spain intending to show support for the anti-fascist troops, who were fighting against the Francoist army. Likewise, many strengthened ties with the Kremlin and, of these, few were selected as unofficial Soviet representatives in France; being, therefore, responsible for mediating conversations with other artists and for discussing strategies related to the dissemination of Soviet ideas on French soil.

It is worth remembering that this admiration, prestige, and/or identification of the French intellectual class was not a coincidence. The USSR symbolized a political alternative to Western capitalism: firstly, with Lenin's political and intellectual leadership during the Russian Revolution and the first years of the bloc, and later, with the rapid and dizzying economic, industrial, and military development under the command of Stalin (both members of the Bolshevik Party). Regarding this process, it is important to highlight the words of historian Eric Hobsbawm (1995, p. 86): “Bolshevism absorbed all other revolutionary traditions and pushed them to the margins of radical movements”. Before the Stalinist period, there was an “economic and cultural backwardness” that, in turn, “appeared as a difficult obstacle to overcome in a reconstruction of the country that should be, at the same time, the construction of socialism and protection against any attempt at capitalist restoration”, according to the Austro-Hungarian Marxist philosopher György Lukács (1977).

The controversies surrounding Stalin revolve around the human cost of this rise, whether in the sense of the absence of democracy or the persecution of political opponents (Lukács, 1977). In other words, the image of the USSR had two interpretations internationally: (1) one would be “committed in theory to the overthrow of bourgeois regimes and the end of empires everywhere” and, furthermore, an experience “inspiring and instigating subversion”; while (2) the other understood it “as an essential enemy” (Hobsbawm, 1995, p. 152), especially of democracy and liberal values (which founded Western modernity), as perpetuated from the Cold War period onwards. France is inevitably included.

The press, especially at the end of the French state of emergency (established by the Germans and French collaborators), known as Vichy France (1940-1944), and at the twilight of World War II, played an important role as an arena for public debate. As a fundamental aspect of its editorial guidelines, it had an evident (if not announced) political-partisan alignment. The publications with the largest circulations, as a rule, were those on the right. However, *Combat*, under Camus's direction, grew rapidly from 1944

onwards, becoming one of the best-selling publications—reaching, at its peak, a circulation of between 200,000 and 300,000 copies—which also helps to attest to its relevance during that period (Lottman, 2009; Santos-Sainz, 2016; Winock, 2000; Zaretsky, 2011).

Originally, it was the press organ of the resistance movement of the same name, whose initial purpose was to “gather information about the German occupation forces, sabotage their installations and, whenever possible, fight the enemy with weapons” (Lottman, 1994, p. 355). Following the tradition of French journalism, that is, a newspaper consisting of opinion journalism, therefore privileging columnism, the editorial line of *Combat*, according to Santos-Sainz (2016), was defined as “progressive, but not communist” in addition to having a “vocation for public service”. This last part does not refer to what is now understood as “service journalism”, whose purpose would be, in general terms, to provide citizens with issues regarding the functioning of the city (bus schedules, street obstructions, etc.); but a patriotic bias, in the sense of reclaiming France for its own people and defending their moral reparation. Also according to this perception, the periodical came to be “widely seen as the voice of the Resistance” (Zaretsky, 2013, p. 60).

In light of the above, it is clear that, on the one hand, there was a strong communist tendency in the French left, which was definitely influential and widespread among the intellectual class. On the other hand, *Combat* represented, along with other publications, an alternative within the left itself, which, in this case, was not aligned with the Communist Party. The sum of these factors raises the question surrounding the figure of Camus: in the midst of World War II, which side did his position regarding the USSR lean towards? Something to be answered in the course of the work.

## The author and the controversy of The Rebel

Camus was born in the interior of Algeria, but soon became an orphan and moved to Algiers, where he spent his youth. Of French origin, his family was extremely poor and only progressed beyond primary education after receiving a scholarship from a teacher. As a teenager, he was diagnosed with tuberculosis, which is why he was unable to enter the teaching profession after graduating in Philosophy from the University of Algiers. In the meantime, he became involved with literature and later entered journalism, which was the gateway for those who wanted to establish themselves in the world of literature (Neveu, 2006).

He first worked at *Alger Républicain*, a liberal, non-communist left-wing publication directed by Pascal Pia, and later in its sister publication, *Le soir républicain*. In both publications, he began to denounce French colonial despotism over the Algerian population, especially ethnic Arabs (Santos-Sainz, 2016). The work ceased due to the economic crisis caused by World War II and the censorship that the colonial government imposed on the editorial staff. Camus's career in journalism was made possible by his friendship with Pia, who first appointed him as *layout editor* of *Paris-Soir*, which was one of the leading periodicals in terms of circulation in France at the time (Todd, 1998). His stay, however, was cut short by disagreements regarding the publication's political orientation and financial bias, which did not occur in his next experience, at *Combat*, when he succeeded Pia as director. In between, he worked as a reader for the publisher Gallimard and published the novel *The Stranger* [1942] and his philosophical essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* [1942].

In *Combat*, Camus experienced his second peak in journalism. This is evident since “in the early post-war years, he had exerted great influence on a wide range of Parisian opinion, receiving thousands of letters every week in response to his newspaper columns”, according to Judt (2014, p. 125). “His style, his concerns, his wide audience and his apparent omnipresence in Parisian public life”, according to the author, “seemed to embody everything that was most characteristically French at the intersection of literature, thought and political engagement” (Judt, 2014, p. 125). The writer then published one of his

greatest successes, *The Plague* [1947], left *Combat*, and began to dedicate himself more to the theater. "During the following two years, Camus would exclusively focus on writing *The Rebel*" (Barreto, 1971, p. 23), published in 1951, a publication that marks his decline in French public life.

Camus' essay received negative reviews and, despite being awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1957, "his reputation was already in decline," Judt (2014, p. 125) points out. Sartre's circle was somewhat wary of the work, considering how it was received by his peers. Sartre was increasingly drawn to the experience of the USSR and, according to Aronson (2007, p. 196), soon "proclaimed his identification with communism, including his approval of communist violence." In his journal, *Les Temps Modernes*, a prominent disciple of this French philosopher, Francis Jeanson, was tasked with reviewing the work:

After defining it as a "great lost book", Jeanson questioned the author's "pseudophilosophy" and his lack of commitment to reality, accusing him of being "an unrepentant idealist", of living in the clouds and of refusing evidence to write "an anti-historical manual". [...] Sartre stated that other critics, when consulted, shied away from the task. Jeanson accepted, promising "moderation" in his approach. Sartre even commented to Camus, when he met him at the Pont Royal bar, that the criticism "would perhaps even be rigorous". Camus's emphasis would have been an unpleasant surprise. In a heated discussion about the tone of the article, Jeanson did not accept the considerations made by Merleau-Ponty, who, in Sartre's absence on a trip abroad, was responsible for the editing (Jeanson; Beauvoir apud Moraes, 2022, p. 101).

Furthermore, "pro-communist left-wing intellectuals in France, for the most part, aligned themselves against *The Rebel*, while a smaller, less influential group welcomed the book" (Aronson, 2007, p. 199). "Those on the right acclaimed him, according to Aronson (2007, p. 199), with few exceptions, such as Raymond Aron, who "clearly disapproved of Camus' style of thinking". In general, this essay, which is the writer's most extensive work, proposed to discuss, from a moral point of view, the legitimization of violence and murder (that is, the state of exception as a permanent policy), with the pretext of resolving the contradictions and problems that had dragged on throughout history and resulted in the *state of affairs* of the Second World War and the years that followed it. His big issue, which led to such controversy, is that part of his purpose was to question the revolutionary logic that, above all, guided the communist spirit of the time. Camus understood this as a form of corruption of the principles, an upstart, that would originate the purpose of these ideals; Furthermore, he was very uncomfortable with the participation of intellectuals who defended these practices, as can be seen:

We are in the age of premeditation and the perfect crime. Our criminals are no longer those unarmed children who invoke the excuse of love. They are, on the contrary, adults, and their alibi is irrefutable: philosophy can be used for everything, even to transform murderers into judges. [...] Since the power of love is rare, crime remains exceptional, thus preserving its aspect of transgression. But from the moment that, lacking character, man runs for refuge in a doctrine, from the moment that crime is rationalized, it proliferates like reason itself, assuming all the figures of the syllogism. It, which was solitary like the cry, is now universal like science. Yesterday judged, today it makes the law (Camus, 2019, p. 13).

The dissent of the writer of *The Plague* resulted in a gradual withdrawal from public life, focusing more on other activities, such as theater and literature. He would return to journalism, now at *L'Express*, a newspaper with a large circulation, but his stay would last about a year. This period was mainly marked by attempts to intervene in the Algerian independence conflict; without success, he was marked by negative marks (Said, 2011).

## The USSR in the eyes of Camus

There is no doubt, when reading *The Rebel*, that Camus was critical of Karl Marx and the Soviet

socialist experience. By way of illustration, the Algerian writer “became a simultaneously heroic and pathetic incarnation of a civic liberalism”, as Rüdiger (2023, p. 41) puts it, “destined for political and intellectual marginalization, at a time when the cultural industry that had emerged in his country was entering what we might call its systemic stage”. This aspect reinforces, *a priori*, the writer’s antipathy, in general, towards socialist-oriented systems (which foresee, among other things, the hegemony of the Communist Party).

Camus argued, among other things, in *The Rebel*, that the ends, before justifying the means, should be justified by themselves. Therefore, as in other movements of the first half of the 20th century, this ideology had become an end in itself, which would be based on, and would legitimize, state violence against adversaries — be they internal, external, contemporary, or historical opponents. For this reason, he wrote that “authoritarian socialists thought that history was moving too slowly and that it was necessary, in order to precipitate it, to hand over the mission of the proletariat to a handful of indoctrinators” (Camus, 2019, p. 284) — hence the state of exception, in a permanent regime. Therefore, this historical mission, according to the author, is inherent to every human group that perceives and preserves the dignity and wealth “of its work and suffering” (Camus, 2019, p. 284). However, in the absence of spontaneity and freedom, its manifestation is artificial and, as a consequence, there is a risk of coercion.

*The revolted man* and the controversy that arose after its publication, however, should not be the only guiding criteria for interpreting Camus’s position on the USSR and the communist question. It is the result of his reflections in light of the historical and particular contexts in which the author lived. In other words, the discussions about the Soviet experience in the 1940s were different from the debates about it during the 1950s. This is not by chance, since the historical conditions were different: during one period, people lived with war day and night; in another, they discussed the direction of international politics (especially thinking about the future of Europe). In order to understand its entirety, it is necessary to go back to Camus’s *Combat* as a first step, so that in the future we can continue with a more extensive study.

It is understood that, since he was a public intellectual, “Camus’ journalistic experience was a kind of applied philosophy”, as elaborated by Rüdiger (2023, p. 29). That said, the scarcity of texts by the Algerian on the issue surrounding the Soviet Union is striking at first. It is worth remembering that the writings, in the case of this study, were published near the end of World War II, more specifically, two of them in December 1944 and the last in April 1945. This means that there is a high probability that the conflict was the main topic on the agenda at the time, and, in view of this, there were other articulations that could be more important to Camus’ judgment.

Shortly after a meeting between General Charles de Gaulle, leader of the French executive,<sup>2</sup> and Stalin, then head of state of the USSR, Camus summarized the debate and the public repercussion in the media by highlighting that the French press was unanimous in its support of a possible rapprochement between France and Russia.<sup>3</sup> According to the journalist, the general discourse revolved around the argument that “the Russian alliance is vital for France, because it allows it to resolve the *German problem*”, that is, the fight against Nazi Germany (Camus, 2021, p. 187; author’s emphasis). In addition, he highlights the widespread approval, in favor of the French Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time, for rejecting the division between Western and Eastern blocs.

The aforementioned *German problem* appears, at first, to be the primary issue to be resolved, according to its initial presentation. This issue, for Camus (2021, p. 187), speaks in favor of this alliance, given that both France and Russia had “particular reasons for wanting Germany to be continually

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2 After the dissolution of Vichy France, Charles de Gaulle served in a provisional government during World War II. The French State returned to the normalization of its functioning in 1946, when the new constitution was promulgated (Price, 2016,)

3 Published on December 3, 1944, without title, therefore, the first sentence is taken as its designation: “General de Gaulle met with Marshal Stalin...” (Camus, 2021, p. 187).

watched on both borders”. This situation, in the author’s understanding, fostered “a policy of European understanding that seeks to reduce rivalries as much as possible” (Camus, 2021, p. 187).

It is assumed that the bloc policy to which the author referred was the formation of military alliances that operated during World War II — being (1) the Allies, formed by the USA, France, the United Kingdom, and the USSR, and (2) the Axis, composed of Germany, Italy, and Japan. At that time, Italy had surrendered, after suffering a siege by the Allied forces. It can therefore be inferred that Camus endorsed the press chorus in favor of a military mobilization against the Nazi-fascist forces and, as mentioned before, in favor of a policy of continental expansion:

If we reject bloc politics, it is because we repudiate the politics of balance, the complicated games of alliances and interests, which have never stopped leading Europe to war. It would be within the logic of this stance to talk to Moscow, not yet about this European federation, which will take time, but, more modestly, about the international aspect of the European problem (Camus, 2021, pp. 187-188).

Like the *German problem*, mentioned by the writer, the *European problem* is not an elaborate concept, which does not prevent us from formulating what it is about, considering Camus's proposition. It is understood that the author's arguments move towards the moral defense of a movement around a collective thought of the continent. After all, war is a catastrophe from a humanitarian point of view and, as much as it consecrates winners and sentences losers, history shows that the aftermath is negative — as would be witnessed by France itself after World War II, when it would have to deal with a major reconstruction of the country, since its economy and cities were in tatters (Price, 2016). But Camus articulated this in another way, stating, for example, that “politics is no longer done today without the economy”, with the addendum that “in reality, there is not a single economic problem today that is not international” (Camus, 2021, p. 188).

In other words, the Algerian intervention shows that there is a relationship of interdependence between countries and that their social ills, just like their prosperity, have repercussions on neighboring nations, forming a chain. “We know that we are in solidarity, in life and in death,” he wrote, “we know that the hunger of a neighboring people is a threat to us in the same way that excessive economic strength can be” (Camus, 2021, p. 188). This was evidence that called for a reconsideration of the direction of international politics, especially on a continent at war: “if these national policies are inevitable today, it is nevertheless necessary that, in the future, in the procedures for reaching agreements, this interdependence and solidarity also be reflected.”

This is a moral appeal. After all, it is possible to see how Camus's reading advocates curbing the *German problem* while moving towards the formation of a European alliance that would aim, first and foremost, to establish a chain of assistance in order to deal with the problems that were spreading across the countries affected by the war. The journalist understood that it would be through the stagnation of the economic crisis, which was aggravated by the fighting, that the next step could be taken — so, the optimistic reading of an alliance between France and the Soviet Union has its origins in this kind of response to the humanitarian crisis that was being experienced at the time:

Taking a concrete example, if in Moscow, as in all conferences where the fate of Europe is at stake, it was possible to address and then concretize the problem of raw materials, ultimately concluding on the need for their internationalization, world peace would have taken a great step forward. The day the foundations of an economic federation of Europe are laid, then a political federation will be possible. Obviously, these problems will not be resolved in a few hours of conversation. However, if France and the USSR could be the first to say the words that all the well-prepared minds of the continent have been waiting for years, that would be a source of pride and confidence for us (Camus, 2021, p. 188).

The author’s position would be reinforced 15 days later, with the publication of the second

*editorial*.<sup>4</sup> Because, once again, Camus starts from the discussion of the treaty between France and the USSR to demand a change in European policy that would have the purpose of curbing nationalist impulses and, in view of this, promoting a new mentality on the continent. “This agreement,” said the Algerian, “is, first and foremost, a war tool with a concrete and limited objective. It aims to neutralize Germany in the current conflict and in the years after peace” (Camus, 2019, p. 305). Because of this, he believed that there would be no objections; after all, Germany was, at that moment, the *problem* to be overcome in international politics.

The issue of the humanitarian crisis, highlighted earlier, returns, but with a more concrete proposal regarding the continuation of the war and, mainly, its subsequent period. Camus begins to defend organizations that would resemble what, in the future, became the United Nations (UN) — more specifically, its Security Council — and, in a certain sense, the European Union (EU), as can be seen:

The preamble of the agreement allows us to confirm an idea that we take very seriously. Indeed, France and Russia insisted on their desire to participate in the organization of international security. They noted that the alliance that unites them is not only not limited, but that it also points to integration into a more general system in which the interests of all countries are reconciled. That is what is important. The system of alliances may sometimes seem, and this is the case here, to be a necessity imposed by historical reality. However, it [the system of alliances] has never resolved the particular problems that two or three nations face, and it has only resolved them for a limited time (Camus, 2021, p. 205)

The author understood the Franco-Soviet pact as “the first step” (Camus, 2021, p. 206) so that, in the future, there would be a generalized reconstruction of the world’s political guidelines. “Peace is the wealth of all peoples,” wrote Camus (2021, p. 205), which meant, for him, that this was the guiding ideal of nations. Therefore, the prevention of nationalism and chauvinism should also be the reason for a reorientation of the organization of security. According to the writer, this organization, on a global scale, could only be based on an “international convention, in which alliances constitute only necessary steps,” because “wars can no longer be anything other than universal, peace must, today, have a global scale” (Camus, 2021, p. 205).

The Algerian’s moralistic discourse calls for a change in mentality by understanding that the state of affairs experienced in the first half of the 20th century was the result of these national stances, which opposed collectivist thinking, as was the case, for example, in the United States and Russia itself. After all, in the Soviet case, “one must never forget that Russia did not adopt its current national policy until its proposal for a collective security system was rejected” (Camus, 2021, p. 205). While the United States, for Camus, 2021, p. 206), “bears its share of responsibility for the failure of international security policy” by turning its back when it could have become a mediating agent; “Europe, thus, became more intense in its nationalisms” and “the result was not long in coming”, still referring to the author (2021, p. 206).

The circumstances historically imposed by relations between countries, especially the leniency towards the growth of Nazi-fascism, required a radical change in international relations, according to Camus. The thesis that this is, ultimately, a moral claim is reinforced by the character of highlighting the responsibility of nations in the face of the ruin of the democratic-liberal values of Western discourse. Therefore, the author reinforces that the Franco-Soviet alliance should, as the second phase of this global reorganization, “find support in complementary alliances that mix nations, united in a system that is, at the same time, solid and flexible” (Camus, 2021, p. 206). Furthermore, he does not fail to reinforce that a world organization will only be established when nationalisms vanish, for the benefit of the nations themselves; as well as each State abandons “part of its sovereignty”, to guarantee “its freedom” (Camus, 2021, p. 206). “Only then,” argues Camus (2021, p. 206), “will peace be restored to this exhausted world.”

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<sup>4</sup> Published on December 18, 1944, without title, therefore, the first sentence is taken as its designation: “The text of the Franco-Soviet pact is now known” (Camus, 2021, p. 204).

Thus, creating “an international economy, where raw materials will be shared, where trade competition will be converted into cooperation, where colonial markets will be opened to all, where currency itself will receive a collective status, is the necessary condition of this organization” (Camus, 2021, p. 206).

In spite of his own speech, the writer of Algerian origin acknowledged in the same *editorial* that humanity was far from this disposition, which he himself considered so necessary. In the end, he appeals, more openly in a moralistic manner — considering the increasingly optimistic perspective of an eventual success against Hitler's troops:

Hatred was raised, the fire of justice burned too much in the depths of hearts, Europe has scores to settle. But above the screams and the violence, despite the relentless decision we are in to win for a long time, let's not forget the goal to be achieved. He is the only one who can take away your bitterness from so many sacrifices. Until then, we will welcome with satisfaction this clear and solid alliance that puts France and Russia up to the preponderant role they must play in the enormous construction effort that we expect from now on (Camus, 2021, pp. 206-207).

Up to this point, it is possible to see that Camus, apparently, was more concerned with the resolution of World War II and, in addition, a political rearrangement of international relations, as a moral task of the humanitarian collapse experienced in that period. The USSR, therefore, was understood by the author as a fundamental ally for there to be, in fact, a significant paradigmatic change; furthermore, it can be said that France's moves to get closer to the Soviet State, for the journalist, signaled an important gesture towards the ideal of a new organization. It is, however, in the last *editorial*<sup>5</sup> that there are more fruitful indications for the purposes that this study proposes.

This is because, in the first lines of the text, the author warns about the conformism — if not indifference — of the French regarding what the recent triumphs of the Western Front against the remnants of the Axis meant. “But the world moves quickly,” wrote Camus (2021, p. 261), “what was our strength in the times when we had health and tradition has become our misfortune, and will continue to be so if we are not careful.” His writing presents a different bias from the two previous ones; no longer reinforcing the moral character of international relations, but drawing France's attention to the relevance that the Soviet Union had achieved up to that point.

The argument is then made that “the French must make amends to Russia” (Camus, 2021, p. 261), under the pretext that the French government and the majority of its population had long refused to observe and understand the Soviet experience, which, in turn, in addition to developing, assumed a leading role in the context of the war. According to the author, this lack of observance originated with the Russian Revolution itself:

They began by rejecting the revolution of 1917. Lenin's Russia was forced to be surrounded by a thick cordon sanitaire, outside of which no news passed. In the absence of news, some are created. With the stupidity of the conservatives, France easily admitted that the USSR was in complete anarchy. Distrust breeds distrust. Whatever our opinion on political realism, it must be recognized that the moral tragedy that the German-Soviet pact represented<sup>6</sup> for so many honorable minds is clearly explained if it is placed in the Munich extension.<sup>7</sup> Even in 1939, eyes were closed, and the Russian-Finnish war,<sup>8</sup> as presented by the press, provided the pretext for one of the greatest misunderstandings in history. It took German aggression, Russian resistance in 1941, and the victories of 1942 and 1943 to finally alert France and the world that a formidable power had been born on the borders of Europe and that this power could

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5 Published on April 10, 1945, without a title, so the first sentence is taken as such: “The victories of the Western Front...” (Camus, 2021, p. 260).

6 Non-aggression pact between Nazi Germany and Stalinist USSR.

7 Agreement that ceded Czechoslovak territories to Nazi Germany.

8 Combat that disputed Finnish territories near Leningrad.

claim all supremacies (Camus, 2021, p. 261).

It can be deduced that Camus's purpose in this *Combat* editorial was to draw the French community's attention to the complexity surrounding the Soviet Union. It was not a debate of good versus evil—as, decades later, the American cultural industry insinuated in many different ways; nor as the communists themselves did, from another perspective—but rather to understand that the country's decisions have their own reasons for being. Furthermore, it is possible that this ignorance, which was constituted on a collective scale, was the reason for the lack of knowledge and surprise regarding the rise in status of the USSR in such a short period of time.

The Soviet Union's developmental, economic, and military distinctions have already been mentioned throughout the text, as well as its political distinctions, albeit briefly. It is the latter that accounts for its broad influence on international relations in the 20th century. This aspect is highlighted by Camus himself, as it is evidence of this phenomenon that should be analyzed more seriously.

He mentions that “the first proclamation of the Czechoslovak Government highlights in almost every paragraph the Soviet-oriented orientation of this policy” (Camus, 2021, p. 261), adding that this power of influence confirms that, at that time, Russia occupied in Central Europe the place that previously belonged to France and other Western powers. He also says that “it was not the French who were embarrassed by Hitler’s entry into Prague” (Camus, 2021, pp. 261-262). For the writer, these data justify the need to recognize one’s own national mistakes.

Thus, when he emphasizes that “it is known, moreover, that we are not communists”, Camus (2021, p. 262) reinforces his thesis that, under this pretext, the rapid advance in the industrialization and fortification process of the Soviet country was ignored. After all, “this is what will give us more freedom to say that the French overcame this incredible challenge of ignoring for 25 years a civilization that was being created before their eyes. Because it is indeed a civilization, whatever objections we may have to it” (Camus, 2021, p. 262).

In other words, there are objections; however, in the eyes of the Algerian, they should not be a sale of lack of culture, according to the author's argument, such as the fact that, for Camus, “there are principles to maintain, in the interest of all, and which Russia sometimes pretends to neglect” (Camus, 2021, p. 262). More specifically, “it is simply a matter of recognizing our illusions and giving the new Russia the place that its superhuman sacrifices have earned” (Camus, 2021, p. 262). Since France was dealing with its own contradictions in this global process, which was the result of the incompetence of the countries themselves, of renewing leading nations.

His argument, above all, is based on the fact that there was a generational change underway that could be observed in the US, and, given all the events and information presented, there were sufficient reasons to observe the same in the Soviet Union. “Let us then open our eyes and recognize that ancient cultures need to be rejuvenated,” warned Camus (2021, p. 262), “the last thing we can do with history is to get sulky [about it] again”; which means that the stance that is refractory to the successes of the USSR, aka “anti-Sovietism,” “is as terrible a stupidity as would be a systematic hostility against England or the United States” (Camus, 2021, p. 262).

Camus, in the end, returns to the point that he evidently emphasized throughout all *his editorials*, which is the *German problem*. He does so by writing that “the first effort” that must be made, *a priori*, to discuss the issues of the international political arena, involves “putting things back in their proper place” (Camus, 2021, p. 262). This, in turn, supports the thesis that the journalist’s priority, based on these propositions, at least in that period between the end of 1944 and the beginning of 1945, was to eliminate (if not eradicate) Nazifascism; and only then to rediscuss the guidelines of international politics.

Thus, the USSR, in Camus' eyes, was a potential partner in the endeavor to prevail humanitarian moral principles over Nazi-fascism, thus constituting opposing blocs. It should not be forgotten that, as

noted, the Algerian writer never uses concepts such as *Aryanism*, *democracy*, *fascism*, or *totalitarianism*, either when dealing with the Soviet State or the cases of the Axis nations.

In any case, there is no gesture on the part of the Algerian journalist that a democratic state under the rule of law actually existed in the territory of the USSR. Above all, considering that the author, on more than one occasion, in view of the above, seeks to emphasize that there is a reason for the Soviet decisions and positions up until that moment of World War II. This underlines the *belonging*, in his view, as part of the allies in the fight against the *German problem*. It can be said that Camus, therefore, understood the Soviet Union as part of the solution to Nazifascism, but not necessarily as a democratic way of revamping global politics. After all, there is an evident understanding by the writer that the rise of the Soviet Union was an unequivocal symptom of the transformations in the international political theater, while, without forgetting, criticizing a certain French incapacity (if not complacency) to preserve its influence on the European continent.

In short, Camus does not praise the Bolshevik experience — and if he does, it is from the point of view of its accelerated development, especially considering that France was experiencing poverty (Price, 2016). The Soviet escalation, amid the local context in which the author was inserted, reinforces the idea of discomfort with the prostration of France and its population, especially concerning the international events of the 1930s and 1940s (which were still ongoing).

One must be careful and avoid establishing, as part of the study's results, a dichotomy between nations that represent civilization *versus* empires of barbarism. This caveat is made because, as previously highlighted, Camus, as a public intellectual, does not use concepts, nor does he make a value judgment in this sense. It is understood from this work that his view of the USSR is of a nation that comprised a group of countries interested in defeating, for whatever reasons, above all, Hitler's Germany. It does not matter whether they are democracies or not.

In this sense, the answer to the initial question provokes reflections that go beyond the logic of yes or no. That is to say, while the Stalinist Soviet Union is not placed in the same category as Nazi Germany, it does not authorize Camus to say that he had sympathy for the regime. However, during the Second World War, the writer of Algerian origin understood that it was possible to dialogue with the Soviet nation and that, more than that, it would be an important participant in a possible restructuring of the world's international politics.

## Final considerations

Although he became a notorious critic of the Soviet experience, Camus, as we have seen, did not allow himself to be alienated by his personal convictions. Reading his writings reveals a profile that is distinct from the one perpetuated: how could a detractor of Stalinism recognize the importance of the Soviet Union and, furthermore, relativize its most contested actions at the time? The material analyzed and supplemented allows for some hypotheses to explain, albeit partially, this issue.

First, France was facing a serious economic crisis that had been going on for many years. This was one of the topics of the Vichy period: a civic-moral and economic recovery of the country (which did not happen). Therefore, the public debate was probably more concerned with the end of the war and the impacts that this would have on the future of France itself. Second, a quick look at Camus's journalistic work in *Combat* reveals that the small number of texts dedicated to the USSR is also the same as the number of texts written about the USA. Added to this is the fact that there are twice as many under the label "International Politics", in addition to another six under the label "European Politics". In other words, the USSR, despite its international prominence, was perhaps not as important on the French agenda at that time.

The discrepancy, however, between the publicist's views expressed between one "phase" and

another also draws attention to the hypothesis of the strategic conjuncture. In other words, one can infer that the author's parsimony is due to the war conditions. This could perhaps justify a series of positions that, under normal conditions, would be less sustainable. In this case, Nazi Germany had annexed and defeated a series of countries without much effort, and, therefore, dealing with it would require strategy. The USSR, for its part, was developing rapidly in terms of industry and military. The speed of this process, therefore, could be exemplary, especially for countries that, like France, had been mired in crisis since World War I and needed alternatives due to the succession of initiatives that had not produced results.

That said, Camus's moral discourse opens up space for the interpretation that, in his view, the countries that made a pact against Nazism had the potential to reshape international politics. Since, at the end of World War II, no policy was consolidated that would rearrange its moral foundations, it is conceivable to conjecture that the dichotomy between the USA and the USSR, instead of eradicating remnants of the global confrontation, gave them a new look and concentrated political power, leaving the others with no alternative but to support one side or the other.

In short, in his political journalism, Camus details the actions taken by Stalin, thinking not of the present, but of the reconstruction of the continent, which would not long after become Europe's greatest concern. The author suggests that, more than ideological, the rearrangement of future times should start with a moralization of international politics. When this did not occur, the evidence in *The Rebel* points to a particular discontent with the supposed socialist and communist ambitions, as well as the conformism of their supporters.

## Discussion

Camus's journalistic vision understood, as the responsibility of the profession, "to inform the public without giving up offering them independent analysis, arguing that without one or the other there is no way to do good journalism" (Rüdiger, 2023, p. 42). This *sui generis vision* currently seems to be more rarefied than at any other period of time. The argument (so characteristic of journalism practiced in France) today seems increasingly strange to the journalist, who, in general, is limited to reporting a myriad of events, often bordering on randomness, whose importance is, therefore, strange, otherwise questionable. Put another way, would this be a sign that the profession, in the course of the dominance of the informational paradigm and its academization, has become essentially technical?

The decline of individuals like this author as public figures leads to questions of this kind. After all, who, at present, plays a similar role? It could be said that there are still great names available in the public square, such as Noam Chomsky and Jürgen Habermas. However, their public appearance is mainly as sources and less as project leaders, as was the case with Camus, Sartre, Mauriac, etc. Furthermore, who, after these gentlemen over 90 years old, is capable of playing such a role? Some argue that there is a generational deficit and that this seems insurmountable, as things stand (Jacoby, 1990).

While *Combat*, like so many other newspapers of the same nature, sank after its peak, there is still much to be discussed in the history of the press. Why did the informative press win, and how serious was the sudden decline of the opinion-based model? To what extent did journalism models accelerate the disappearance of public intellectuals?

The questions raised here remain open, as they have remained in recent decades, for scholars of the history of journalism, the press, and their respective theories to put forward their hypotheses.

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