

FOR PEACE FOR SOCIALISM FOR DEMOCRACY

A Reader on Marxist Strategy

*Compiled by the
Marxist Unity Group*



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Marxist Unity Group

Contents

Contents	ii
Preface to the Third Edition	iv
Preface to the First Edition	v
Section I: The Merger Formula	1
Summary	1
<i>Lenin Rediscovered: What Is To Be Done? In Context</i> , Chapter One: “The Merger of Socialism and the Worker Movement”	3
Supplemental Readings	43
Section II: Economism and High Politics	45
Summary	45
<i>What Is To Be Done?</i> , Chapter 3: Tred-iunionist Politics and Social-Democratic Politics	49
<i>Lenin’s Political Thought, Vol. 1</i> , Chapter 6: Turn-of-the-Century Crisis – The Threat to Orthodoxy (conclusion)	71
<i>Lenin’s Political Thought, Vol. 1</i> , Chapter 7: The Reaffirmation of Orthodoxy Social-Democratic Consciousness and the Party	72
Political Agitation and “The Class Point of View”	94
Supplemental Readings	98
Section III: The Classical Marxist Minimum-Maximum Program	101
Summary	101
Programme: Lessons of Erfurt	103
The Programme of the Parti Ouvrier	112
A Critique of the Draft Social-Democratic Program of 1891	115
The Erfurt Program	119
On the Erfurt Program of 1891	122
Programme of the Social-Democratic Workers' Party	128
The Socialist Party Platform of 1912	133
Supplemental Readings	137
Section IV: Party of a New Type?	141
Summary	141
<i>Revolutionary Strategy</i> , Chapter 5: Communist Strategy and the Party Form	143
<i>Revolutionary Strategy</i> , Chapter 6: Unity in diversity	151
A Faction is Not a Party	159
The Myth of Lenin’s “Concept of The Party” or What They Did to <i>What Is To Be Done?</i>	169
Supplemental Readings	185
Section V: The Strategy of Patience	187
Summary	187
<i>Left Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder</i> , Chapter 5: “Left Wing Communism” in Germany, The Leaders, The Party, The Class, The Masses	191
<i>Revolutionary Strategy</i> , Chapter 2: Reform Coalition or Mass Strike?	227
<i>Revolutionary Strategy</i> , Chapter 3: The Revolutionary Strategy of the Centre	235
Supplemental Readings	243
Section VI: Anti-Coalitionism in Liberal Constitutional Regimes	247
Summary	247
The Book That Didn't Bark	253
<i>The Republic and Social Democracy in France</i> , Chapter 2: The American Republic	257
<i>The Republic and Social Democracy in France</i> , Chapter 5: The Second Empire and the Paris Commune	259
<i>The Republic and Social Democracy in France</i> , Chapter 6: The Constitution of the Third Republic	267
<i>The Republic and Social Democracy in France</i> , Chapter 7: The Bourgeois Republicans at Work	275
<i>The Republic and Social Democracy in France</i> , Chapter 8: Socialism in the Third Republic	281
Introduction to <i>The Republic and Social Democracy in France</i> (1905)	292
Supplemental Readings	296
Section VII: Fraction Politics	299
Summary	299
<i>Parliamentarianism and Democracy</i> , Chapter 12: Parliamentarism and the Working Classes	306
<i>The Outlawed Party</i> , Chapter 7: Growth of Social Democracy Creates a Major Crisis for the Party	313
Lenin and Bogdanov: Protagonists in the 'Bolshevik Center' (excerpts)	329
The Russian Social Insurance Movement, 1912-1914: An Ideological Analysis	337

Supplemental Readings.....	349
Section VIII: The Democratic Social Republic.....	353
Summary	353
Control the Bureaucrats.....	359
<i>Revolutionary Strategy</i> , Chapter 9: Republican Democracy and Revolutionary Patience.....	366
The Civil War in France: The Third Address – May, 1871	375
Marx’s Social Republic: Radical Republicanism and the Political Institutions of Socialism	380
Theory and Practice (excerpt)	398
Supplemental Readings	400
Section IX: Decolonization.....	403
Summary	403
The Revolutionary Proletariat and the Right of Nations to Self Determination.....	405
Democracy Was a Decolonial Project.....	409
Race and Globalization	416
Section X: Fight the Constitution, Demand a New Republic	427
Summary	427
The American Workingmen’s Parties, Universal Suffrage, and Marx’s Democratic Communism.....	429
Fight the Constitution! Demand a New Republic!	450
Supplemental Readings	458

Preface to the Third Edition

When this book was first compiled, Marxist Unity was a group of seven people who had been working together at *Cosmonaut* for three years, but had only just begun to formalize our political views by making a coordinated intervention at the DSA 2021 convention. We have since held two courses, where prospective members and facilitators studied it together. It was therefore necessary to update it based on these experiences, both on the technical level of the layout and, more importantly, the editorial level of content.

The astute reader will notice significant changes between the table of contents in the first and third editions. To make it more readable, we tried to focus less on primary sources, which need to always be placed in their historical context to be understood, and replaced some with the best contemporary secondary sources. We divided the first week's reading into two in order to lighten the load, and we added a section from Neil Harding's groundbreaking study of Lenin which, in the 1970s, set the stage for the critique of the "textbook interpretation". Besides the last two sections, the most significant change was taking out the section entitled 'Democratic Revolution to the End', which included Marx & Engels' famous 1850 Address, Lenin's *Two Tactics*, and a few other articles. It was too much of a detour to unpack the specific issues of the peasantry in the 1905 Revolution, and felt eclectic to connect it to the "Address". However, the issues of permanent revolution, its relation to the Bolshevik strategy of hegemony, and what that means to us from the vantage point of the 21st century are important and messy theoretical issues that do need to be unpacked and understood by Marxists.

Sections VIII and IX were also significant revisions. In the first and second editions, the last section, "The Social Republic", was the curriculum's shortest and sweetest. We decided to expand it to include Marx's most important political work, his commentary on the Paris Commune from *Civil War in France*, as well as a commentary on Lenin's *State and Revolution*. The final section is a new addition. It is focused on grounding the preceding sections in US history, as well as pointing towards the strategic objective for our time and place.

Despite Section IX's US focus, it should be clear that MUG rejects putting forward an analysis based *entirely* on the current conjuncture. Part of our hypothesis is that in a broad sense, there are only a few strategic choices available to the working class, and all of them now have significant historic case studies. The mistake of privileging the conjuncture obscures the tendencies of capitalism and the bourgeois state within the *longue duree* of history, and thus obscures the tasks of the rising class: in our case the proletariat.

We hope that this edition of the curriculum, one that is more collaborative and hopefully easier to read, will be more closely approaching its finalized form, and come to be seen as a definitive statement on our tendency's views.

PM

March 2023

Preface to the First Edition

For the most part, the list of materials included in this reader is not the usual one found in a Marxist educational curriculum. It is not intended as an exhaustive introduction to Marxism (we're already assuming a basic level of familiarity), nor as a complete roadmap for a Marxist intervention in the contemporary United States. Thus it must necessarily exclude topics that are also essential to the formation and victory of the working class in taking state power; on questions of political economy, the relationship of socialism to black liberation, how Marxists should respond to the threat of the far-right, what strategy socialists should take in the trade union and tenant movements, etc. All of these questions and more need to be thoroughly investigated by Marxist Unity Group and DSA as a whole as we further develop our politics together.

Our view is that the main challenge for socialists in the United States is the lack of a Marxist party. That is why our reader emphasizes key texts from the period when the first socialist parties were forming into mass organs of working class struggle. These texts are all from influential European Marxists from between 1871 and 1910, with the exception of Lenin's *Left Wing Communism* (1920) and secondary sources reflecting on and analyzing that period. In these four decades between the Paris Commune and World War I, Marxism seemed to spread through the Continental working class as rapidly as Napoleon's armies had a few generations prior. It was also in this era that the revolutionary *theoretical* work of Marx (1818-1883) and Engels (1820-1895) was successfully transformed into a mass *political* practice in a newly united Germany by their closest comrades Wilhelm Liebknecht (1826-1900) and August Bebel (1840-1913). This strategy was further elaborated for a mass proletarian audience by Karl Kautsky (1854-1938) and his greatest pupil: a certain Russian lawyer with an acerbic pen, Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924).

At the beginning of this conjuncture, socialists in Europe were divided into small competing sects and reeling from a long series of defeats. These demoralizing retreats included the failure of the 1848 revolutions and the Paris Commune, the dissolution of the First International, the Spanish Bourbon Restoration that ended the *sexenico democrático*, and the lording over Europe by aristocratic reactionaries like Metternich, Napoleon III, and Bismarck—not unlike the contemporary far left's sectarian irrelevancy following the Soviet collapse and the global counterrevolutionary plague of neoliberalism. By the end of that conjuncture however, the sects had united to build Marxist parties deeply ingrained in the working class with their own democratic civil societies. They elected benches of revolutionary parliamentarians who were answerable to the rank and file and committed to international proletarian solidarity over patriotic national unity, and revolutionary democratic-republicanism over narrow reformist and *economist* laborism. Or at least this was the ideal presented on the surface in the resolutions and congresses of the Second International (see Mike Taber, *Under the Socialist Banner: Resolutions of the Second International 1889-1912*, Haymarket, 2021). It was the first period of successful and mass party-building by Marxists, and it was only on the foundations of these parties that the question of taking power was even conceivable in Europe during the revolutionary period of 1917-21. The imperative of revolutionary, democratic, and mass party-building is the first reason we chose these texts.

As every leftist knows, there was a deep rot at the center of the Second International, as its various national sections started to drop their revolutionary principles against their own national ruling classes one-by-one in the “Spirit of 1914” when war was declared. This was a world-historic tragedy, but it was by no means an inevitability, as the usual Marxist just-so story goes. Marxists inherited this narrative from the history as presented by the Comintern in the period of 1920-21, when proletarian revolution was on the immediate agenda and the remnants of the Second International were scabbing against the world’s first workers’ regime. The Soviet regime was locked in an international struggle for life or death and it thus overemphasized its break with the “orthodox Marxism” of the Second International. Lenin himself acknowledged his grounding in Second International politics. In Lenin’s words: “When and where did I call the revolutionism of Bebel and Kautsky opportunism? When and where did I ever claim to have created any sort of special trend in International Social-Democracy not identical with the trend of Bebel and Kautsky?” (*Two Tactics*, Chapter 8).

A full accounting of the relationship between the Second and Third Internationals or between Kautsky and Lenin is beyond the scope of this article. Suffice to say, the *just-so* story inherited by the contemporary Left is an ahistorical caricature. For a comprehensive review, see Ben Lewis's introduction to *Karl Kautsky on Democracy and Republicanism* (Haymarket, 2020). However, the matter of Lenin's critique of Kautsky in one of the most widely read pamphlets on the Left—*State and Revolution*, should be addressed. In his 1920 polemic *Left Wing Communism*, Lenin, referring to Kautsky “when he was still a Marxist and not a renegade,” wrote on the very first page: “How well Kautsky wrote eighteen years ago!” In 1917’s *State and Revolution* however, he accuses Kautsky (in his pre-renegade period) of never having sufficiently grasped Marx’s revolutionary theory of the state, contrasting what Kautsky *didn’t* say in his polemics with Bernstein’s revisionism with what Marx wrote on the Paris Commune in *Civil War in France*. In fact, according to Lars Lih, *State and Revolution* is the *only* place that Lenin substantively criticized Kautsky “when he was still a Marxist.”

However, writing in Swiss exile without access to his library’s complete works of Kautsky, Lenin had apparently forgotten a pamphlet Kautsky had written which directly addresses the Commune and represents Marx’s theory of the state. Kautsky’s *Social Democracy and Republic in France* was a scathing polemic against the French socialist Alexandre Millerand and his supporters. Millerand had set off a controversy in international Social Democracy when he joined the bourgeois coalition cabinet in Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau’s government of “Republican Defense” against the far right, alongside General de Gallifet who was known as “the Commune’s executioner.” It is remarkable that Kautsky’s pamphlet was only published in English in October 2020 (by Ben Lewis in his above-mentioned book), as it is a major political work of the preeminent Marxist thinker between Engels and Lenin. It is particularly relevant to our context, as it articulates the “orthodox Marxist” (or “revolutionary Social Democratic”) strategy in the context of a so-called “high inclusion democracy,” rather than the “low-inclusion” regimes of Finland or Germany or autocracies like the Russian Empire.

The second reason for the choice of these texts is their common emphasis on the centrality of democratic revolutionary political struggle. Since the crystallization of Comintern orthodoxy, Marxists—in both Stalinist and Trotskyist forms, as well as other non-Leninist offshoots—have inherited an economism that underplays the relevance of revolutionary political democracy. This has led to both left-wing and right-wing errors: the former made in the assumption that the struggle for political democracy is merely the task of the bourgeois revolution, the latter in ignoring the struggle against the bourgeois rule-of-law and the specific political form of the class-state, only working towards democratic reform within a legalist constitutional-loyalist schema. Rather than conceding the term ‘democracy’ to the bourgeois liberal-constitutional state, Marx held a two-tier schema of revolution: first, the conquest of political power by the proletariat to form a democratic republic (in other words a *dictatorship of the proletariat*), second for the transition from the democratic regime of the working class towards communism: the abolition of all classes, etc. In the 1847 document “Principles of Communism,” an alternate draft to the *Manifesto*, Engels puts it well:

What will be the course of this revolution? Above all, it will establish a democratic constitution, and through this, the direct or indirect dominance of the proletariat...Democracy would be wholly valueless to the proletariat if it were not immediately used as a means for putting through measures directed against private property and ensuring the livelihood of the proletariat.

In his critique of the Erfurt Program, Engels again is clear: “If one thing is certain it is that our party and the working class can only come to power under the form of a democratic republic. This is even the specific form for the dictatorship of the proletariat, as the Great French Revolution has already shown.” The final section of this reader is devoted to Marx’s conception of the democratic republic, which is consistent with the programmatic demands documented in section II.

The readings address the question of the organization of the party in sections I, on the merger formula, II, on the minimum-maximum program, section IV, on the party of a new type, and section VII on ‘fraction politics’. However, due to the length of the reader already, we have foregone adding a section on democratic centralism: an important but massively bastardized concept usually only understood as the militarized party model that was necessarily adapted by the Communist

Party under the conditions of civil war. In fact, democratic centralism had a rich history in Marxism prior to the ban on factions with which it is usually associated today. Democratic centralism is particularly relevant in DSA after the Bowman affair, and it would be good to do a supplemental reading series on the topic in the future. Section VII, which focuses on "fraction politics," does explore democratic centralism indirectly, without getting into its deeper history, by looking at Lenin's electoral strategy for Russian Social Democrats in the Duma, as well as the 'intransigent' Marxist oppositional political strategy of SPD legislators in the German Reichstag.

A broad study of the classical Marxist political strategy might not seem like the most immediately relevant political education guide to cohere a new tendency within DSA. It doesn't provide us with an obvious answer to tactical questions like what DSA policy should be towards China, how we implement the rank and file strategy, whether or not Marxists should engage in so-called mutual aid, or how to relate to liberal NGO coalition partners in reform campaigns. Even so, it is our view that a rethinking of the *whole history* of the workers movement is necessary to achieve the great goal of working class self-emancipation. The texts in this reader provide a *starting point*. In DSA today, and indeed in the wider history of the US Left, a focus on rethinking the ideological inheritance of Marxism is seen as a distraction from "doing the work" of practical organizing. In order for us as Marxists to develop a solid political footing in the present and be fully confident of our path ahead, we must be critical of following popular trends of thought and ideological narratives not of our own making. Without more critical reflection and rethinking of the dominant narratives of Left history, the necessary spread of awareness and widespread reiteration of what need to be our movement's aims or "great goals" will not be victorious.

A particularly vulgar example of this thinking surfaced during the Bowman affair, when members of the liquidationist right argued that focusing on "internal matters," like how to relate to a DSA Congressman who flagrantly broke our Zionism boycott, distracted us from the outward-facing organizing we should be doing. This was nothing more than a cynical attempt to shut down criticism of the dominant opportunist electoral strategy. However, we would argue it is precisely the lack of debate on the questions posed in this reader that makes these sorts of crises endemic on the Left, and forces us to reinvent the wheel strategically where many of the brilliant minds of Marxism have already intensely labored. While we may not have every tactical question figured out, we believe studying these texts together will give us a wider strategic outlook that can build a principled unity of Marxists towards the basis necessary for a real Communist Party.

PM

January 2022

Section I

The Merger Formula

Section I: The Merger Formula

Summary

The political history of the 19th century was defined by a split between the workers' movements, characterized by the early labor movement (the Chartists in Britain), and the movement of intellectuals trying to better the world *on behalf of* the working class. This is a contradiction that many of us experience on a daily basis today, and Marxism represents a solution to that contradiction via the merger. The slogan 'Social Democracy is the merger of socialism and the worker movement' was Kautsky's summation of Marx's political beliefs. This slogan was taken up by the German Social Democratic Party (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* or SPD) and other parties across the world. The merger was talked about with a massive depth of feeling. Within Marxist Unity Group, we view the merger formula as one of the fundamental pillars of Marxism.

But we are talking about two things when we talk about the merger. The first is the narrative we get in Lih's chapter, and it is part of the formalization of Marxism that came through the Manifesto, especially the first generation of the SPD, and spread throughout the Second International. This first narrative says the movement of socialist intellectuals needs to merge with the workers' movement by taking their skills and generalizing them into the party. Most political movements of the time, but also now, are movements *of* the classes most able to engage in political action (all levels of the ownership class, professionals, etc.), which can occasionally be *on behalf of* the working class. However, charity and advocacy both function by servicing workers while maintaining the resources of the capitalists or the 'fiefdom' of skills that professionals have. The merger formula argues that well-meaning professionals should turn their skills to a democratically organized party, which can thus spread their knowledge and skills to the whole movement. Among that knowledge is the socialist thesis, which is understanding the whole system of exploitation and oppression as an interconnected system that must be overthrown. This knowledge, like administrative skills, is something the workers' movement can eventually learn for itself. However, the argument presented by Kautsky and Lih is that it is on socialists to hasten it.

This is not the only or even the *first* time that the concept of the merger formula was used. That first time was in Engels' 1844 book, *The Conditions of the Working Class in England*:

Hence it is evident that the working-men's movement is divided into two sections, the Chartists and the Socialists. The Chartists are theoretically the more backward, the less developed, but they are genuine proletarians all over, the representatives of their class. The Socialists are more farseeing, propose practical remedies against distress, but, proceeding originally from the bourgeoisie, are for this reason unable to amalgamate completely with the working-class. The union of Socialism with Chartism, the reproduction of French Communism in an English manner, will be the next step, and has already begun. Then only, when this has been achieved, will the working-class be the true intellectual leader of England. Meanwhile, political and social development will proceed, and will foster this new party, this new departure of Chartism.

Here, we see a slightly different version of the merger: socialists are a segment of the workers' movement, and the workers' movement *is* Chartism. This group struggled for critical political rights, including universal and equal suffrage. Here, we see another critical aspect of Marxism throughout the 19th century: the struggle for democracy. The working class political movement *is* the struggle for democracy. Think of a busy street of offices, small stores, manufacturers, etc. Outside of conscious efforts by socialists or proto-socialists, the struggles of each particular site could happen without anything to do with each other, and that is how capitalists prefer it. But by struggling for democratic rights culminating in a democratic republic, the working class finds itself. Democratic struggles can activate fractions of the class that may otherwise not be touched by the labor movement or work together. The battle for democracy is at the core of workers'

collective self-conception *as workers*. The struggle for democracy makes apparent that the denial of universal and equal suffrage is etched into the American Constitution.

These two conceptions of the merger — between socialists and the workers' movement unifying into a socialist party and between socialism and the struggle for democracy culminating in a democratic republic — play off each other throughout the history of socialism. Together, they form the boundaries of Marxist politics. Against charity or advocacy, Marxists advocate for empowering the working class through the development of consciousness and skills. Against anarchism and 'simple' trade unionism, Marxists struggle for democracy to unite the whole class and achieve state power. While the relationship between these two principles has been in constant tension, we can see that the greatest revolutionaries combined the workers' movement with the struggle for democracy.

Study Questions

*Independent Study questions are italicized

1. *Describe the merger formula and its place in the history of social democracy.*
2. *Describe the components of Erfurtianism.*
3. Describe Lih's "circles of awareness." Is this schema applicable to the contemporary socialist movement?
4. What is the "good news" conception of social democracy? Why is social democracy "needed" and why will it be "heeded" by the working class?
5. Why is political freedom "light and air" for the workers' movement?
6. What's the history of the 'light and air' metaphor? How did the Russian Social Democrats describe it?
7. Lih doesn't mention the demand for a democratic republic in the opening chapter. Why might this be the case?

Can Lih's conclusions be taken as definitive?

Lenin Rediscovered: What Is To Be Done? In Context, Chapter One: “The Merger of Socialism and the Worker Movement”

by Lars Lih

Anyone reading Lenin's early writings will often run across the formula 'Social Democracy is the merger of socialism and the worker movement.' At one point he describes this formula as 'Karl Kautsky's expression that reproduces the basic ideas of the *Communist Manifesto*'.¹ In this way, Lenin draws a link between what for him were two foundational books: the *Communist Manifesto* of Marx and Engels (1848) and the *Erfurt Programme* by Karl Kautsky (1891). So important were these books to the young Lenin that he translated both of them into Russian (unfortunately, neither translation survives).²

We shall follow Lenin's lead and describe developments from the 1840s to the 1890s with the merger formula as unifying theme. The aim is not so much to advance a particular interpretation of the history of nineteenth-century Marxist socialism as to bring out how Lenin and others of his generation saw this history. The merger formula is a condensation of a *narrative*. Key to the considerable emotional charge of this narrative is the idea of a *mission* – both the world historical mission of the *workers* to take power and introduce socialism and the mission of the *Social Democrats* to merge socialism and the worker movement. To bring out this emotional aspect out, I shall be quoting some flowery rhetoric of a type that does not often make its way into secondary accounts. Anyone who pictures Social Democracy as based on dry and deterministic 'scientific socialism' and overlooks the fervent rhetoric of good news and saving missions has missed the point.

The merger formula also implied a concrete political strategy that is as often overlooked as the formula's emotional fervour. In order to further the desired merger, certain kinds of organisations need to be set up, certain kinds of political conditions need to be established, and certain social forces need to be assessed as either friends or foes. When the Russian Social Democrats put forth this strategy, observers found it innovative and even heretical. But although the Russians may have come up with the new name of 'hegemony', the basic logic had been fairly thoroughly worked out by the Germans.

My label 'good news interpretation' underscores these two vital but under-appreciated aspects of nineteenth-century Social Democracy: the proselytising fervour of the Social Democrats plus some hard-headed thinking about how best to spread the word.

Marx and Engels

One element of success the workers possess – numbers; but numbers weigh only in the balance, if united by combination and led by knowledge. (Karl Marx, Inaugural Address, 1864.)

At its highest level, the merger narrative is a world-historical epic about the coming of socialism. In its full scope, the epic surveys both 'the history of all hitherto existing societies' and the future.³ In a biographical sketch of Marx written during his lifetime, Engels summarises the crucial final episodes of this epic in one monster sentence:

¹¹ Lenin 1958-65, 4, p. 189, an unpublished newspaper article from late 1899.

² The Manifesto in 1889 and the Erfurt Programme in 1894.

³ Marx and Engels 1959, p. 462.

[Marx's 'new conception of history' teaches that] the ruling big bourgeoisie has fulfilled its historic calling [Beruf], that it is no longer capable of the leadership of society and has even become a hindrance to the development of production ... that historical leadership [Leitung] has passed to the proletariat, a class which, owing to its whole position in society, can only free itself by abolishing altogether all class rule, all servitude and all exploitation, and that the productive forces of society, which have outgrown the control of the bourgeoisie, are only waiting for the associated proletariat to take possession of them in order to bring about a state of things in which every member of society will be enabled to participate not only in production but also in the distribution and administration of social wealth, and which so increases the productive forces of society and their yield by planned operation of the whole of production that the satisfaction of all reasonable needs will be assured to everyone in ever-increasing measure.⁴

While this particular formulation brings out the key feature of Marx's narrative – classes having a 'calling' for 'historical leadership' – it does not bring out the central task of proletarian class leadership, namely, the conquest of political power. The *Communist Manifesto* states this task as follows: 'The immediate aim of the communists is the same as that of all the other proletarian parties: formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of bourgeois rule, conquest of political power by the proletariat'.⁵ Marx's Inaugural Address in 1864 for the Working Men's International Association puts it more succinctly: 'To conquer political power has therefore become the great duty of the working classes'.⁶

Scientific socialism is a reasoned recounting of this world-historical epic. We are here primarily interested in the political strategy that differentiates Marx-based Social Democracy from other nineteenth-century socialists and revolutionaries. Thus we now focus on one particular episode from the overall story, namely, the episode in which the worker class realises its great duty and carries it out.

As long as we remain on the level of the world-historical epic as a whole, we can content ourselves with saying 'the worker class realises its great duty', as if this process occurs more or less automatically. But, once we start to examine this episode in detail, we immediately see that the episode has a dramatic plot of its own, since it describes the outcome of interaction of historical actors who strive to overcome obstacles to their chosen goals. The plot of this episode is summarised by the merger formula: 'Social Democracy is the merger of socialism and the worker movement.' 'Socialism' here means socialist *doctrine*, and Social Democracy is the historical actor that prepares the worker class for its great deed.

According to both Kautsky and Lenin, the first person to set forth the logic of the merger narrative was Engels in *Condition of the Working Class in England*, published in 1845. In a tribute to Engels written after his death in 1895, Kautsky summarised the argument of this book in these words: 'the worker movement must be the power to bring socialism into birth; socialism must be the goal the worker movement sets before itself'.⁷ In his own tribute to the recently deceased Engels, Lenin closely followed Kautsky in giving a high evaluation to *Condition of the Working Class*. This book shows that Engels was 'the first to say that the proletariat is *not only* a suffering class'. Lenin also summarised Engels's argument:

*All that the socialists had to understand was which social force, owing to its position in contemporary society, has a deep interest in the realisation of socialism – and then communicate to that force an awareness of its interests and historical task. The proletariat is such a social force ... The political movement of the worker class inevitably leads the workers to the awareness that there is no escape outside of socialism. On the other hand, socialism only becomes a force when it becomes the aim of the political struggle of the worker class.*⁸

⁴ Engels 1962c, pp. 103-4.

⁵ Marx 1996, p. 13 (Carver translation).

⁶ Marx and Engels 1978, p. 518 (Marx 1984a, p. 12).

⁷ Kautsky 1899, pp. 5-6.

⁸ Lenin 1958-65, 2, p. 8. Lenin's emphasis.

Engels's argument is set forth in the chapter of *Condition of the Working Class* entitled 'Worker Movements'. In it Engels delineates two separate forces. The first is the worker movement that achieved its highest expression in Chartism, a radical political movement on a national scale. The second is the 'socialist agitation' inspired by Robert Owen. The socialists are 'thoroughly tame and peaceable ... They understand, it is true, why the working man is resentful against the bourgeois, but regard as unfruitful this class hatred, which is, after all, the only moral incentive by which the worker can be brought nearer the goal'. And so, 'in its present form, Socialism can never become the common creed of the working class; it must condescend to return for a moment to the Chartist standpoint'.

Engels confidently outlines the next episode in the story in what is evidently the first explicit statement of the merger narrative:

It is evident that the worker movement is divided into two sections, the Chartists and the Socialists. The Chartists are the more backward, the less developed, but they are genuine proletarians all over, the representatives of their class. The Socialists are more far-seeing, propose practical remedies against distress, but, proceeding originally from the bourgeoisie, are for this reason unable to amalgamate completely with the working class. The merger [Verschmelzung] of Socialism with Chartism, the reproduction of French Communism in the English style, will be the next step, and has already begun. Then only, when this has been achieved, will the worker class be the true leader of England. Meanwhile, political and social development will proceed, and will foster this new party, this new departure of Chartism.⁹

I have quoted Kautsky's and Lenin's summary of Engels in order to bring out the crucial importance of this chapter for both men. They saw it as the first statement of the essence of their political creed. And yet it is well-nigh impossible to find any mention of this chapter in the secondary literature. Thus the view from WITBD implies a revised Marxist canon.

The logic of the merger narrative is deeply embedded in the *Communist Manifesto* – or, in any event, Lenin strongly believed this to be the case. The *Communist Manifesto* states that the Communists 'fight [*kiimpfen*] for the attainment of those aims and interests of the working class that lie immediately to hand, but they are also the voice in the present movement of the future of the movement'.¹⁰ This sentence expresses the specifically Marxist road-map to socialism: merging the day-to-day interests that gave rise to the worker movement with the final aim of socialism. It was precisely this road-map, and perhaps even this very sentence, that finally persuaded Georgii Plekhanov, the most important founder of Russian Social Democracy, to become a Marxist in the early 1880s.¹¹

It is not too fanciful to see the merger formula reflected in the overall structure of the *Manifesto*. The *Manifesto* is divided into three large sections: 'Bourgeois and Proletarians', 'Proletarians and Communists', 'Socialist and Communist Literature'. The first section, 'Bourgeois and Proletarian', tells the story of the worker movement up to the point of revolution. The basic theme in this section is the resistance of the workers and their growing organisation, that is, the replacement of mutual isolation through competition by the merger [*Vereinigung*] of the workers into revolutionary associations.¹²

⁹ Engels 1959, p. 453. The nineteenth-century English translation supervised by Engels and published in the 1880s adds two noteworthy glosses: the Chartists are '*theoretically* the more backward', etc., and the post-merger worker class will be 'the true *intellectual* leader of England' (Engels 1993, pp. 244-5, emphasis given to added words).

¹⁰ Marx and Engels 1959, p. 492.

¹¹ I have read somewhere that this sentence was indeed crucial for Plekhanov, but I have been unable to track down the reference. In his memoirs, another founder of Russian Social Democracy, Pavel Akselrod, quotes this sentence from Plekhanov's introduction to his 1882 translation of the *Manifesto*: 'The *Manifesto* can prevent Russian socialists from two equally sorry extremes: a negative attitude toward political activity [= working to overthrow tsarism] on the one hand, and forgetting the future interests of the party, on the other'. Akselrod 1975, p. 423.

¹² Marx and Engels 1959, p. 474.

The next section, 'Proletarians and Communists,' describes the aims of the revolution, that is, 'the future of the movement'. The communist is said to reflect only the beliefs of the most decisive part of the worker movement, the one that ever drives forward [*der entschiedenste, immer weiter treibende Teil*].¹³ Thus the worker movement as a whole still needs to be persuaded of its great duty.

So we see that the first section describes the worker movement and the second section describes socialism. The third section turns to the question of *how* to merge these two. This section – 'Socialist and Communist Literature' – is where the political strategy inherent in the merger formula first begins to be worked out. Marx invites us to observe the self-destruction of all forms of socialism *except* the kind that reaches out to the worker movement. The aggressively polemical tone is in its way a compliment to the socialists. Marx wants to persuade other socialists that *their* great duty is to further this process. *They* are the aware element, they are the ones who can be directly convinced by abstract reasoning and literary polemics. When the socialists have been swung round, they themselves will start spreading awareness in the worker milieu.

The five targets subjected to critique in the final section of the *Manifesto* are not just a random assortment but represent most of the logical possibilities of opposition to the merger strategy. As such, they foreshadow the bulk of the polemics unleashed later by Social Democracy against its competitors. The first target is feudal or reactionary socialists. The merger strategy will not work here because these are the wrong socialists. Their demagogic flirting with the workers covers up a will to dominate the worker movement. Various forms of 'state socialism' continued to challenge Social Democracy throughout the nineteenth century.

In his next target – 'petty-bourgeois socialism' – Marx argues that the merger strategy will fail because it is based on the wrong workers. The interests of the petty bourgeoisie – peasants and shopkeepers – do not lead them toward a viable socialist society but toward a 'reactionary utopia' in which economic independence is based on small individual property.

The third target ('True Socialists') will be examined later when we look at the *Manifesto's* tactical implications. In the fourth and fifth targets, we see the right workers and the right socialists – but *outside* the merger, outside the great synthesis. If the worker movement refuses to adopt the revolutionary socialist point of view, it becomes mere bourgeois reformism that vainly seeks to emancipate workers *inside* the framework of bourgeois society. If the socialists continue to regard the workers as incapable of emancipating themselves, they will dwindle into a set of cranks. The *Manifesto* does not blame the early worker movement and the early socialists for not immediately seeking the merger – indeed, they are praised for their embattled resistance on the one hand and for their critical insight on the other. It is the *continued* refusal of the great synthesis that is reprehensible.

Having established the foundational impact of the merger narrative, we now turn to an outline of the political strategy therein implied, as set forth in various remarks by the masters. The key idea is 'the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves'. The famous motto of the First International can be understood in two ways. On one reading, the motto tells revolutionaries from other classes that they are not wanted: the emancipation of the worker class is the business of the workers and no one else. The motto was understood in this way by the French Proudhonists who were perhaps the most important constituency within the First International.

On another reading, the motto not only refuses to close the door to non proletarian revolutionaries but actually invites them in. If only the workers themselves can bring about their liberation, then it is imperative that they come to understand what it is they need to do and that they obtain the requisite organisational tools. This mission of preparing the worker class for its mission was incumbent upon *any* socialist who accepted the Marxist class narrative, no matter what his or her social origin. As the programme of the Austrian Social-Democratic Party put it in 1890, the aim of Social Democracy is 'to

¹³ Ibid.

organise the proletariat politically, to fill it with the awareness of its position and its task, and to make and keep it spiritually and physically fit for struggle'.

It follows that the job of the socialists is to ensure that the workers are 'united by combination and led by knowledge'. 'Combination' – disciplined organisation – is necessary on both the national and international level if the workers are not to be 'chastised by the common discomfiture of their incoherent effort', as Marx elegantly put it in the Inaugural Address.¹⁴ When Marx and Engels speak of the knowledge that must lead the workers, they mean, of course, scientific socialism. A crucial couple of sentences by Engels defines the role of scientific socialism in the Social-Democratic political strategy. These sentences conclude Engels's immensely influential *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*. I despair of reproducing the rhetorical force made possible by German syntax and therefore present this passage in both languages.

Diese weltbefreende Tat durchzuführen, ist der geschichtliche Beruf des modernen Proletariats. Ihre geschichtlichen Bedingungen, und damit ihre Natur selbst, zu ergründen und so der zur Aktion berufenen, heute unterdrückten Klasse die Bedingungen und die Natur ihrer eignen Aktion zum Bewusstsein zu bringen, ist die Aufgabe des theoretischen Ausdrucks der proletarischen Bewegung, des wissenschaftlichen Sozialismus.

To carry out this world-freeing deed – this is the historical calling of the modern proletariat. The task of the theoretical expression of the proletarian movement – scientific socialism – is to solidly explicate the deed's historical conditions and therefore its very nature. By so doing, scientific socialism will bring the conditions and the nature of the proletariat's own act into the awareness of a class that, although oppressed today, is called to this [great] action.¹⁵

Beruf, 'calling', is an expressively intense word that summons up echoes of a high religious calling. The proletariat is almost defined as 'die zur Aktion berufenen Klasse', 'the called-to-a-great-deed class.' Scientific socialism's own task [*Aufgabe*, another key word] is not only to explicate the proletariat's calling but also to make the class aware of it – that is, to get involved in the nuts and bolts of propaganda and agitation. Thus, scientific socialism tells the proletariat a story about itself: its past ('historical conditions'), its present ('oppressed') and its future ('world-freeing deed'). Since this story will itself inspire the proletariat to carry out the great deed, telling the story is a precondition for freeing the world.

The great duty of taking political power implies that the aim of all this insight and organisation will be a nation-wide, class-based and therefore independent, political party.¹⁶ Marx sketches the development of such a party in Part I of the *Manifesto*. One theme in this sketch is of particular importance for understanding Lenin's rhetoric in *WITBD*: the parallel Marx draws between the nationalisation of the *economy* and the nationalisation of *political organisations*. The bourgeoisie nationalises the economy by dislodging it from its original starting point of local, parochial, scattered and low-technology production and progressively moving it toward the endpoint of national, urban, centralised and industrial production. The bourgeois transformation of society is mirrored by the transformation of society's own political organisations. Thus 'the confrontations between individual workers and individual bourgeois increasingly take on the character of confrontations between two classes'. The drive toward nation-wide combination is furthered by 'the growing means of communication

¹⁴ Marx 1984a [1864].

¹⁵ Engels 1962b, p. 228.

¹⁶ The necessity of some sort of organisation aimed at political power is inherent in the new world view. Marx's views on the role of 'the party' are less basic, especially since the appropriate institutions and terminology were still inchoate at this period. With this proviso, the discussions by Molyneux 1978 and Johnstone 1967 of Marx's view of the party provide valuable insights.

generated by large-scale industry that put the workers of different localities in contact with one another. But this contact is all that is needed to centralise the many local struggles of a generally similar kind into a national – a class – struggle'.¹⁷

Thus, the merger formula sets the socialists the task of organising and propagandising on a national level. From this definition of the task flows an enormous tactical implication: the necessity of freedom of assembly, freedom of the press and other political freedoms. This implication is already drawn without any ambiguity in the *Communist Manifesto*. As discussed earlier, the third section of the *Manifesto* outlines the nature of the merger between socialism and the worker movement in the negative form of showing how *not* to do it. In the third of the five targets attacked in the third section, Marx draws a contrast between the German 'True Socialists' and the German communists. As described by Marx, the True Socialists were a set of intellectuals who 'hurled traditional anathemas against liberalism, against representative government, against bourgeois competition, bourgeois freedom of the press, bourgeois right, bourgeois freedom and equality'. They were so eager to use socialist demands as a way of discrediting any striving for political freedom that they became tools of the nobility and the German absolutist governments. Far different are the German communists, who fight *alongside* the bourgeoisie 'as soon as it shows itself revolutionary – against the absolutist monarchy, the feudal landowners, the petty bourgeoisie'.¹⁸

Exactly these passages are cited by Plekhanov in *Socialism and the Political Struggle*, the book he issued in 1883 to announce his conversion to Social Democracy. As Plekhanov's title implies, the aim of the book is to convince Russian socialists that the struggle for political freedom must be their most urgent priority.¹⁹ But the insistence on political freedom was basic not only to Russian but to all Social Democrats: it was what distinguished the political strategy of Marx-based Social Democracy from all other nineteenth-century socialists, revolutionaries and worker-movement activists.

The central importance of political freedoms for Social Democracy is brought out in another revealing but overlooked text by Engels, 'The Workingmen of Europe in 1877'.²⁰ In this survey of the progress of worker parties all over the continent, the state of political freedom is a touchstone of the aims and successes of the various national parties. Engels's description of the French worker class is particularly revealing. By 1877, the French worker class had suffered two recent traumas. The first was

the eighteen years of the Bonapartist Empire, during which the press was fettered, the right of meeting and of association suppressed and the working class consequently deprived of every means of inter-communication and organisation.

This repressive regime was followed by the crushing of the Paris Commune in 1871. The ones who held power in France now were the very middle-class radicals who (as Engels angrily put it) had betrayed the workers and the country.

Nevertheless, Engels's political advice is to support these hateful bourgeois democrats against monarchist attacks. The worker class has

¹⁷ Marx and Engels 1959, pp. 470--1. This section of the *Manifesto* forms the background to Lenin's metaphor of 'artisanal limitations' as a stage in the development of party organisation (see Chapter Eight).

¹⁸ Marx and Engels 1959 , pp. 485-8. According to Gareth Stedman Jones, Marx is unfair here to the actual 'True Socialists' (Stedman Jones 2002). Jones's assertion does not detract from the centrality of the tactical point Marx is making.

¹⁹ In his biography of Plekhanov, Samuel Baron brings out the importance of this section of the *Manifesto* for Plekhanov. Unfortunately, he also argues that this section and its tactical implications were 'little more than an aside' for Marx and Engels (Baron 1963, p. 112).

²⁰ Engels 1989, pp. 209-29 (written in 1878 for a New York socialist newspaper). Hal Draper first pointed out the importance of this article (Draper 1977-90, Vol. 2).

but one immediate interest: to avoid the recurrence of such another protracted reign of repression [as it had experienced under Bonapartism], and with it the necessity of again fighting, not for their own direct emancipation but for a state of things permitting them to prepare for the final emancipatory struggle.

Only the republic, despicable as it was, gave them a chance to 'obtain such a degree of personal and public liberty as would allow them to establish a working-class press, an agitation by meetings and an organisation as an independent political party, and moreover, the conservation of the republic would save them the necessity of delivering a separate battle for its future re-conquest'.

Political freedoms are so fundamental that even political independence should be temporarily sacrificed for them if need be. In 1877, the worker class supported the republicans from an attack by the monarchists. Engels comments:

*No doubt in this they acted as the tail of the middle-class Republicans and Radicals, but a working class which has no press, no meetings, no clubs, no political societies, what else can it be but the tail of the Radical middle class party? What can it do, in order to gain its political independence, but support the only party which is bound to secure to the people generally, and therefore, to the workmen too, such liberties as will admit of independent organisation?*²¹

Thus the new view of history set out in the *Communist Manifesto* came attached with a political strategy, one that is firmly outlined in the *Manifesto* itself and one to which its authors remained loyal over the years. Some writers see a contrast between the revolutionism of the Address to the Communist League in 1850 and the reformism of the Inaugural Address of the Working Men's International Association in 1864. Yet both are based on the same fundamental political strategy: strive to obtain political liberties and use them once attained to bring combination and knowledge to a nationwide, independent, worker political party whose goal is to conquer political power in order to introduce socialism. Despite the fierceness of the cry *Die Revolution im Permanenz!*, the 1850 address is engaged in giving electoral advice ('even where there is no prospect whatsoever of their being elected, the workers must put up their own candidates in order to preserve their independence, to count their forces and to bring before the public their revolutionary attitude and party standpoint') under the assumption of a 'lengthy revolutionary development'.²² Despite the mildness of the Inaugural Address's salute to legislation such as the English Ten Hours Bill, Marx still insists that the great duty of the worker class is to conquer political power in order to abolish hired labour.

The Marx presented here is not the Marx of Leszek Kolakowski, who opens his trilogy with what he considers the most important fact about Marx, namely, 'Marx was a German philosopher'.²³ Nor is it the Marx of Geoff Eley, who writes that 'Marx's most important legacy for the pre-1914 social democratic tradition' was an economic theory that emphasised 'the determining effects of material forces on human achievement, and the linking of political opportunities to movements of the economy'.²⁴ Nor yet is it the Marx of Eric Hobsbawm, who says that Marx's greatest impact came from the assertion of socialism's inevitability.²⁵ On the other hand, the Marx presented here is akin to the Marx of Hal Draper. Draper's great

²¹ Engels 1989, pp. 222-3.

²² Marx and Engels 1960, p. 251. As we shall see, the German SPD followed this electoral advice to the letter.

²³ Kolakowski 1978, 1, p. 1. It is hard to find in Kolakowski's account even a mention of the conquest of state power by the proletariat, much less a recognition of its central role.

²⁴ Eley 2002, p. 38. Eley has an excellent description of the new 'independent mass party of labour': 'independent, because it organised separately from liberal coalitions; mass, because it required broadly based public agitation; labour, because it stressed the need for class-based organisation; and a party, by proposing permanent, centrally organised, programmatically co-ordinated, and nationally directed activity' (pp. 39-40). Unfortunately, he contrasts this to 'vanguardism', although this strategy is precisely what Social Democrats (including Lenin) meant by a vanguard party.

²⁵ Hobsbawm 1962, p. 289.

achievement was to put Marx in the company not so much of Hegel and his followers, not so much of Ricardo and his followers, but of the nineteenth century's other radical, socialist, revolutionary and worker leaders – the likes of August Blanqui, Ferdinand Lassalle, and Mikhail Bakunin.²⁶

Of course, Marx was indeed a major philosopher and economist. But the Marx who was central for Lenin and his generation was the one whose new view of the *path* to socialism gave rise to a new view of the *tasks* of the socialists – a new political strategy that, in turn, inspired some of the most impressive and innovative political institution-building of the nineteenth century. In 1917, in his notebook on Marxism and the state, Lenin commented on 'the basic idea of Marx: the conquest of *political power* by the proletariat'.²⁷ Marx the philosopher and Marx the economist tried to give these few words the most solid foundation possible. But the Marx who had the greatest impact on the nineteenth century was the activist who tried to draw out all the implications for political strategy that lay hidden in these few words.

Ferdinand Lassalle

In Italy at the turn of the century, so we are told, Italian socialists named their sons Lassalo and their daughters Marxina.²⁸ Some informed observers were ready to give Ferdinand Lassalle top billing: 'To Lassalle, even more than to Marx, modern Socialists are deeply indebted; Marx set the world of culture thinking and arguing, Lassalle set the people organising'.²⁹ In the German Social-Democratic Party, Lassalle remained the hero-founder, and meetings were opened by an anthem that affirmed:

Der Bahn, der kilhnen, folgen wir,

Die uns gefilhrt Lassalle.

(We follow that bold path on which Lassalle has led us.)³⁰

These days, in contrast, Lassalle has more or less dropped off the historical radar screen. A recent 600-page book on the history of the European Left in the last 150 years does not even mention him.³¹ A direct motive for bringing out his contribution here is that Lassalle makes an appearance in a crucial passage in *WITBD*. A wider motive is the conviction that one cannot understand the emotional world of Social Democracy nor the logic of its institutions without looking at its forgotten founding father.

Lassalle's career as a leader of nascent German Social Democracy was incredibly short, given its impact on the rest of the century. In 1863, he was asked by a German worker group to give his opinion on the best political course for the workers. In his *Open Letter* (also known as his *Manifesto*), Lassalle advised them to organise an independent political party aimed at achieving universal suffrage. He then plunged into a whirlwind round of setting up just such an organised party. Only a year and a half after the start of his campaign, he was killed in a duel that arose out of his love affair with a German

²⁶ Draper 1977-90.

²⁷ Lenin 1958-65, 33, p. 226.

²⁸ Michels 1962 [1911], p. 95.

²⁹ Villiers 1908, p. 86.

³⁰ Russell 1965 [1896], 130. On the importance of this song in SPD culture, see Lidtke 1985, pp. 112-14. Lidtke observes that 'throughout the nineties numerous localities still held Lassalle Festivals, but no one seems ever to have thought of holding a Marx Festival' (Lidtke 1985, p. 195).

³¹ Eley 2002.

countess. His death was probably a good career move, since his organising efforts had achieved little in concrete results and his flirtation with conservatives such as Bismarck might soon have sorely discredited him. As it was, he remained a martyr and an icon of the cause.

Lassalle's impact on his contemporaries was in large part due to his larger-than-life flamboyance. The English critic George Brandes, writing in 1881, declared that the fundamental feature of his temperament was 'apparent in the quality best expressed by the Jewish word "Chutspo", which connotes presence of mind, impudence, temerity, resolution, and effrontery'.³² Lassalle's legacy to German Social Democracy was a very mixed bag indeed and the movement spent many years shedding many of his policy nostrums as well as his proclivities toward dictatorial party organisation. In our discussion, however – with one important exception – we are going to focus on the permanent contribution that even otherwise suspicious Marxists were prepared to grant. There were two sides to Lassalle's permanent contribution. He brought out the emotional underpinning of the merger narrative more vividly and effectively than either Marx or Engels. He also brought the political strategy inherent in the merger formula out on the national stage for all to see.

The emotional fervour latent in the merger formula arises most profoundly from the idea of a *mission*: a noble task that one has an obligation to accept. In the texts by Marx and Engels we have looked at, we have seen references to a *Beruf*, to a 'world-freeing deed', to the workers' 'great duty' and their 'historic mission'. But Marx and Engels were perhaps too sardonic to wax eloquent on this theme. Lassalle was just the opposite. While his melodramatic rhetoric has no doubt dated more than Marx's, it was extremely effective at the time. Thirty years later, propagandising among the workers of Petersburg, K.M. Takhtarev found that Lassalle's 'idea of the worker estate' made a very strong impression on the workers in his study circle.³³

Lassalle explained the 'idea of the worker estate' by telling the following story. Originally, the workers had been united with the bourgeoisie as part of the revolutionary Third Estate, but then the bourgeoisie separated itself off due to its egoism and desire for privilege. For the workers, in contrast, self-interest and group solidarity coincided.

*The more earnestly and deeply the lower classes of society strive after the improvement of their condition as a class, the improvement of the lot of their class, the more does this personal interest, instead of opposing the movement of history and being thereby condemned to that immorality [that is exemplified by the bourgeoisie], assume a direction which thoroughly accords with the development of the whole people, with the victory of the idea, with the advance of culture, with the living principle of history itself, which is no other than the development of freedom. Or in other words ... its interest is the interest of the entire human race.*³⁴

The workers now constituted a Fourth Estate that possessed a historical *mission* to transform society.

*You are able therefore to devote yourselves with personal passion to this historical development, and to be certain that the more strongly this passion grows and burns within you ... the higher is the moral position you have attained. We may congratulate ourselves, gentlemen, that we have been born at a time which is destined to witness this the most glorious work of history, and that we are permitted to take a part in accomplishing it.*³⁵

But this destiny imposes the obligation of a quasi-religious earnestness, as revealed by the following widely-quoted passage from one of Lassalle's most influential writings, *The Worker Programme*:

³² Brandes 1911, p. 16 (preface dated 1881).

³³ Takhtarev 1924, p. 24

³⁴ Lassalle 1899, p. 53 (*Worker Programme*). When possible, I have used translations made in the nineteenth century as less academic and closer to Lassalle's agitational spirit. Quoted passages have been checked against the original German text (Lassalle 1919a, pp. 193-4).

³⁵ Lassalle 1899, pp. 53-9; Lassalle 1919a, pp. 194, 199 (*Worker Programme*).

Nothing is more calculated to impress upon a class a worthy and moral character, than the awareness that it is destined to become a ruling class, that it called upon to raise the principle of its class to the principle of the entire age, to convert its idea into the leading idea of the whole of society and thus to form this society by impressing upon it its own character.

The high and world-wide honour of this destiny must occupy all your thoughts. Neither the burden of the oppressed, nor the idle dissipation of the thoughtless, nor even the harmless frivolity of the insignificant, are henceforth becoming to you. You are the rock on which the Church of the present is to be built.

It is the lofty moral earnestness of this thought which must with devouring exclusiveness possess your spirits, fill your minds, and shape your whole lives, so as to make them worthy of it, conformable to it, and always related to it. It is the moral earnestness of this thought which must never leave you, but must be present to your heart in your workshops during the hours of labour, in your leisure hours, during your walks, at your meetings, and even when you stretch your limbs to rest upon your hard couches, it is this thought which must fill and occupy your minds till they lose themselves in dreams.

The more exclusively you immerse yourselves in the moral earnestness of this thought, the more undividedly you give yourselves up to its glowing fervour, by so much the more, be assured, will you hasten the time within which our present period of history will have to fulfil its task, so much the sooner will you bring about the accomplishment of this task.³⁶

Lassalle was also remembered because he 'showed the path', that is, he set out the fundamentals of the party's political strategy. This strategy was first announced in the *Open Letter*: 'The working class must constitute itself an independent political party and make universal, equal and direct suffrage the primary watchword and banner of this party.'³⁷ Thus Lassalle called for an *independent political organisation*: all three terms have equal emphasis. At the time that Lassalle put forth his strategy, all of its facets were innovative, not to say outrageous.³⁸ By insisting on a *political organisation*, Lassalle was flying in the face of an opinion widespread even among the workers themselves that (as Lassalle put it in his *Open Letter*) 'you have *no business* to trouble yourselves about a *political* movement, for this is something in which you have no interest'.³⁹

The content of worker politics comes from the uplifting *mission* of the workers and their loyalty to 'the idea of the Fourth Estate'. Lenin in *WITBD* makes a distinction between '*tred-iunionist* politics' and 'Social-Democratic politics'. The essence of this distinction is already in Lassalle:

You want to found Savings-banks, Invalid and Sick-help Societies; institutions whose relative but subordinate importance I readily recognise. [But] is it your aim to ameliorate the condition of the worker – guarding him against the results of recklessness, sickness, age and accidents, the unguarded effects of which press individual workers below the ordinary condition of their class?

If so, the establishment of such institutions will be fully equal to meet your aims. But for such an aim, it would hardly be worthwhile to instigate a movement throughout all Germany and commence a universal agitation of the entire worker estate.

³⁶ Lassalle 1899, pp. 59-60; Lassalle 1919a, pp. 200-1 (*Worker Programme*). Note how this passage combines determinism (you are *destined* to be a ruling class) with a call to passionate activity to bring about this inevitable denouement.

³⁷ Lassalle 1919c, p. 47 (*Open Letter*). The nineteenth-century English translation of the *Open Letter* freely adds considerable glosses to Lassalle's text. For example, it says in this passage that universal suffrage is for the worker party 'a sentiment to be inscribed on its banners, and forming the central principle of its action' (Lassalle 1898, p. 8).

³⁸ For background on the emergence of the SPD, see Barclay and Weitz 1998.

³⁹ Lassalle 1919c, p. 42 (*Open Letter*); compare Lassalle 1898, pp. 4-5.

*A movement of such magnitude as the universal agitation of the workingmen of the nation, however, would be far from finding its reward in accomplishing so little when so much could be done.*⁴⁰

Lassalle also insisted on political *independence*, a goal which in 1861 had a very concrete meaning: to break away from the liberal Progressive Party that to a large extent had summoned up the worker societies in the first place in order to recruit followers in its struggle for a liberal constitution. Lassalle violently attacked the Progressives because their bourgeois interests were in conflict with those of the workers. He also attacked them because of their lack of energy, weakness and pusillanimity in fighting for their own goal of political freedom. This sort of accusation against the liberals became a standard feature of Social Democracy both in Germany and in Russia.

Finally, Lassalle insisted on effective *organisation*. One aspect of this theme was a rather dictatorial and 'cult of personality' mode of inner-party organisation. What I want to stress here is rather how Lassalle's ideal of organisation followed from the fundamental aim of spreading the good news of the 'idea of the Fourth Estate'.

But how to effect the introduction of universal direct suffrage? Look at England. The great agitation of the English people against the Corn Laws lasted for over five years. And then the laws had to go: a Tory Ministry itself had to abolish them.

*Organise yourselves as a Universal Union of German Workers for the purpose of a legal and peaceful but unwearying, unceasing agitation for the introduction of universal direct suffrage in every German state.*⁴¹

Lassalle wanted a party of agitation that openly inscribed its sentiments on its banners. In order to succeed in this aim, the new party had to set up treasuries based on membership dues. These treasuries will support a powerful agitation force:

*Found and publish newspapers, to make this demand daily and to prove the reasons for it from the state of society. With the same funds circulate pamphlets for the same purpose. Pay agents out of the Union's funds to carry this insight into every corner of the country, to thrill the heart of every worker, every house-servant, every farm-labourer, with this cry. Indemnify out of the Union's funds all workers who have been injured or prosecuted for their activity. Repeat daily, unwearingly, the same thing, again the same thing, always the same thing.*⁴²

In this way, Lassalle evoked the image of the spreading circle of awareness that was later central to Lenin's idea of class leadership:

*Propagate this cry in every workshop, every village, every hut. May the workers of the towns let their higher insight and education [Bildung] overflow on to the workers of the country. Debate, discuss, everywhere, every day, without pausing, without ending as in the great English agitation against the Corn Laws, now in peaceful public assemblies, now in private conferences, the necessity of universal direct suffrage. The more the millions who echo your voice, the more irresistible will be its influence.*⁴³

The key to effective agitation, Lassalle believed, was to keep it simple by focusing on one basic message. In the case of his own agitation, the message was to be 'universal suffrage in order to obtain state aid to worker co-operatives'. This programme was a very distorted first approximation of the programme of conquering political power in order to introduce socialism.

Thus Lassalle had his own version of the merger formula: 'The great destiny of our age is precisely this – which the dark ages had been unable to conceive, much less to achieve – the dissemination of scientific knowledge among the body

⁴⁰ Lassalle 1898, pp. 9-10; Lassalle 1919c, pp. 48-9 (*Open Letter*). Later Social Democratic opinion concluded that Lassalle overdid his hostility to reforms as such.

⁴¹ Ensor 1910, pp. 45-6; Lassalle 1919c, pp. 89-90. Note Lassalle's inspiration by the middle-class anti-Corn Laws agitation campaign in England.

⁴² Ensor 1910, p. 46; Lassalle 1919c, pp. 90-1 (*Open Letter*).

⁴³ Ensor 1910, p. 46; Lassalle 1919c, p. 90 (*Open Letter*).

of the people'.⁴⁴ What Lassalle means by 'science' here is essentially his popularised version of Marx's historical materialism. And what he meant by 'disseminate' was not adult education lectures, but the excited agitation machine described in the *Open Letter*.

Many features of Lassalle's programme, tactics and organisation were rejected by German Social Democracy as the years went by. One of the most important Marxist criticisms of Lassalle could have been predicted on the basis of the *Manifesto* passages cited previously. According to the Marxist wing of the early Social-Democratic movement, Lassalle's hostility toward the bourgeoisie led him to dangerously underestimate the importance of political freedom. Wilhelm Liebknecht, one of these early Marxist leaders, used the opportunity of his trial for high treason in 1872 to make this point:

*I showed that a one-sided procedure against the bourgeoisie could only be of service to the aristocracy, that the contemplated universal suffrage, without freedom of the press, of meeting, and of combination, was nothing but an instrument of the reaction, and that 'State-help' from a government of lordlings could only be granted to corrupt the workmen and make them useful for the purposes of the reaction.*⁴⁵

It is easy to pick holes in Lassalle's programme and tactics and certainly his rhetoric has badly dated. Put next to Marx, he is, as Jeeves would say, intellectually negligible. Yet his current absence from historical memory must distort our view of Social-Democratic activists such as Lenin, for whom Lassalle was a hero even after all the criticisms were accepted. Lassalle put the political strategy adumbrated in the *Communist Manifesto* on the map. He caught two essential features of that strategy: the emotional appeal of the call to a historical mission and the organisational implications of preparing the workers to carry out that mission. He can indeed be called the first Social Democrat.

We may conclude with an appreciation of Lassalle penned by Eduard Bernstein in his orthodox, pre-revisionist days. His book *Ferdinand Lassalle as a Social Reformer* (1893) was heavily influenced by Engels and translated into English by Marx's daughter Eleanor. Engels's role in the book was so great that Hal Draper practically treats him rather than Bernstein as the author.⁴⁶ The book as a whole is hostile to Lassalle and insists on his weaknesses at great length. All the more valuable, then, is the book's summary of Lassalle's enduring achievements. The value of organisation was one such contribution: 'If the German Social Democracy has always recognised the value of a strong organisation, if it has been so convinced of the necessity of the concentration of forces, that even without the outer bond of organisation it has yet known how to perform all the functions of one, this is largely a heritage of the agitation of Lassalle.' But Lassalle's central contribution was to turn the idea of historical mission into practical politics:

*Where at most there was only a vague desire, he gave conscious effort; he trained the German workers to understand their historical mission, he taught them to organise as an independent political party, and in this way at least accelerated by many years the process of development of the movement. ... The time for victory was not yet, but in order to conquer, the workers must first learn to fight. And to have trained them for the fight, to have, as the song says, given them swords, this remains the great, the undying merit of Ferdinand Lassalle.*⁴⁷

Party of a new type: the SPD model

⁴⁴ Lassalle 1900, p. 44 (*Science and the Workingman*, translated by Thorstein Veblen); Lassalle 1919b, p. 247. Compare Lassalle's dictum 'die Wissenschaft an das Volk zu bringen' with Lenin's notorious formula about bringing socialist awareness to the workers from without.

⁴⁵ As cited by Russell 1965 [1896], pp. 77-9.

⁴⁶ Draper 1977-90, 4, pp. 266-9. According to Draper, 'this book was one of the most acute Marxist analyses ever published'.

⁴⁷ Bernstein 1970, pp. 190-2 (translated by Eleanor Marx Aveling). The song is the anthem quoted at the beginning of this section.

It is rather startling to one whose observation of socialist movements has been confined almost entirely to the United States, to enter one of the largest and most beautiful halls in the world, – a hall seating 10,000 persons – and find it packed to the point of suffocation with delegates, members, and friends of the Social-Democratic Party of Germany ... It was an impressive sight.⁴⁸

The American socialist Robert Hunter was not the only one impressed by the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD). The strength and prestige of the SPD was a source of confidence – no, *the* source of confidence – for socialists the world around. Hunter reels out the facts on which this confidence rested:

The German party is the oldest and largest socialist organisation in Europe. It represents the thought of a very large proportion of the working men of the entire nation. There are more socialists in Germany than there are people in Spain, or Mexico, or in Belgium, Holland, Denmark, and Norway put together. Its present vote would have elected the President of the United States up till the time of Grant's second term. It polls a million more votes than any other party in Germany.⁴⁹

Hunter stresses some other features that made contemporaneous observers regard the SPD as something unseen before, as a party of a new type in European politics. ‘The German socialist movement is a democratically controlled organisation of a character unknown in American politics’. Furthermore, ‘the party carries on a propaganda of incredible dimensions’.

Finally, it was truly a working man’s party – and

they were of that type of working men one too rarely sees outside of Germany ... They were serious minded, ruddy-faced, muscular; one could see that they had saved from the exploitation of the factory enough physical and mental strength to live like men during their leisure hours; and my belief is that physically and mentally they can hold their own in the essentials with any other class in Germany.⁵⁰

Most discussion of the SPD today, whether from the Left or the Right, is heavily tinged with irony. The party was not as revolutionary as it thought, it was not as Marxist as it thought, it was not as democratic as it thought, and (more recently) it was not as committed to gender equality as it thought. The textbook interpretation of *WITBD* in particular operates with a contrast between Lenin’s fierce revolutionary party and the SPD’s mild mannered party of reform. In Bertram Wolfe’s words, the parties and trade unions of the West were ‘democratically organised, comfortably adapted to the sizeable legality permitted them, and long since devoid of insurrectionary spirit except as a banner for festal occasions’.⁵¹

No doubt there is much that gives support to all this irony. But perhaps we can understand the more dramatic view taken by contemporaneous observers when they heard August Bebel, the leader of the Party, exclaim ‘I shall remain the mortal enemy of this society and social system, in order to sap its very life and, if I can, to eliminate it altogether.’ Or when they heard Prussian officials say that the SPD was not ‘a reformist party ... but a revolutionary party, whose aim is the destruction of the existing state and social system’.⁵² In any event, if we want to understand the impact of the SPD model on *WITBD*, we must, for a time, bracket the irony of hindsight. For this reason, I will document my discussion with comment from contemporaneous observers.

⁴⁸ Hunter 1908, p. 1.

⁴⁹ Hunter 1908, pp. 4-5.

⁵⁰ Hunter 1908, pp. 1-2, 5.

⁵¹ Wolfe 1964 [1948], pp. 160-1.

⁵² Hall 1977, pp. 17, 58 (Bebel in 1903, Prussian official in 1897). The cited comment by Prussian Minister of the Interior von der Recke was in defence of a bill that would have prohibited the SPD from holding public meetings. This bill almost passed. Hall’s excellent study is an effective response to Wolfe’s rosy view cited above.

Every institution has an idealised model of itself – ‘idealised’ in the sense that it is abstracted from everyday concrete practices, in the further sense that it reflects the ideals and goals of the institution, and in the final sense that it pictures the institution and its members as more heroic and pure hearted than reality warrants. Such a model is not just a self-flattering pat on the back but plays a crucial role in the working of the organisation. It determines what is seen as normal and what abnormal. Debates within the organisation and proposals for innovation are steeped in a rhetoric imposed by the model. Such a model is in fact the unwritten constitution of the organisation.⁵³

This idealised model can sometimes have a greater impact on foreigners than on the institution itself. The ideal model of the English Parliament is a case in point. In a similar way, the SPD model was normative for all of European Social Democracy, as described by Gary Steenson:

*When Jean Dormoy wrote his first-hand account of the founding congress of the first French workers' party, he referred to the congress's decision 'to organise itself into a party similar to that which existed in Germany'; seven years later in a letter to Engels, Paul Lafargue referred to his group as 'we who hold up the German party as a model'. An anarchist opponent of the first united workers' political party in Austria objected strongly to the repeated, almost exclusive reference at its founding congress to the German model. And one prominent historian of the Italian worker-socialist movement has argued that the German organisational example was at least as influential with the founders of the first national socialist party as was the northerners' presumed marxian theory, and, in fact, that the former fostered widespread acceptance of the latter.*⁵⁴

Although Steenson might be surprised to hear it, he could and should have added the Russian Social-Democratic Worker Party to this list. As we sketch out the features of the SPD model that are particularly relevant to *WITBD*, we shall see that the model was fundamentally narrative in form: it told a story about the SPD's past, present and future. We shall start with the ways in which the Party in the 1890s saw its own past. When the Party looked back, it saw its origin in a double act of independence from liberals and bourgeois democrats. We have already seen how Lassalle urged the workers to reject the tutelage of the liberal Progressive Party. The other wing of the movement – the more Marx-oriented groups led by August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht – had a more gradual but no less determined break with its radical-democratic middle-class sponsors. In the case of Bebel and Liebknecht, it was an internal evolution in their views as well as an external organisational evolution that led them by 1869 to embrace the programme of Marx's International and the accompanying ideal of an independent, class-based political party.⁵⁵ In contrast to Lassalle, however, Bebel and Liebknecht retained from their days as radical democrats a firm conviction of the primordial importance of political freedom.

The next great episode in the Party's story of itself was the heroic outlaw period. In 1878, at Bismarck's instigation, very harsh anti-socialist laws were put into effect that essentially outlawed the Party with the bizarre but crucial exception of its ability to elect parliamentary representatives.⁵⁶ The period of persecution ended in 1890 with a resounding victory for the SPD and a resounding defeat for the Iron Chancellor. Despite the persecution, the SPD votes swelled during this

⁵³ A comparison can be made to what John Kay calls the American Business Model: an idealised model of the American economy that is not a reliable empirical guide to the actual workings of this economy but that nevertheless is fervently believed in by many of the practitioners within the economy and that has acquired prestige throughout the world as an explanation of the perceived successes of the American economy (Kay 2003).

⁵⁴ Steenson 1991, p. 80.

⁵⁵ Steenson 1981; Barclay and Weitz 1998.

⁵⁶ 'Not only were party organisations proper outlawed, but also trade unions with even the faintest socialist connections, cultural and exercise clubs, workers' lending libraries, consumer co-operatives, and on occasion even taverns and cafes popular with workers were shut down by overzealous police officials' (Steenson 1981, p. 35).

period until it became the largest single party in the German Empire. In 1890 the laws were allowed to lapse. By the end of 1890, Bismarck was gone but the SPD was still there.

The tactics used by the German socialists during this period were, of course, of consuming interest to Russian Social Democrats, for whom absolutist repression was an ongoing reality and not just a matter of 'exceptional laws'. At the centre of these tactics was the role of exile organisations in giving the movement a continuing voice and sense of direction. The most important role here was played by Eduard Bernstein as editor of the newspaper weekly *Sozialdemokrat*, published in Switzerland. One of the sagas of the outlaw period told how this paper continued to be distributed by the 'red postal service' right under the noses of the Imperial gendarmerie. As Bertrand Russell remarked in the 1890s, 'this paper, which was secretly distributed with the greatest energy, and soon began to make a large profit for the party funds, restored, in some measure, the connection between the central authority and the individual members'.⁵⁷

Sozialdemokrat's role in keeping the Party together was due just as much to its editorial line as to its successful distribution. In his influential party history first published in 1898 (just when the *Iskra* plan was taking shape in Lenin's mind), Franz Mehring commented that 'Bernstein well understood how to maintain the newspaper as an organ of the whole party and to give it, at the same time, a definite, firm, clear direction that took into account all tactical demands without violating principle'.⁵⁸ Thus the Russians had a ready-made model for the party-building role of a newspaper published abroad.

Above and beyond the tactical and organisational successes of the outlaw period, it demonstrated what a sympathetic but not uncritical British observer called 'the extraordinary vitality of the movement' – so vital that absolutist repression could not destroy it (an encouraging thought for Russian Social Democrats). This British observer, Thomas Kirkup, goes on to explain:

*The Social Democrats had shown a patience, resolution, discipline, and, in the absence of any formal organisation, a real and effective organisation of mind and purpose which are unexampled in the annals of the labour movement since the beginning of human society. They had made a steady and unflinching resistance to the most powerful statesman since the first Napoleon, who wielded all the resources of a great modern State, and who was supported by a press that used every available means to discredit the movement; and as a party, they had never been provoked to acts of violence. In fact, they had given proof of all the high qualities which fit men and parties to play a great role in history. The Social-Democratic movement in Germany is one of the most notable phenomena of our time.*⁵⁹

The triumphal outcome of the outlaw period did more to confirm a sense of the coming revolution's 'natural necessity' than all the learned proofs of scientific socialism.

We turn now the SPD's view of the present, that is, the 1890s. The SPD model interpreted the innovative institutions of the Party as the embodiment of the Marxist political strategy, namely, to bring to the workers the *insight* and *organisation* that they needed to enable them to carry out their great mission. The emphasis on insight led to the Party's educational thrust. The Party's job was to teach the workers not only *how* to carry out their mission but, more fundamentally, the very fact that they *had* a mission. As Gary Steenson states, a key assumption of the SPD model was that 'while the conditions of their experience might predispose workers to adhere to social democracy, specifically socialist consciousness had to be taught and learned'.⁶⁰

This essential point is stated in more detail by H.-J. Schulz:

⁵⁷ Russell 1965, p. 106. The man who ran the red postal service was Julius Motteler; for detailed discussion, see Lüdtke 1966, pp. 89-97.

⁵⁸ Mehring 1898, 2, p. 463; see also Gay 1962, pp. 60-1.

⁵⁹ Kirkup 1906, p. 222. I suspect that this passage comes from the first edition of 1892, that is, fresh after the triumph of the SPD.

⁶⁰ Steenson 1981, p. 130.

In a movement which began in the 1860s with the establishment of liberal education clubs for craftsmen and workers, the original and paradigmatic act of proletarian emancipation was not the strike or street protest but the reading of authorised texts, the acquisition of approved knowledge for the intellectual, moral and aesthetic improvement of the individual. The equation ‘knowledge is power’ attended the birth of the socialist movement and remained, despite all criticism, a central metaphor of its discourse ... The progressive worker who entered the movement was obliged to become, first of all, a reader of canonised texts. He was taught to approach each of these texts as containing coherent, self-evident and class-transcending scientific truth.⁶¹

This educational thrust was supported by an agitation machine of unprecedented elaborateness. Already in the 1870s, prior to the anti-socialist laws, this machine amazed observers:

A staff of skilful, intelligent, and energetic agitators advocated the new creed in every town of Germany, and they were supported by an effective machinery of newspapers, pamphlets, treatises, social gatherings, and even almanacs, in which the doctrines of socialism were suggested, inculcated, and enforced in every available way.⁶²

In 1911, the German sociologist Robert Michels made a similar observation.

The tenacious, persistent, and indefatigable agitation characteristic of the socialist party, particularly in Germany, never relaxed in consequence of casual failures, nor ever abandoned because of casual successes, and which no other party has yet succeeded in imitating, has justly aroused the admiration even of critics and of bourgeois opponents.

Michels goes on to note that the emphasis on agitation means that ‘in democratic organisations the activity of the professional leader is extremely fatiguing, often destructive to health, and in general (despite the division of labour) highly complex’.⁶³

The single most impressive feature of this agitation machine was the party press. In 1895 there were 75 socialist newspapers, of which 39 were issued six times a week. These newspapers catered to a broad variety of workers. There were newspapers for worker cyclists and worker gymnasts, for teetotaling workers and even for innkeepers. By 1909 the total circulation was over one million, a figure that implies a great many more actual readers.⁶⁴ But the printed word was embedded in an even wider context of the face-to-face spoken word. Social-Democratic agitation was carried on by public meetings, smaller conferences for the party militants and agitation by individual members.⁶⁵

Nor did the SPD confine itself to political propaganda and agitation. The Social-Democratic movement in Germany consisted of a wide range of institutions that attempted to cover every facet of life. Party or Party-associated institutions included trade unions, clubs dedicated to activities ranging from cycling to hiking to choral singing, theatres and celebratory festivals. The broad scope of the movement's ambitions justifies the title of Vernon Lidtke's classic study *The Alternative Culture*. Looking just at Lidtke's index under the letter 'W', we find the following: workers' athletic clubs, workers' chess societies, workers' consumer societies, workers' cycling clubs, workers' educational societies, workers' gymnastic clubs, workers' libraries, workers' rowing clubs, workers' samaritan associations, workers' singing societies, workers' swimming clubs, workers' temperance associations, workers' theatrical clubs, workers' youth clubs.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Schulz 1993, p. 2.

⁶² Kirkup 1906, p. 214. (Kirkup is describing the causes of the Party's excellent showing in the Reichstag election of 1877.)

⁶³ Michels 1962, p. 91.

⁶⁴ Steenson 1981, pp. 132-3.

⁶⁵ Russell 1965 (1896), pp. 124-31, based on Paul Gohre's first-hand reporting toward the end of the time of the anti-socialist laws.

⁶⁶ Lidtke 1985, pp. 298-9. The full title of Lidtke's book is *The Alternative Culture: Socialist Labor in Imperial Germany*.

The reader will have noticed the repetition of the word 'worker'. This observation leads us to the central importance of the word *Arbeiter*, worker, as the symbolic core of the SPD model. The centrality of *Arbeiter* is also reflected in the high ideological discourse of the SPD. The key terms in this discourse are *Arbeiter*, *Arbeiterklasse* [worker class], *Arbeiterbewegung* [worker movement], *Arbeiterpartei* [worker party]. This close verbal and symbolic link is also present in the vocabulary of Russian Social Democracy. An individual worker is *rabochii*, *rabochii klass* is 'worker class', and so on.

In English, these verbal links are broken. One German-English dictionary translates the terms given above as 'working class', 'labour movement' and 'workers' party'.⁶⁷ The English language cannot jam nouns together as easily as German. (The Russians could match German usage in this instance because the noun *rabochii* happens to be adjectival in form.) At the cost of subverting the genius of the English language, I translate the key Social-Democratic terms as 'worker class', 'worker movement', 'worker party'. A few words in justification of this decision will not be amiss.

One motive is to preserve the centrality of the complex of associations attached to the word *Arbeiter* in the German Social-Democratic movement. Lidtke calls it 'the central code word' of the movement. On the one hand, the symbolic and ideological use of *Arbeiter* marked the separateness of the workers, their sense of exclusion, their hostility to German society. On the other hand, the word emphasised the unity of *all* participants in the movement, and this usage had paradoxical implications.

This broad ideological usage [of Arbeiter], in conjunction with the ubiquitous comrade (Genosse), sanctioned the presence of a substantial number of middle class people, found especially among the movement's intellectuals, in a party that proclaimed both its confidence in the necessity and ability of workers to emancipate themselves and its unrelenting hostility to everything bourgeois and capitalist.⁶⁸

Preserving 'worker' as a link between the key terms of Social-Democratic discourse also helps us see the underlying narrative in which the worker class is a subject, an actor, a protagonist, in a world-historical epic. The English term 'working class' defines the class in terms of a *function*, one function among many needed for society. Engels once wrote:

The moment the workers resolve to be bought and sold no longer, when, in the determination of the value of labour, they take the part of human beings [Menschen], possessed of a will as well as of working power [Arbeitskraft], at that moment the law of wages and the whole political economy of today is finished.⁶⁹

We might put this as follows: bourgeois political economy ends when the workers stop seeing themselves as 'the working class' with the function of providing labour power, and begin seeing themselves as 'the worker class', possessed of a will that allows them to play an active role in world history. 'Worker class' also defines the class in terms of the concrete and active individuals making it up. Nineteenth-century English usage allowed another way to bring this out. For example, the first German editions of Engels's book on the English working class had a dedication in English which began: 'Working Men! To you I dedicate this book'.⁷⁰ For obvious reasons, this usage is no longer acceptable. At least when translating and paraphrasing the historical documents of Social Democracy, I compensate by using 'worker class' to preserve the sense that the class is made up of living, breathing individuals.

The Social-Democratic narrative relied heavily on preserving the links between the various key terms. Take the following crucial sentence from Kautsky's *Erfurt Programme*:

⁶⁷ See the Collins German-English English-German Dictionary 1981, s.v. *Arbeiter*.

⁶⁸ Lidtke 1985, p. 200.

⁶⁹ Engels 1959, p. 436; Engels 1993, p. 227.

⁷⁰ Engels 1959, p. 235; Engels 1993, p. 9. See also the title of the International under Marx: The International Working Men's Association.

*So bildet sich allmählich aus qualifizierten und unqualifizierten Proletariern die Schicht der in Bewegung befindlichen Arbeiterklasse – die Arbeiterbewegung.*⁷¹

My translation tries to preserve this narrative thrust: 'From skilled and unskilled proletarians there gradually forms the stratum of the worker class that finds itself in movement – the worker movement.'

One final motivation for using 'worker class' is that German Social Democrats also used the term 'working class', *die arbeitende Klasse*. Engels, for instance, uses this in the title of his book that is appropriately translated *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. Often, the term 'working classes' means everybody in the class *except* the urban proletariat. In the same passage as the quotation just given, Kautsky talks about the growing influence of the militant proletariat on 'die anderen arbeitenden Klassen'.⁷²

Returning now to the SPD model, we note that the job of the Party itself was to ensure that all these institutions worked together to carry out the movement's central mission of raising proletarian awareness. Thus observers were impressed not only by the scope of the SPD agitation but also by its superb organisation. 'So efficient is the organisation that the Socialists boast of being able to flood all Berlin with agitation leaflets in two hours.'⁷³ Particularly striking was the extent of what might be called the SPD's *apparat*: the salaried bureaucracy both in the Party itself and its offshoots. The party *apparat* was the outward and visible sign of the inward and invisible grace of discipline and organisation. For the SPD model, these were highly positive qualities. As Karl Kautsky put it in a comment cited by Lenin:

*The proletarian is never an isolated individual. He feels great and strong as part of a strong organisation. His individuality counts little beside it. He struggles with full devotion as a part of an anonymous mass, without prospect of personal gain or personal fame, fulfils his duty in the post in which he is placed, in voluntary discipline which fills his whole feeling and thought.*⁷⁴

Another innovative feature of the SPD model that arose out of the *Manifesto* strategy was the fact that it was a truly *nation-wide* party – indeed, in many ways, it was the only truly nation-wide party in the German Empire. The SPD attempted to run candidates in as many electoral districts as possible, including many in which it had no chance of victory. Its aim, here as everywhere, was 'to spread the word to the masses, even to the reluctant, unhearing, and scornful masses'.⁷⁵

A final aspect of the SPD that was extremely important for Lenin can be described using Lenin's own image: it acted as the *people's tribune*. As an English journalist put it in 1912, the German Social Democrats were

*the only unterrified, tooth-and-nail foes of reaction, insensate militarism and class rule, the one voice which cries out insistently, fearlessly, implacably, against the injustices which, in the opinion of many patriotic men, are retarding the moral progress and sapping the vital resources of the German nation.*⁷⁶

Thus, the Party stood not just for worker-class interests and not even just for socialist transformation, but for the principles of democratic decency in society as a whole. One central forum for this activity was parliament. We sometimes tend to equate 'parliamentary activity' with mild-mannered reformism. But, at the end of the nineteenth century, when

⁷¹ Kautsky 1965, p. 216.

⁷² Kautsky 1965, pp. 216-17. In Russian Social Democracy, the term *trudianashchesia* has the same technical meaning of workers in a very broad sense, as opposed to the industrial proletariat by itself.

⁷³ Russell 1965 [1896], p. 124.

⁷⁴ Pierson 1993, p.170; written by Kautsky in 1903-4 and cited in Lenin in *Two Steps Forward* (1904), Lenin 1958-65, 8, pp. 309-10.

⁷⁵ Steenson 1981, p. 45.

⁷⁶ Hall 1977, p. 20, citing Frederick William Wile.

oratory in general and parliamentary oratory in particular was much more popular and prestigious than today, the SPD's use of the parliamentary forum was an essential means of taking its stand and spreading its message. Since later we will hear Lenin talk of 'Russian Bebels', we should remember that the basis of Bebel's vast influence was his activity as a parliamentary orator whose enormous talent was all the more striking because he personified 'the entrance to power of the men of toil ... No other member [of the Reichstag] exercises a personal influence equal to his and one can actually feel a thrill of excitement pass through the chamber when he rises to speak'.⁷⁷ At a time when parliamentary debates could attract excited crowds, Bebel was a figure of Europe-wide import. Bebel's prestige should be kept in mind when we consider Lenin's dream of 'hegemony' – leadership in the revolutionary movement as a whole – for Russian Social Democracy.

The existence of parliament and especially the right of interpellation (the right of an ordinary member to demand an answer of a cabinet minister on any topic) allowed small parliamentary minorities to obtain a nation-wide hearing for their criticism of the government. An observer such as the American Robert Hunter felt that the right of interpellation as employed by the Social Democrats in their role as tribune was one of the main bulwarks of political liberty in Europe.

*Except in Russia, and a few of the more backward countries, it is inconceivable that in Europe men should be shot, deported from their homes, denied every constitutional protection, and put at the mercy of martial law, – as happened for a period of many months a year or so ago in Colorado, – without the entire country knowing both sides of the case.*⁷⁸

Another weapon used by the SPD in its role as people's tribune – one of central importance to Lenin and *Iskra* – was what Lenin called political indictments: the exposure of corruption and scandal. Uncovering abuses, often with the help of sympathetic whistle-blowers who passed on incriminating documents, was a major activity of the socialist press. Observers attributed an 'incredible influence' to the embattled Party due to the 'unfriendly and relentless eye' it cast on events affecting all classes of society.⁷⁹

Besides its heroic past as defier of Bismarck and besides its energetic present as educator and organiser of the worker class and as people's tribune, the SPD also included the future in its narrative of identity – that is, it defined itself as a party inspired by a final goal of social transformation and, as such, unique. The inspiration provided by the final goal had two sources: the idea of the mission, the task, the calling, the great duty, plus the idea that the final outcome was guaranteed by the forces of history. Much commentary on Marxism and Social Democracy is fascinated by a supposed contradiction between these two sources. If the outcome is inevitable, why devote your life to ensuring that it will come about? Such commentary misses the point that in practice the two sources complemented and strengthened each other. I will close with two contemporaneous observers who made exactly this point, so we can better understand some of the reasons why the would-be founders of the Russian Social-Democratic Party thought that 'theoretical clarity' was a life-and-death matter.

Bertrand Russell, writing in a book published in 1896 – that is, prior to the furore caused by Bernstein's revisionism – tells us:

Those who have seen the daily support, in the midst of the most wretched conditions, which the more intelligent working men and women derive from their fervent and religious belief in the advent of the Socialist State, and from their conviction that historical development is controlled by irresistible forces, in whose hands men are only puppets, and by whose action the diminution and final extinction of the capitalist class is an inevitable de-

⁷⁷ Hunter 1908, pp. 225-7.

⁷⁸ Hunter 1908, pp. 213-14.

⁷⁹ Hunter 1908, p. 30. For a full-length study of SPD indictments, see Hall 1977.

*cree of fate – those who have seen the strength, compactness and fervour which this religion gives to those who hold it, will hardly regard its decay as likely to help the progress of the party.*⁸⁰

Russell was a sympathetic outsider. The Austrian Social-Democratic leader Victor Adler may be considered an insider. Writing after the Stuttgart Congress of 1898 – that is, after the German Party had semi-officially repudiated Bernstein's position, but before his famous book *Presuppositions of Socialism* had appeared, Adler exclaimed:

How unpractical these practical people so often are! The strength of our party, the efficiency of every single one of our comrades depends on his knowledge that the extraordinary amount of labour, sacrifice, courage, and endurance which he must daily exact from himself and from others is not just devoted to the welfare of the individual groups around him, but that he is the vehicle for a bit of history, that he is working not only for the present but also for the future.⁸¹

Kautsky and class leadership

In support of his argument in *WITBD*, Lenin quoted a rather long passage by Karl Kautsky. Much ink has been spilled on the relationship between Lenin's views and Kautsky's views as presented in this passage.⁸² But most of this discussion is beside the point, since Lenin's real debt to Kautsky is much earlier and much more basic. One might say that Kautsky's influence is hidden in plain view, since the crucial text is the final chapter of Kautsky's *Erfurt Programme* – probably the most fundamental statement of what Social Democracy is all about.

Kautsky is remembered as the most influential theoretician of international Social Democracy, but in certain key respects – particularly in the case of the fledgling Russian Social Democracy – Kautsky's role went beyond influence. In 1892, Kautsky wrote the *Erfurt Programme*, a semi-official commentary on the recently adopted programme of the Social-Democratic Party of Germany. This book *defined* Social Democracy for Russian activists – it was the book one read to find out what it meant to be a Social Democrat. In 1894, a young provincial revolutionary named Vladimir Ulianov translated the *Erfurt Programme* into Russian just at the time he was acquiring his life-long identity as a revolutionary Social Democrat. Despite the canonical status of the *Erfurt Programme* for Lenin's generation, it is ignored today, at least by English speaking scholars. Few are even aware that the existing English translation – first issued in 1912 – is a bowdlerised abridgement that serves only to obscure what someone like Lenin might have taken out of the book.

Besides the *Erfurt Programme*, the principal text for my reconstruction of Kautsky's outlook is *Parliamentarism* (1893), cited directly by Lenin in *WITBD* as an authority for some of his key arguments. This book really has been totally forgotten (the copy I read was one of the hardest to obtain and most decrepit of the texts I consulted for this commentary).⁸³ *Parliamentarism* is unjustly forgotten, since it is one of the very few works in the Marxist tradition dealing entirely with political theory and, in my view, compares favourably with Lenin's *State and Revolution*. And, since I have mentioned *State and Revolution*, let me say that we should not anachronistically see Kautsky defending parliamentary democracy as opposed to, say, soviet democracy. What Kautsky means by 'parliamentarism' in the 1890s is essentially representative democracy. As such, it cannot really be opposed to soviet-style democracy, itself a form of representative democracy. For our purposes, *Parliamentarism* is important not only because of the arguments that Lenin uses explicitly but also because

⁸⁰ Russell 1965, p. 161.

⁸¹ Tudor and Tudor 1988, pp. 316-17.

⁸² This Kautsky passage is discussed in detail in the Annotations Part Two.

⁸³ Kautsky 1893. The French translation is more easily located (Kautsky 1900).

the book brings together better than anywhere else the logic behind what the Russians labelled the strategy of proletarian hegemony in the democratic revolution.

I occasionally use revealing passages from other works by Kautsky, including one or two that were written after the publication of *WITBD*. But since both the *Erfurt Programme* and *Parliamentarism* are, in different ways, forgotten works and since their influence on Lenin is indisputable, I rely mainly on them for my exposition.⁸⁴

Circles of awareness

Kautsky conceived of Social Democracy as the inner ring in a series of concentric circles. A key passage in the *Erfurt Programme* describes these circles and their mutual relationship. (NB: the term usually translated 'conscious', *bewusst*, is here translated 'aware'.)

From skilled and unskilled proletarians there gradually forms the stratum of the worker class that finds itself in movement – the worker movement. This is the part of the proletariat that fights for the common interests of its class, its ecclesia militans (fighting church).⁸⁵ This stratum grows at the expense of the arrogant worker 'aristocrats' sunk in their egoism as well as the dull 'rabble', the lower strata of the wage proletariat that vegetates in hopelessness and powerlessness.

We have seen that the worker proletariat is constantly increasing; we know further that it becomes ever more decisive for the other working classes, whose living conditions and whose way of feeling and thinking is ever more influenced by it. Now we see that in this ever-growing mass the fighting section grows not only absolutely but proportionately. No matter how fast the proletariat grows, the fighting section grows even faster.

But the fighting proletariat is by far the most important and productive recruiting ground for Social Democracy. Social Democracy is nothing other than the part of the fighting proletariat that is aware of its goal. [In turn,] the fighting proletariat has a tendency to become more and more synonymous with Social Democracy; in Germany and Austria the two have in actuality become one.⁸⁶

Using this passage, I have created a diagram called 'Kautsky's Circles of Awareness' (see Figure 1.1). The remainder of this discussion of Kautsky will be devoted to teasing out the implications hidden in this chart.

The first point – a very important one for understanding *WITBD* – is that the term 'worker movement' used in the merger formula is a technical one with a fairly precise meaning within Social-Democratic discourse. The worker movement is neither the proletariat as a whole, nor is it Social Democracy. It is the militant or fighting proletariat – the section of the proletariat animated by a spirit of organised resistance.

⁸⁴ Among the useful secondary literature on Kautsky is Steenson 1978, Geary 1987, Hinlich 1981, Gilcher-Holtey 1986, Salvadori 1979, J. Kautsky 1994, Donald 1993.

⁸⁵ The usual translation of *ecclesia militans* in English is 'church militant'. Note the strong verbal link in German between 'fighting church', *kämpfende Kirche*, and class struggle, *Klassenkampf*.

⁸⁶ Kautsky 1965, pp. 216-17.

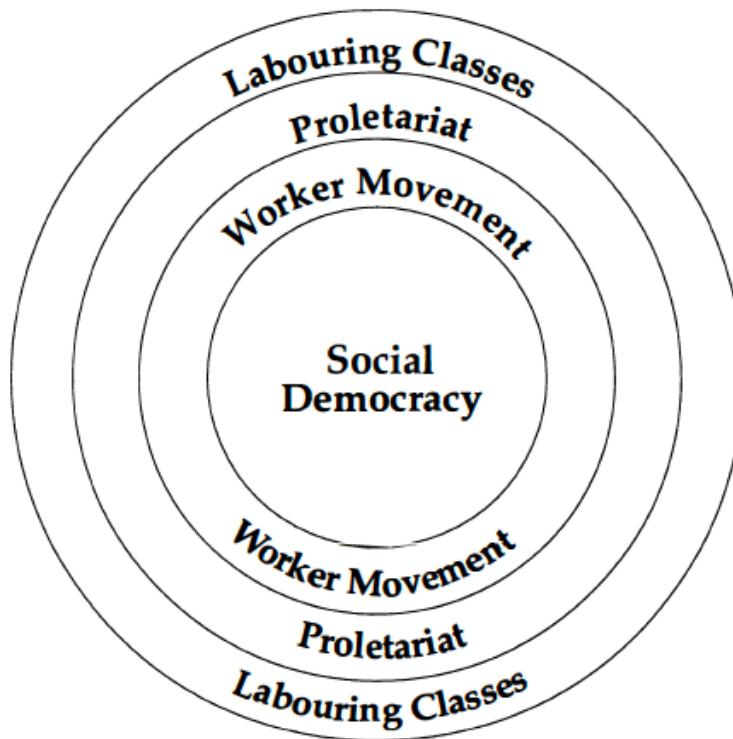


Figure 1.1: Kautsky's Circles of Awareness

At any one point in time, members of the outside circles will always have less awareness – that is, less insight into their own class position, basic interests, and therefore historic mission. Yet, viewed over time, there is a tendency for the inner, more aware, circles to expand. Social Democracy becomes a greater and greater portion of the worker movement, while the worker movement becomes a greater and greater portion of the whole proletariat. At the limit, all the circles collapse into one circle of complete awareness.

What we still do not know is the nature of the forces that are working to bring the circles together. Kautsky's brief description of the process might leave the impression that the whole thing is automatic. This impression is strengthened by the frequent occurrence of one of Kautsky's favourite words, *Naturnotwendigkeit*, natural necessity. We therefore need to ask, what are the amalgamating forces in Kautsky's model and in what direction do they operate? Does the worker movement give rise to the highly aware inner circle through forces internal to itself? Or does Social Democracy move out to transform the worker movement in its own image?

The answer is somewhat complicated by the fact that Kautsky has two aims in this section of the *Erfurt Programme*. One is to provide an ideal model of the past and future of Social Democracy: its origin and its destiny. The other aim is to set out an explicitly counterfactual and highly unlikely scenario in order to make a theoretical point about the 'natural necessity' of socialism. We will first examine Kautsky's thought experiment, which is all the more important to us because it was cited at length in disputes within Russian Social Democracy about the orthodoxy of *WITBD*.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ For example, by Plekhanov in his 1904 article attacking *WITBD* (*Iskra*, No. 70 and 71 [25 July and 1 August 1904], reprinted in Plekhanov 1923-7, 13, pp. 116-40).

For various rhetorical and theoretical purposes, Kautsky wants to show that socialism is an inevitable natural necessity even if there were no Social Democracy – in fact, even if the workers did not accept socialist ideas. He therefore invites us to consider the outcome *even if* Social Democracy were absent from the picture. The chain of inferences proceeds as follows:

8. It is inevitable that the workers will resist capitalist exploitation, that is, it is inevitable that there *be* a worker movement.
9. It is inevitable that this resistance lead to a nation-wide worker political party.
10. It is inevitable that this party will take over control of the state.
11. It is inevitable that the workers will use this power to introduce socialism, because – as they will discover after much trial and error – socialism is the only way to protect their essential interests.⁸⁸

Thus, only at the very last minute, just as the curtain goes down, the workers discover and accept the merits of socialism (NB: this last-minute conversion could also be called Social Democracy). The point of this thought experiment is to show that even in a worst-case scenario, socialism is still inevitable. Nevertheless (Kautsky immediately adds), this is indeed a *worst case scenario* because socialism arrives only after 'a great many misconceptions, errors and unnecessary sacrifices and useless expenditure of strength and time'.⁸⁹

I call this the 'sooner or later' argument. It turns up rather frequently in Social-Democratic writings as a way of combining the core Social-Democratic claim of inevitability with the core Social-Democratic urgency about proselytising the workers. As the young Stalin put it when he recycled Kautsky's argument in 1905 in order to defend the orthodoxy of WITBD:

*Of course, at some point, after long wanderings and sufferings, the stikhiinyi [elemental] movement, even without the help of Social Democracy, will come into its own and arrive at the gates of socialist revolution.*⁹⁰

Having made his worst case scenario, Kautsky returns from his thought experiment to the real world. He hastens to assure us that the chances that events will play out in this manner are vanishingly small. The following extensive but crucial passage explains the forces that actually are at work to expand the circles of awareness.

Nevertheless there is absolutely no reason to expect that the proletariat of any country will adopt such a negative attitude [toward socialism] after it comes to power. This would mean that in relation to awareness and knowledge it remains at the level of a child, while economically, politically and morally it has become an adult, one with the power and the capability of overcoming its powerful opponent and imposing its will. Such a misshapen development of the proletariat is highly unlikely. We have already noted more than once that thanks to [mechanised industry], there is in the proletariat (once its original degradation has been overcome) a theoretical sense, a capacity for great problems and goals that lie outside the realm of immediate interests, that one searches for in vain in the other working and labouring classes under it and over it.

At the same time, furthermore, the economic development of present day society proceeds so rapidly and manifests itself in such a mass of conspicuous phenomena that it is recognised even by an uneducated person, once his attention is called to it. And there won't be any lack of attention calling, since simultaneously, thanks to the continuation by Karl Marx of the work begun by bourgeois classical economy, insight into the course of economic development and the whole economic mechanism becomes exceptionally deep and comprehensive.

⁸⁸ Kautsky 1965, pp. 225-31.

⁸⁹ Kautsky 1965, p. 229.

⁹⁰ Stalin, 1946-52, 1, p. 98, see also 1, p. 105. For other instances of the same kind of argument, see Gorin, a speaker at the Second Congress cited by Stalin (Stalin 1946-52, 1, p. 104) and Kanatchikov 1986, p. 267.

This all comes together to make the fighting proletariat extremely receptive to the socialist teaching. Socialism is no message of woe for the proletariat but rather good news, a new gospel [ein neues Evangelium]. The ruling classes cannot recognise socialism without committing moral suicide. The proletariat finds in socialism new life, new power, inspiration and the joy of hope. Will the proletariat remain indifferent or even hostile to such a teaching for any length of time?

Once an independent worker party has been formed, it will with natural necessity sooner or later adopt a socialist outlook – if it has not been filled with such an outlook from the very beginning – and finally it must become a socialist worker party, that is, Social Democracy.

We now see the chief recruiting ground [of Social Democracy] set out clearly before us. In brief, the conclusion of our discussion is as follows: the bearer of the socialist movement is the fighting strata of the industrial proletariat that has attained political self-awareness. The more the influence of the proletariat on the social strata nearest to it grows and the more the thinking and emotions of these strata are influenced, all the more will they also be drawn into the socialist movement.

The class struggle of the proletariat has socialist production as its natural goal; it cannot end before this goal is reached. Just as the proletariat will with certainty come to be the ruling class in the state, so equally is the victory of socialism certain.⁹¹

We can now describe more concretely the forces at work in Kautsky's model. First, there is a force that comes about automatically from *within* the worker movement: the spirit of resistance. As we have seen, this resistance is capable of eventually getting us to socialism all by itself, but this point is almost irrelevant in real life. What is more important is that the spirit of resistance (along with other features of the industrial proletariat) makes the worker movement *receptive* to the good news brought by Social Democracy. And, since Social Democracy and its message *do* exist, we have a new natural necessity: any worker party will 'sooner or later' adopt a socialist programme. This natural necessity does not detract from the fact that, in real life, Social Democracy is the *active* force that transforms the worker movement by expanding awareness. Social Democracy realises that the militant proletariat is the ideal 'recruiting ground' and so it directs its efforts there. Social Democracy definitely does *not* emanate automatically from the worker movement in order to serve the movement's own ends more efficiently. It is, rather, the force of a particular *insight* that comes originally from Marx and Engels.

We can now see the relevant meaning of 'confidence' in the Social-Democratic context. In terms of the worst case scenario, the Social Democrat is confident that the workers will *eventually* introduce socialism. In terms of the *real-life* scenario, the Social Democrat is confident that the worker movement will hear, mark and inwardly digest the Social-Democratic message as soon as it is in a position to receive it. Even the unlearned, the *Ungelehrter*, will achieve this insight.

Since this new natural necessity – 'a worker party will sooner or later adopt the socialist programme' – is dependent on *insight*, the actual timing is not closely tied to the course of capitalist development.⁹² The most advanced Social Democracy need not be found in the most advanced capitalist country. It could conceivably be found, say, in Germany rather than England. Indeed (says Kautsky at one point), even the workers in economically backward Russia are more politically advanced in their thinking than the English workers.⁹³ The driving force in this respect is the quality of class leadership rather than the level of productive forces.

Thus, we see that the circles of awareness are constantly shifting in their relation to one another. The basic formula defines Social Democracy as the merger of socialism and the worker movement. But only context can inform us, when Social-Democratic writers use the term 'worker movement', whether they mean the worker movement *prior* to Social Democracy (defined by its militant resistance alone) or after its transformation by Social-Democratic insight and organisation.

⁹¹ Kautsky 1965, pp. 230-1.

⁹² Kautsky 1901b (this article is cited by Lenin in WITBD).

⁹³ Kautsky 1902, pp. 55-6.

Much of the misunderstanding about the orthodoxy of this or that formulation is caused by the resulting ambiguities. The best way to avoid such misunderstanding is to keep in mind the underlying narrative. On one side, we have a worker movement animated by the spirit of resistance, and, on the other, we have Social Democracy animated by the insight that a merger is necessary. (Note that when an individual worker becomes convinced of the truth of scientific socialism, he becomes by virtue of that very fact a part of Social Democracy rather than simply the worker movement – thus making it almost a matter of definition to assert that awareness comes from Social Democracy.) The inner forces of the two protagonists drive them in each other's direction and eventually lead to their melding.

We may sum up the moral of the circles of awareness in the following way: Social Democracy is *needed* and will be *heeded*. It is not needed to achieve socialism, since this will come about regardless. It is needed to avoid the human tragedy that would be caused by socialism coming ‘later’ rather than ‘sooner’. It will be heeded because its good news brings the proletariat new life, new power, inspiration and the joy of hope.

Merger vs. continued isolation

In order to bring out the crucial importance of the Social-Democratic merger, Kautsky stresses that the two partners – socialism and the worker movement were originally *separate*. What might be called the foundation myth of Social Democracy describes how these two separate forces come together. Kautsky's rendition of this story served as a template for many other more detailed accounts of Social-Democratic origins, including the one given by Lenin in *WITBD*.

In the *Erfurt Programme*, Kautsky traces the growth of the worker movement from its early beginnings in the Middle Ages. The driving force of the movement was always resistance to capitalist exploitation. This resistance grew more and more organised and effective, but resistance in and of itself does not generate the realisation that capitalist private property had to be abolished. To make this point, Kautsky sets out the thought experiment described earlier and describes a worker movement that remains separate from socialism until long after it takes political power.

Just as worker resistance in and of itself does not generate insight into the need for socialism, possession of the insight about socialism does not in and of itself generate the realisation that only a militant worker movement can bring it about. Kautsky's narrative tells how 'socialism' (= all those who advocated social control of the economy as the only answer to the problems of society and the problems of the poor in particular) comes to the worker movement from without – in other words, how socialism was originally separate from the worker movement. But the intention of the narrative is not to laud the socialists. On the contrary, their haughty condescension towards the militant worker movement and indeed their overt fear of it meant that worker rejection of socialism as a bourgeois whim was entirely understandable.

From the early socialists' point of view, the proletariat was much too crude and raw to be credited with the capacity for independent political initiative. And, when a militant worker movement did come into existence in the 1830s, the socialists were hostile because worker militancy threatened to scare off the bourgeois philanthropists and the elite politicians whom the socialists wanted to win over. The 'utopian' rejection of the worker movement can be illustrated with a North-American example. Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* is a classic of utopian socialism: published in 1888, it contrasts the world of its time with the enlightened world of 2000.⁹⁴ Bellamy made no distinction between 'the labor parties', 'followers of the red flag', and bomb-throwing anarchists. In the following exchange, the narrator who grew up in the world of the nineteenth century learns the point of view of the enlightened twentieth century from the lips of his host, Doctor Leete:

⁹⁴ [Editorial note: for more on Bellamy and other late-Victorian utopias, see another book in the HM Book Series, Beaumont 2005.]

As we sat at table, Doctor Leete amused himself with looking over the paper I had brought in. There was in it, as in all the newspapers of that date [1887], a great deal about the labor troubles, strikes, lockouts, boycotts, the programs of labor parties, and wild threats of the anarchists.

'By the way', said I, as the doctor read aloud to us some of these items, 'what part did the followers of the red flag take in the establishment of the new order of things? They were making considerable noise the last thing that I knew.'

'They had nothing to do with it except to hinder it, of course', replied Doctor Leete.

Doctor Leete then announces as historical fact that the followers of the red flag were subsidised by the capitalists in order to delay reform. (The narrator adds in a footnote that this assertion is undoubtedly incorrect even though it is the only theory that makes intelligible their actions.) Doctor Leete then explains that the 'national party' that ushered in the utopian system of 2000 had nothing to do with the labour parties:

The labor parties as such never could have accomplished anything on a large or permanent scale. For purposes of national scope, their basis as merely class organisations was too narrow. It was not till a rearrangement of the industrial and social system on a higher ethical basis, and for the more efficient production of wealth, was recognised as the interest, not of one class, but equally of all classes, of rich and poor, cultured and ignorant, old and young, weak and strong, men and women, that there was any prospect that it could be achieved.⁹⁵

Kautsky lays great stress on this kind of hostility toward militant labour on the part of the early socialists. Even worker socialists shared this hostility. The point of Kautsky's narrative is not that socialism was originally separate from the *workers* as such but that it was originally separate from the *worker movement*. Individual workers such as Wilhelm Weitling could and did become socialists – but that very fact alienated them from the worker movement and kept them apart from the militant day-to-day struggle. An 'elemental' [*urwüchsig*] class instinct of hatred for the bourgeoisie made early worker socialists reject any doctrine coming from it. As a result, their own rough hewn theories were crude and violent [*gewalttätig*]. Furthermore, despite their hostility to bourgeois intellectuals, they themselves had no real faith in the worker movement.

This early form of proletarian socialism lacked the patience and the confident sense of strength needed to contemplate a long, drawn-out class struggle. It remained a form of utopian socialism, only instead of hoping like earlier utopians for a bourgeois millionaire to bankroll the new Jerusalem, it placed its hopes on 'the Revolution' with a capital R that would give power to a small dictatorial group of visionaries. Any form of class struggle besides an immediate call to the barricades was perceived as a betrayal of 'mankind's cause'.

Usually such worker revolutionaries end up as anarchists, or, if they do join in the day-to-day class struggle, they forget about socialism altogether. This kind of 'elemental' revolutionary militancy is one of the growing pains [*Kinderkrankheit*] of a genuinely socialist worker movement, since it tends to crop up whenever recent backward recruits to the proletariat still lack 'clear insight' into social relations. The paradoxical conclusion of this discussion is that even a socialism that grew directly out of proletarian soil failed to overcome the gap between socialism and the worker movement.

How then to overcome the gap – indeed, conflict – between socialism and the worker movement? Kautsky provides the answer in a basic passage that brings together the *Communist Manifesto*, Social Democracy, and the logic of the merger formula. The following paragraph begins the climactic section entitled 'Social Democracy as the Merger of the Worker Movement and Socialism'.

*In order for the socialist and the worker movements to become reconciled and to become fused into a single movement, socialism had to break out of the utopian way of thinking. This was the world-historical deed of Marx and Engels. In the *Communist Manifesto* of 1847 they laid the scientific foundations of a new modern socialism, or, as we say today, of Social Democracy. By so doing, they gave socialism solidity and turned what*

⁹⁵ Bellamy 1968, pp. 263-5 (this particular example of utopian socialism, originally published 1888, is not used by Kautsky).

had hitherto been a beautiful dream of well-meaning enthusiasts into a earnest object of struggle and [also] showed this to be the necessary consequence of economic development.⁹⁶ To the fighting proletariat they gave a clear awareness of its historical task and they placed it in a condition to speed to its great goal as quickly and with as few sacrifices as possible.

The socialists no longer have the task of freely *inventing* a new society

but rather of uncovering its elements in existing society. No more do they have to bring salvation from its misery to the proletariat from above, but rather they have to support its class struggle through increasing its insight and promoting its economic and political organisations and in so doing bring about as quickly and as painlessly as possible the day when the proletariat will be able to save itself. The task of Social Democracy is to make the class struggle of the proletariat aware of its aim and capable of choosing the best means to attain this aim [zielbewusst und zweckmäßig].⁹⁷

The heroic contribution of Marx and Engels could only have come from people who had mastered all of modern 'scientific' political economy and extended it further – in other words, bourgeois intellectuals (albeit very exceptional ones). This is one reason for the failure of the early self-taught proletarian socialists. The *necessary* role of bourgeois intellectuals, however, begins and ends with Marx and Engels. Once the great insight is achieved, anybody can understand, accept and pass on the good news.

Furthermore, the great contribution of Marx and Engels should not be seen as a *rejection* but as a *synthesis* of what went before. As Kautsky put it later, each of the warring socialist sects contained a little bit of the truth, 'ein Stückchen des Richtigen'.⁹⁸ In what we can now see as a version of the 'sooner or later' argument, the contribution of Marx and Engels is to bring clarity and insight to what was previously instinctive groping.

A glance at these beginnings [of early socialist organisations always reveals] a chaotic germ, an uncertain, instinctive seeking and groping of numerous proletarians, none perceptibly more prominent than the others, all moved forward on the whole by the same tendencies, but often displaying the most striking individual deviations. Such a picture is, for instance, presented by the beginnings of the proletarian socialistic movement in the thirties and forties of the nineteenth century ... Had it not been for Marx and Engels, the teachings [of the League of Communists] would have continued to remain in the stage of ferment for a long time. The two authors of the Communist Manifesto were only enabled to secure their dominant and determining position by virtue of their mastery of the science of their times.⁹⁹

Kautsky's narrative stresses the original *separation* of socialism and the worker movement in order to bring out the absolute necessity of their *merger*. And this is not just an inspiring story of the past – it also defines the tasks of Social-Democratic polemics in the present. Even at the present time, some participants of both the worker movement and the socialist movement still refuse the great synthesis, with the result that even their little bit of truth becomes debased. What was pardonable one-sidedness in the past becomes dangerously harmful in the present.

Thus, the merger narrative laid the foundation for a two-front polemical war aimed against all who defend the continued isolation of either socialism or the worker movement. The technical term within Social-Democratic discourse for the effort to keep the worker-class struggle free from socialism was *Nur Gewerkschaftlerei*, 'trade-unions-only-ism'. A similar '*Nur*' term could have been coined for bomb-throwing revolutionaries who continued to think that it was a waste of time to try to propagandise and educate the worker class as a whole prior to the revolution.

⁹⁶ 'Necessary' = *naturnotwendig*. Note the combination of will and determinism in this sentence that many commentators find so paradoxical but which Kautsky evidently saw as mutually supporting.

⁹⁷ Kautsky 1965, pp. 238-9.

⁹⁸ Kautsky 1908.

⁹⁹ Kautsky 1925 [1908], p. 442.

These two enemies of Social Democracy are often invoked by means of national stereotypes. Over here, we see the frantic French anarchist or syndicalist who scorns parliamentary politics. Over there, we see the stolid British trade unionist who is a brilliant organiser but who openly rejects socialism. And, somewhere in the middle, the German Social Democrat who is both solidly organised *and* inspired by a high ideal.

If we only look at one front in this polemical war, we will come away with a equally one-sided view of the Social-Democratic outlook. This is the conclusion reached by Robert Stuart in his very useful study of the French Marxists led by Jules Guesde and Paul Lafargue. The standard comment on the French Marxists is that they flip-flopped back and forth between a sectarian hard-line and an opportunist soft line. After reading party literature throughout the period, Stuart stresses rather the *continuity* in outlook, once we take into account the Party's multiple targets.¹⁰⁰ One aim of my commentary is to bring out in a similar way the continuing two-front polemical war in Lenin's *Iskra* era writings, very much including *WITBD*.

Insight and organisation

Now that we have witnessed the origins of the great synthesis, we can look closer at Social Democracy as the active force that works to bring about the merger. The key goals are summarised by the eloquent German words Kautsky used in the passage just cited, *zielbewusst* and *zweckmüssig*, 'aware of one's aim' and 'capable of choosing the best means to attain it'. Or, as Kautsky elaborated in 1899,

*Social Democracy is the party of the militant proletariat; it seeks to enlighten it, to educate it, to organise it, to expand its political and economic power by every available means, to conquer every position that can possibly be conquered, and thus to provide it with the strength and maturity that will finally enable it to conquer political power and to overthrow the rule of the bourgeoisie.*¹⁰¹

Out of Kautsky's extensive discussion of this topic, we will concentrate on the themes with the most impact on Russian Social Democracy. These include the primordial importance of political freedom; the strength that a clear final goal gives to the struggle here and now; the high value given to party organisation and discipline; the Social Democrats' own exalted sense of mission.

The Social-Democratic mission of educating and organising on a national level is crippled at the outset if political freedom is absent. Secret organisations are a highly ineffectual substitute for 'open' [*öffentliche*, public] ones for purposes of a nation-wide class struggle. The crucial weapon of the socialist press is particularly dependent on political freedom.

*To bring these masses into contact with one another, to awaken their awareness of their broad community of interests and to win them over for organisations capable of protecting their interests – this implies the possibility of speaking freely to the great masses, this implies freedom of assembly and the press ... Without the help of the press, it is absolutely impossible to unite the huge masses of today's wage-labour into organisations and to get them to the level of unified action.*¹⁰²

For all these reasons and more, there is no worse sin from a Social-Democratic point of view than to disparage the crucial role of political freedom:

Where the working class bestirs itself, where it makes the first attempts to elevate its economic position, it puts political demands next to purely economic ones – namely, demands for freedom of association, of

¹⁰⁰ Stuart 1992. Unfortunately, Stuart's book does not take up the question of the influence of the SPD model or of Kautsky on French Marxists during this period.

¹⁰¹ Cited by J. Kautsky 1994, p. 86.

¹⁰² Kautsky 1965, p. 218.

*the press. These freedoms have the greatest significance for the working class: they are among the conditions that makes its life possible and to which it unconditionally owes its development. They are light and air for the proletariat; he who lets them wither or withholds them – he who keeps the proletariat from the struggle to win these freedoms and to extend them – that person is one of the proletariat's worst enemies. It doesn't matter how great a love for the proletariat he feels or fakes, it doesn't matter whether he calls himself an anarchist or a Christian-Socialist or whatever. He harms the proletariat just as much as a declared foe; it is all the same whether he does this from evil will or simply from ignorance – he must be fought against in the same way as acknowledged opponents of the proletariat.*¹⁰³

The history of the 'light and air' metaphor is a revealing one. It can be traced back at least to 1865, when Engels wrote 'The Prussian Military Question and the German Worker Party'. On the subject of proper relations to liberal bourgeois opposition to absolutism (a subject with obvious relevance to Russia), Engels gave this advice:

*Even if the worst came to the worst and the bourgeoisie was to scurry under the skirts of reaction for fear of the workers and to appeal to the power of those elements hostile to itself for protection against the workers – even then the worker party would have no choice but, notwithstanding the bourgeoisie, to continue its agitation for bourgeois freedom, freedom of the press and rights of assembly and association which the bourgeoisie had betrayed. Without these freedoms it will be unable to move freely itself; in this fight it is fighting to establish its own life-element, to obtain the air it needs to breathe.*¹⁰⁴

In 1882, Engels wrote a letter to Kautsky in which he remarked

*Polish socialists who fail to put the liberation of the country at the forefront of their programme remind me of those German socialists who were reluctant to demand the immediate repeal of the Anti-Socialist Law and freedom of association, assembly and the press. To be able to fight, you must first have a terrain, light, air and elbow-room. Otherwise you never get further than chit-chat.*¹⁰⁵

Whether he got the phrase from 'The Prussian Military Question' or from Engels's letter, Kautsky used it when he wrote the *Erfurt Programme* in 1892. The Russian Social Democrats immediately understood its application to their own situation. In 1897, the underground Social-Democratic paper *Rabochaia gazeta* [Worker Newspaper] wrote:

*The Russian worker movement is still tightly held in the iron grip of governmental oppression. As a living being needs air, so we need political freedom. Without achieving freedom of strikes, assembly, unions, speech and press, without achieving the right to take part in the administration of the country or in making its laws, we will never cast off the chains of economic slavery that oppress us. That is why the struggle with the autocratic government for political freedom is the most urgent task of the Russian worker movement.*¹⁰⁶

In 1898, the abortive First Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Worker Party (RSDWP) declared *Rabochaia gazeta* the official organ of the new party – although the paper was never able to publish another issue. The First Congress also issued an influential manifesto drafted by Petr Struve. In this document – the first official programmatic document of the RSDWP – we read that 'political freedom is as necessary for the Russian proletariat as fresh air is for healthy breathing.'

It is the fundamental condition for its free development and for its successful struggle both for partial improvements and final liberation'.¹⁰⁷ In the first issue of *Iskra* that came out in late 1900, the same point is hammered home using the

¹⁰³ Kautsky 1965, p. 219.

¹⁰⁴ Engels 1962a, p. 77.

¹⁰⁵ Letter of 7 February 1882 in *Marx Engels Werke*, Band 35, p. 270; Marx Engels

¹⁰⁶ Lead article from *Rabochaia gazeta* No. 2, November 1897, from a reprint of the article in Lenin 1958-65, 2nd edition, 2, pp. 612-15.

¹⁰⁷ Lenin 1926-35, 2, p. 616 (an English translation of the Manifesto of the First Congress can be found in Harding 1983).

same metaphor.¹⁰⁸ To complete the circle, Kautsky repeated the metaphor in his *Social Revolution* – published in 1902 and promptly translated into Russian with Lenin as editor.

We can now understand why it was fatal for a Russian Social Democrat to be labelled as an 'economist'. An individual or group who really did argue that political rights were unimportant, or that it was no part of Social Democracy's job to fight for them, or that political goals should be restricted to economic legislation – such a person, if the charge held, was not a 'moderate'

Social Democrat and certainly not (as some scholars seem to think) a more orthodox Marxist than his 'political' opponents. No, such a person had read himself out of Social Democracy altogether. 'He who lets political freedoms wither or withholds them – he who keeps the proletariat from the struggle to win these freedoms and to extend them – that person is one of the proletariat's worst enemies.'

Thus, a nation-wide political party – *not* nation-wide economic organisations – was the highest form of the class struggle. As Kautsky rather extravagantly defends the crucial role of a worker political party:

*The adherents of trades-union-only-ism are conservative even when they put on radical airs, while [in contrast] all worker parties are revolutionary by their very nature even when their attitude or indeed the awareness of their members is moderate.*¹⁰⁹

The creation of a nation-wide and effective organisation – whether political or economic – has implications that were rejected by anarchists and the old style liberals of Kautsky's time but accepted by Social Democrats. The Social Democratic movement requires 'permanent organs in the course of its growth, a sort of professional bureaucracy in the party, as well as in the unions, without which it cannot function, which are a necessity for it, which must continue to grow and to obtain duties that grow in importance'.¹¹⁰ This bureaucracy consists not only of salaried officials but parliamentary representatives and party journalists.¹¹¹ Coupled with this functional division of labour is a spirit of discipline unique to a worker-class organisation.

These organisational imperatives were partly the result of the capitalist transformation of society and partly a necessary condition of *any* effective fighting organisation. 'One finds [these features] present any time that the large-scale masses are fighting for a weighty battle-prize and where victory can be won only with the strictest co-ordination and the most decisive unity of action all tending toward the same end'.¹¹² Thus Kautsky laughs at liberals who excoriate trade-union tyranny but who always vote at their party's call and never think of thinking for themselves at all. Equally ridiculous are anarchists who sneer at the discipline of parliamentary parties while praising trade unions – proletarian trade unions! – as the home of unconstraint.

In order to combat the dangers inherent in this situation, representative democracy *within* the party is required. But representative democracy is in its way just another manifestation of a modern division of labour and the spirit of voluntary discipline. Any effective nation-wide political organisation will follow this imperative: 'our century is not only the century

¹⁰⁸ 'Achievements of International Social Democracy', *Iskra*, No. 1 (December 1900).

¹⁰⁹ Kautsky 1900, p. 188.

¹¹⁰ Kautsky 1925 [1908], p. 463.

¹¹¹ Kautsky 1925 [1908], pp. 464–6.

¹¹² Kautsky 1893, p. 42. In German, Kautsky calls for a combination of *Zusammenhalten* and *Zusammenwirken*.

of parliamentarism but also the century of [party] congresses'.¹¹³ Leave to the anarchists the absurdity of assembling in party congresses in order to denounce the inevitable corruption of representative democracy!¹¹⁴

But worker-class parties have a better chance than others of keeping organisational bureaucracy under control precisely because of the proletarian sense of discipline. This sense of discipline does not only mean the workers are good at following orders – it also means that the workers will stand for no nonsense from party officials, parliamentarians and journalists. The class origin of party spokesmen is no predictor of their behaviour: middle-class activists have been among the workers' best defenders while worker activists have sometimes betrayed their class. What is crucial is the workers' ability to 'constantly oversee and influence' those who speak in their name.¹¹⁵ Neither the middle classes nor the non-proletarian classes of the people (peasants and urban petty bourgeoisie) are capable of such organisational discipline.

Social-Democratic political organisations are powerful not only because they are modern large-scale organisations and not only because they are proletarian organisations that understand the value of discipline but also because they are *Social-Democratic* Parties and therefore inspired by a grand historical mission. Only a few years after the Erfurt Congress, Eduard Bernstein became notorious for his epigram 'The movement is everything, the final goal is nothing'. We can understand the horror occasioned by the epigram when we look at the *Erfurt Programme* and *Parliamentarism* – both written prior to any revisionist controversy – and observe Kautsky's insistence that an inspiring final goal was a unique source of strength for the Party in its ongoing day to-day struggle.

Any worker movement – especially when operating under the oppressive environment of semi-absolutist countries like Germany and Austria – is going to face heartbreaking defeats as well as victories. The only thing that can prevent these failures from wreaking devastating demoralisation is a firm sense of the big story in which all failures are no more than passing episodes. After the class struggle is transformed by 'the fusion of the socialist and the worker movement',

*the worker movement now has an aim to which it visibly comes closer, now all sides of the struggle are significant, including those that do not bring any immediate practical consequences, if only they further the self-awareness and prestige of the proletariat, its comradely unity and discipline. Now many battles that seem to end in defeat are equivalent to a victory, now every strike and every rejected legislative proposal that would have served the interests of the proletariat is a step forward toward the aim of achieving an existence worthy of mankind.*¹¹⁶

Kautsky's mention of prestige and human dignity point to larger themes. Faced with the formidable self-righteousness of Victorian bourgeois civilisation, a worker political party faced a life-and-death problem of protecting what we might now call worker self-esteem. Kautsky argued that scientific socialism provided a goal that was superior in its sweep and generosity of vision to bourgeois parties. Not only that, it also provided the necessary confidence that this goal could and would be achieved. Thus only a firm sense of the final goal could give the workers self-respect and the respect of other classes.¹¹⁷ The final goal was also the only thing that made a unified nation-wide class party even feasible.

¹¹³ Kautsky 1893, p. 79; Kautsky 1900, pp. 110-12.

¹¹⁴ As Lenin observes in *WITBD* (1958-65, 6, pp. 142-3 [802-3]), there is a substantial overlap between Kautsky's defence of representative democracy within organisations and the similar defence mounted by Sidney and Beatrice Webb a few years later in *Industrial Democracy* (Webb, Sidney and Beatrice 1965 [1897]). I note that Kautsky's *Erfurt Programme* is listed in the Webbs' bibliography.

¹¹⁵ Kautsky 1893, p. 109.

¹¹⁶ Kautsky 1965, pp. 241-2.

¹¹⁷ Kautsky 1965, Section 12, pp.238-42.

What gives a political party cohesion – especially if, like the socialist party, it has a great historical task to fulfil – is the final goal. There will always be differences of opinion within the party and sometimes these differences reach a disquieting intensity. But the more the great common goals really live in the awareness of party members, the less easily will these internal disputes cause party splits.¹¹⁸

The final goal is not just words inscribed on a banner. It imposes the obligation of learning to grasp the big picture.

As Kautsky wrote in 1908:

Today, in a society whose market embraces the entire world, a society which is in a process of constant transformation, of industrial and social revolution, in which the workers are organising themselves into an army of millions, and the capitalists are accumulating billions in money, it is impossible for a rising class – a class that cannot content itself with the retention of the status quo and that is obliged to aim at a complete reconstruction of society – to conduct its class struggle intelligently and successfully by a mere resort to 'plain common sense' and to the detail work of practical men.

It becomes a necessity for every combatant to broaden his horizon through scientific understanding, to grasp the operation of great social forces in time and space, not in order to abolish the work in detail, or even relegate it to the background, but in order to align it in a definite relation with the social process as a whole.¹¹⁹

The dire consequences of the absence of a final goal are exemplified by the fate of the English workers. The power of individual trade unions was hardly compensation for the resulting narrowness of spirit that caused the 'worker aristocrats' who should have been the champions of the masses to act instead as their oppressors. Even more striking was the political helplessness of even these economically powerful workers. Writing in 1902 and citing the research of Beatrice and Sidney Webb, Kautsky stated that the impact of the English workers on British politics was in fact steadily decreasing.

Even the latest scourgings by their opponents have not served to rouse the proletariat of England. They remain dumb, even when their unions are rendered powerless, dumb when their bread is made more costly. The English workers today stand lower as a political factor than the workers of the most economically backward and the least politically free country in Europe – Russia. It is their thriving revolutionary awareness that give the Russian workers their great practical strength. It is the renunciation of revolution, the narrowing of interest to the interests of the moment, their so-called Realpolitik, that have made the English workers a nullity in actual politics.¹²⁰

If the inspiring final goal was so vital for effective worker-class influence, then the mandate for Social Democrats was clear: it is

the duty of every man who has made the advancement of the proletariat his life work, to oppose this tendency toward spiritual stagnation and stupidity, and to direct the attention of proletarians to great points of view, to large prospects, to worthy goals.¹²¹

This comment leads us to one final aspect of Kautsky's outlook: the insistence not only on the proletariat's but also on Social Democracy's own high and inspiring mission. Just as the Social-Democratic narrative gave strength to the workers to fight against seemingly hopeless odds, it also gave strength to the Social-Democratic activists who devoted themselves to their *Kleinarbeit*, the seemingly insignificant detail work needed to run the impressive party machinery.

To lead the economic and political class struggle – to carry out enthusiastically one's small duties but also to fill them with thoughts of a wide-encompassing socialism – to bring together by these means the organisations and activities of the proletariat, in a unified and harmonious way, into a massive whole that rises up ever more irre-

¹¹⁸ Kautsky 1900, p. 183 (written before Bernstein's 'revisionism').

¹¹⁹ Kautsky 1925, pp. 16-17.

¹²⁰ Kautsky 1902, p. 55.

¹²¹ Kautsky 1925, pp. 16-17.

*sistible – this is what Marx and Engels taught was the task of anyone, whether proletarian or not, who adopts the viewpoint of the proletariat and wishes to liberate it.*¹²²

We end this section with the final words of Kautsky's *Path to Power*, written in 1909 and much admired by Lenin. This kind of exalted rhetoric rarely makes it into secondary accounts, yet it is a vital part of the context for a book like WITBD.

Already today the elite [of the proletariat] forms the strongest, the most far-sighted, most selfless and boldest stratum – the one united in the largest free organisations – of the nations of European culture. And in the same way the proletariat will, in and through struggle, take up into itself the most selfless and farsighted elements of all classes; it will organise and educate in its own bosom even its own most backward elements and fill them with the joy of hope and with insight. Its elite will be raised up to the height of culture, making it capable of leading the immense economic transformation that will finally, throughout the whole world, put an end to the misery that arises out of slavery, exploitation and ignorance.

*Happy are they who are called to take part in this high struggle and this glorious victory!*¹²³

Leadership of the people (the hegemony scenario)

Social Democracy, Kautsky tells us, has a tendency

*to become more and more a national party – that is, a Volkspartei, in the sense that it is the representative not only of the industrial wage-labourers but of all the labouring and exploited strata – and therefore the great majority of the population, what is commonly known as 'the Volk'.*¹²⁴

This feature of the Social-Democratic narrative was overwhelmingly important for Russian Social Democracy.

Social Democracy will ultimately be able to lead the non-industrial labouring classes because socialism is in the interest of *all* labouring classes. But this long-term perspective does not exhaust the potential for leadership of the *Volk* in the here and now. Precisely because Social Democracy is the merger of socialism and the worker movement, it is not restricted to preaching socialism and defending worker interests.

*Social Democracy cannot defend exclusively the interests of the proletariat. Its historical mission is to precipitate social evolution in every domain in which it can act, and to take in its hands the cause of all the exploited and all the oppressed.*¹²⁵

Thus Social Democracy encourages the proletariat to see itself as 'the sworn enemy of any exploitation or oppression, in whatever form they might take – it is the champion [*Vorkämpfer*] of all exploited and oppressed'.¹²⁶

What this means in concrete terms is that Social Democracy can defend the *present-day, acknowledged* interests of all labouring classes better than any other party. These interests are enshrined in the so-called 'minimum programme'. The logic of the minimum programme would be easier to grasp if it were called the *maximum* programme – that is, the maximum that can be achieved prior to proletarian rule. (Conversely, the logic of the so-called 'maximum programme' is that it contains the *minimum* that has to be realistically achievable before the worker class is justified in taking power.) 'Minimum' indeed seems a misleading epithet for a set of measures that would have entailed a vast political and social transformation

¹²² Kautsky 1908, p. 37.

¹²³ Kautsky 1909, p. 104.

¹²⁴ Kautsky 1965, p. 250.

¹²⁵ Kautsky 1900, p. 165.

¹²⁶ Kautsky 1965, p. 251.

of Imperial Germany: full representative democracy, full political liberties, religious tolerance, 'socialised' medicine, progressive tax, labour protection laws. This list also shows how justified the SPD was in regarding itself as the principal voice of the ethical decency of modernism in Imperial Germany. According to Kautsky, some of these demands can only be championed by an anticapitalist party. Others are officially part of the programme of 'bourgeois democracy', that is, those sections of the middle classes that are actively (or at least publicly) interested in democratic transformation. But – and this is a crucial observation – 'even the bourgeois-democratic demands will not be championed by any party with as much energy as by Social Democracy'.¹²⁷

Along with Social Democracy's role as the champion of the interests of all labouring classes as a whole is the influence that results as the proletarian way of life becomes more of a model for other classes. I have already cited Kautsky on this point, so I will document this aspect of the Social-Democratic narrative with some words written in 1898 by Parvus, a Russian-born Social Democratic activist who was at this time an influential spokesman for the SPD Left:

*The overwhelming majority of the population are in industry, trade, etc. These are therefore the people who determine the economic character of the country. This is not merely a matter of numerical superiority; it means that this industrial urban population with its interests, conflicts, views, and demands dominates the historical character of Germany, brings all other things under its sway, shapes them in its own likeness, makes them dependent upon itself, and, inevitably, establishes its moral hegemony over them by the vast tide of public opinion it generates.*¹²⁸

The reader will notice that Parvus used the word 'hegemony' in the passage just quoted. This allows us to segue nicely into the political strategy labelled 'hegemony' by the Russian Social Democrats. Our interest is much more in the logic of this political strategy than in the word used to label it (for a word history of 'hegemony', see the appendix to this chapter). 'Hegemony' was used to describe Social-Democratic hopes for inter-class leadership in the Russian context. The core idea of the hegemony strategy is that the Russian *proletariat* is the only force capable of leading the *bourgeois-democratic* revolution that would overthrow the tsar. As Plekhanov put it in 1889, 'The Russian revolution [Plekhanov means the anti-tsarist revolution] will either triumph as a revolution of the worker class or it will not triumph at all'.¹²⁹

This strategy has struck many as a surprising, even paradoxical, one for Marxists to adopt. According to the Marxist schema, it is said, the bourgeois revolution is carried out by the bourgeoisie – otherwise, why label it a 'bourgeois revolution'? – while the proletariat carries out the socialist revolution at a later date. What I want to show here is that the hegemony strategy follows – perhaps even with natural necessity – from the accepted premises of Social Democratic thinking that I have already described. In fact, the appropriate conclusions from these premises were already drawn by Kautsky in his book on parliamentarism in 1893.¹³⁰

Premise Number One is that political freedom is an absolute necessity for Social Democracy. From this premise, it follows that 'in countries where there is only a pretend parliamentary regime [*Scheinkonstitutionalismus*], another weighty task falls to the proletariat: the conquest of a genuinely parliamentary regime'.¹³¹ Perhaps, before the rise of Social Democ-

¹²⁷ Kautsky 1965, pp. 254-6.

¹²⁸ Tudor and Tudor 1988, p. 182, originally published in *Sächsische Arbeiter-Zeitung*, 6 February 1898, as part of a series directed against Bernstein. I have consulted only the English translation provided by the Tudors and therefore I am not absolutely certain that 'hegemony' appears in the German text.

¹²⁹ Zinoviev 1924, p. 54. On the basis of this statement, Zinoviev labels Plekhanov the father of the idea of the hegemony of the proletariat.

¹³⁰ Kautsky 1893 and Kautsky 1900 (French translation). All further Kautsky citations in this section are from this book.

¹³¹ Kautsky 1900, p. 166.

racy, a revolutionary could really believe that a parliamentary regime would only benefit the elite and not the people, but 'today it becomes clearer every day that [the struggle for proletarian political power] takes the form, at least in the east of Europe, of a struggle for a parliamentary regime, against militarism and absolutism'.¹³²

Premise Number Two is that the people as a whole also have an interest in the political freedom that will protect them from abuse of power. Of course, Social Democracy is the force that will most effectively use political freedom to fight abuses. A parliamentary system – even such a 'servile and weak' one as Austria – ensures that a single 'inflexible and brave' individual can throw the glare of publicity on abuses and set a certain limit to arbitrary action. Parliament provides 'a tribune from whose height the accusers of present day society can speak to the entire people'.¹³³

Premise Number Three is that the bourgeoisie's interest in political freedom goes down as the proletariat's interest in it goes up. The bourgeoisie certainly would not mind having political freedom for themselves, and they have no qualms about enlisting proletarian help in getting these freedoms – *as long as* the bourgeoisie can be sure that the proletariat will not use them in a dangerous way. Perhaps the proletariat can simply be banned from political participation, as in France after 1830, or perhaps the bourgeoisie feels unthreatened by a docile proletariat, as in England.

But the bourgeoisie has begun to notice, correctly, that it can no longer exploit the revolutionary services of the proletariat in this way. In fact, the evident success of Social Democracy makes political freedom itself rather less attractive. For German Social Democrats, it was axiomatic that the cowardly bourgeoisie had betrayed their own cause after 1848. As Kirkup recounts:

*It is a standing charge brought against German liberalism by the Social Democrats, that it has never led the progressive forces against the reaction with any degree of courage or resolution. They maintain that in the revolutionary struggles of 1848 the German Liberals never trusted the working class, that when the choice came to be made between the reaction and a strenuous democratic policy supported by the proletariat, they preferred to transact with the reaction, and so committed treason on the sacred cause of progress ... 'The treason of the bourgeoisie', 'the abdication by the bourgeoisie' of its historic place at the head of the democratic movement: these phrases sum up the worst accusations brought by the Social Democrats against the German middle class.*¹³⁴

Kautsky generalised the failure of the German bourgeoisie with the following epigram:

*In fact, the European bourgeoisie east of the Rhine has become so weak and so cowardly that in all likelihood the regime of the sabre and of the bureaucracy cannot be broken until the proletariat is in a position to conquer political power, so that the fall of absolutist militarism will lead directly to the seizure of political power by the proletariat.*¹³⁵

Put all these premises together, and we see that 'Social Democracy, the party of the class-aware proletariat, is by that very fact the most solid support of democratic aspirations, a much more reliable support than – the [bourgeois] democrats

¹³² Kautsky 1893, p. 138; Kautsky 1900, pp. 193-4.

¹³³ Kautsky 1900, p. 105. Lenin explicitly wanted the newspaper *Iskra* to be a temporary substitute for parliament as a tribune that could address the whole people.

¹³⁴ Kirkup 1906, pp. 200-2. Compare the comment by Michels on German liberalism's 'partisan struggle against socialism and its simultaneous and voluntary renunciation of all attempts to complete the political emancipation of the German bourgeoisie' (Michels 1962, pp. 49-50).

¹³⁵ Kautsky 1900, p. 194. Compare this statement from the Manifesto issued by the Russian Social-Democratic Worker Party at its first congress in 1898: 'The further east we go in Europe, the more weak, cowardly and base becomes the bourgeoisie in regard to politics and the greater are the cultural and political tasks that fall to the lot of the proletariat.' *Kommunisticheskai partiaia ... v rezoliutsiiakh* 1983, pp. 15-18. If he had been so minded, Lenin could have cited this statement in justification of the Bolshevik revolution in 1917.

themselves'.¹³⁶ The Social-Democratic proletariat was the most reliable supporter of democracy *because* it saw democracy not as an end in itself but as a means – an absolutely vital means. Social Democracy would love democracy less, loved it not socialism more.

The Russians may have been the first to use the word 'hegemony' to describe proletarian leadership in the bourgeois revolution, but the strategy itself was impeccably Social-Democratic. The basic idea was simply this: bourgeois political freedoms are much too important to be left to the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie would try to exploit the revolutionary services of the proletariat to get as much for themselves and as little for the labouring classes as possible. A proletariat led by Social Democracy would instead lead the whole people to ensure the most extensive democratic constitution available. Political freedom made Social Democracy possible and it was therefore the duty of Social Democracy to make political freedom possible.

According to the hegemony scenario, Social Democracy assumes leadership not just of the worker movement and of the proletariat, but the people [*das Volk*, the *narod*] as a whole. Thus we find ourselves now in the outer circles of the spread of awareness. The battle for leadership is more difficult in these outer circles. There is more incomprehension, vacillation and even hostility. The resulting complex set of expectations is brought out in a passage written by Kautsky in the 1920s:

As the mass, the economic importance, and the intelligence of the industrial population grow, so too does the attraction exerted by the proletariat on strata of the people that do not entirely belong to it but are close to it with respect to their standard of living and their economic relations. This attraction becomes the stronger, the greater the intellectual and organisational independence and unity of the proletariat are... .

The classes in society are in reality not so rigorously distinct as they have to be in theory ... Thus, there are numerous intermediate grades between the class of wage-labourers and the other working classes, peasants, artisans, and petty trades, just as there are between them and the intellectuals. Vacillating between the proletariat and capital, individual members and even whole groups of these classes and strata decide more in favour of or against the proletariat, depending on particular personal influences, historical situations, and economic constellations. Thus, a part of the peasants, petty bourgeois, and intellectuals can become ever more bitterly antagonistic to the proletariat. A constantly growing part, especially of the poorer strata, will be drawn to the proletariat and make the proletarian cause its own... . In this way, too, the mass army grows that marches under the proletarian banner.¹³⁷

Social Democracy as good news

We have canvassed Karl Kautsky's pronouncements on a number of topics and we shall see echoes of all of them in Lenin's writings. The power of these pronouncements does not stem merely from Kautsky's authoritative status. His various opinions are unified and anchored in three ways: by the narrative logic of the merger formula, by the authority of the

¹³⁶ Kautsky 1900, p. 194.

¹³⁷ Kautsky 1988, p. 409. If this commentary aimed at providing a full account of Bolshevism, we would have to go into the subject of inter-class leadership in much greater detail. In particular, the figure of the vacillating peasant or urban petty bourgeois is central to the Bolshevik view of the world. I have examined various aspects of inter class leadership in Bolshevik doctrine in Lih 1999, Lih 2000 and Lih 2002.

Communist Manifesto, and by the prestige of actually existing Social Democracy in Germany. We might even say that, for a reader such as Lenin, the *Communist Manifesto* and the *Erfurt Programme* stand in a Old Testament/New Testament relation to each other. The New Testament tells us a story that is supposed to govern our lives and then backs up this claim by arguing that the events of the story have unfolded *secundum scripturas*, as predicted by earlier authoritative writings. The *Erfurt Programme* tells an idealised version of the story of the SPD – past, present and future – as a confirmation of the predictions of the *Communist Manifesto*. In this way, it strengthens the authoritative status both of the *Manifesto* and the SPD model.

The merger formula – 'Social Democracy is the merger of socialism and the worker movement' – pulls all Kautsky's various arguments together. The expanding circle of awareness, the original and nearly fatal separation of socialism and the worker movement, the two-front polemical war against those who refuse the great Marxian synthesis, political freedom as light and air for the proletariat, the strength that comes from an inspiring final goal, the need for disciplined modern parties of nation-wide scope, the aspiration to become a *Volkspartei*, the need to carry out the democratic tasks that the bourgeois is too scared to undertake, and finally, Social Democracy's own exalted sense of mission – all these flow from the merger narrative. In order for the worker class to accomplish its socialist mission, it must understand this mission and make itself capable of overcoming all resistance to its completion. Social Democracy can provide the requisite insight and organisation only if it builds up an efficient nation-wide organisation. It can only do this if it has obtained political freedom. Political freedom, along with the many other demands of the 'minimum programme', allows and indeed compels Social Democracy to become a tribune of the people.

The merger formula was not confined to Kautsky. In fact, if there was one thing that united both orthodox and 'opportunist', it was loyalty to the merger formula as a definition of Social Democracy. A brief survey will bring out the foundational nature of the merger formula.

Conrad Schmidt was a member of the German Social-Democratic Party who leaned toward revisionism. In an article devoted to showing the many ways in which the *Communist Manifesto* had become dated, he started off with an appreciation of its fundamental contribution (NB: 'modern socialism' is a synonym for 'Social Democracy'):

*The essence of modern socialism lies in the connection between the working class movement and a final goal beyond bourgeois-capitalist society. Modern socialism found itself faced, firstly, with a spontaneous working class movement which had arisen as a reaction to unrestricted capitalist exploitation and, secondly, with the conception of collectively organised production and distribution of goods, which had arisen outside the mainstream of practical life, from criticism of the irrationality of bourgeois property. What socialism achieved was the combination and mutual interaction of both these moments, an interaction which stripped the actual working class movement of its native limitations and the socialist idea of its utopian character. The materialist conception of history ... provided the conceptual means of achieving this reconstructive combination.*¹³⁸

In 1908, our American socialist Robert Hunter published an informative and useful survey of the European socialist movement. In this book, he looks into the conflict within Social Democracy between 'Marxists' and 'reformists', but he insisted that there was still a fundamental difference between committed Social Democrats of either camp and socialists such as the Fabians who thought they could dispense with an independent political organisation of the proletariat. To bring out the fundamental difference, he cited with approval the words of the 'reformist' Jean Jaurès, one of the leaders of the

¹³⁸ Tudor and Tudor 1988, pp. 205-10 (originally published in *Vorwärts*, 20 February 1899). I do not know what German word is here translated as 'spontaneous'. Note this statement by Bernstein himself in 1898: 'We talk of "proletarian" ideas. And the way this is sometimes presented in our literature suggests that these ideas are not merely accepted by a large section of the workers of all civilised countries but were actually first produced by the intelligence of the modern working class. But this is at best a metaphor, an ideological inversion of the actual process.... Just think how much ideology is required for workers to see themselves as proletarians!' (Tudor and Tudor 1988, pp. 233-9).

French Socialist party. The reader will find little that is new in Jaures's words, but some repetition is inevitable when one wants to document the existence of a commonplace:

*To Marx belongs the merit, perhaps the only one of all attributed to him that has fully withstood the trying tests of criticism and of time, of having drawn together and unified the labour movement and the socialist idea. In the first third of the nineteenth century, labour struggled and fought against the crushing power of capital, but it was not conscious itself toward what end it was straining; it did not know that the true objective of its efforts was the common ownership of property. And, on the other hand, socialism did not know that the labour movement was the living form in which its spirit was embodied, the concrete practical force of which it stood in need... . [Marx] enriched the practical movement by the idea, and to the theory he added practice; he brought the socialist thought into proletarian life, and proletarian life into socialist thought.*¹³⁹

I have just given the words of a Frenchman as cited by a contemporaneous American, and now I will give the words of a Belgian, Emile Vandervelde, as cited by a contemporaneous Russian: 'The theory of socialism, born of compassion, remained divided from day-to-day socialism, born of suffering. It required long years, full of heavy ordeals, for the thinkers and proletarians to join forces and extend a hand to each other.' The Russian Social Democrat who cited these words, Vladimir Akimov, did not himself like the emphasis on separation, but nevertheless acknowledged that 'this image has been used repeatedly as a figurative description of the development of the social labour movement'.¹⁴⁰

The merger narrative was used as a template for developments in Russia by Iulii Martov when he published a pioneering historical sketch of the struggle of the Russian proletariat in 1900. The work begins with the words 'The contemporary international socialist worker movement consists of two streams that for a long time developed independently of each other'. There follows a very familiar account of Western developments lifted from Kautsky's *Erfurt Programme*, ending with the consummation devoutly to be wished:

Socialism came to the economic movement of the worker class, it took on itself the task of becoming the expression of the common interests of this class movement. And meanwhile the worker movement came to socialism: the worker masses started to see in socialism the final aim of their own historical movement. Thus took place the fusion of the practical worker movement with theoretical thought – thus was realised what Lassalle called the union of science with the workers. The idea of socialism became the idea of the worker class, the socialist party became its advance detachment [or 'vanguard'].

*This is how things turned out in all countries. Speaking of the history of the Russian revolutionary movement, we also must trace both the development of the economic struggle of the worker masses and the development of socialist thought up to the moment when it became the patrimony of the proletariat.*¹⁴¹

In the rest of the pamphlet, Martov traces the intermingling of socialism and the worker movement in a way that brings out both the canonical essence and the local peculiarities of the Russian story. Thus, in absolutist Russia the Social Democrats themselves had to take over much of the job that trade unions and the like had done in the West, namely, 'to give an organised and sensible character to the *stikhiinyi* [elemental] worker movement'. The trust earned by the Social Democrats in this line of activity helped them in their more basic task of

*sowing in the masses an awareness of the class interests of the proletariat, of the necessity of uniting in the struggle for socialism, and of the necessity of conquest of political freedom as the first stage on the path to the full liberation from exploitation.*¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Hunter 1908, pp. 206-7.

¹⁴⁰ Akimov 1969, p. 118. The Vandervelde citation is from 1898.

¹⁴¹ Martov 1900, pp. 27, 30.

¹⁴² Martov 1900, pp. 92-3.

We have seen the merger narrative's canonical status endorsed in various ways by a Czech, a German, a Belgian, an American, a Frenchman and a Russian. I believe we may consider as established its role as a central part of international Social Democracy's doctrinal identity.

The aim of this chapter has been to provide the Social-Democratic context for *WITBD*. Today, when scholars can affirm that the *Communist Manifesto* was neglected by Kautsky and by Social Democrats in general or that Marx was nihilistic about political freedom, the view of Social Democracy presented here may be surprising. A hundred years ago, it was a commonplace to any informed observer. To bring this out, I will conclude this chapter by looking at the spirit of Social Democracy through the eyes of two observers, one from the beginning and the other towards the end of the era of pre-World-War Social Democracy.

These two passages will anchor my 'good news' interpretation of Social Democracy. According to this interpretation, the self-appointed mission of Social Democracy was to bring the good news of their world-historical mission to the workers in the confident expectation that they would receive the message and carry out the mission. The first passage by John Rae reveals the Marxian roots of the political strategy implied by Social Democracy's mission and the second passage by Robert Hunter reveals the emotional exaltation that surrounded the mission.

John Rae was a learned economic historian who wrote one of the first scholarly biographies of Adam Smith, from which we may accurately deduce his hostility to socialism. Nevertheless, his 1884 publication *Contemporary Socialism* contains a chapter on Karl Marx that must be one of the very first academic discussions of Marx in any language – and, in my opinion, an excellent one (in particular due to his recognition of the importance of Marx's Young-Hegelian background). In the first edition of 1884, Rae noted that it was remarkable that the works of Marx were so little known in England even as they stirred up a commotion as far away as Russia, especially since *Das Kapital* is so imbued with things English. But an English translation of *Das Kapital* had appeared in 1887, leading Rae to remark in the second edition of 1891 that 'we have therefore grown more familiar of late with the name and importance of Karl Marx'.¹⁴³ In his chapter on Marx he quotes Marx's criticism of the original outlook of the Communist League (the organisation for which he drafted the *Communist Manifesto*):

*its work could have no tenable theoretical basis except that of a scientific insight into the economic structure of society, and this ought to be put into a popular form, not with the view of carrying out any utopian system, but of promoting among the working classes and other classes a self-conscious participation in the process of historical transformation of society that was taking place under their eyes.*¹⁴⁴

Rae comments that 'this is always with Marx the distinctive and ruling feature of his system'. After noting Marx's belief in inevitable economic evolution, he describes at length the practical political strategy implied in Marx's system. I cite this passage *in extenso*, not only because I think it one of the best things ever written by an academic scholar about Marx but because it proves that even in 1884, the year after Marx's death, when German Social Democracy was still struggling to come into existence, the political strategy that inspired Lenin was clearly apparent to an attentive reader of Marx.

Marx thought the League should also change its method and tactics. Its work, being that of social revolution, was different from the work of the old political conspirators and secret societies, and therefore needed different weapons; the times, too, were changed, and offered new instruments. Street insurrections, surprises, intrigues, pronunciamentos might overturn a dynasty, or oust a government, or bring them to reason, but were of no avail in the world for introducing collective property or abolishing wage labour. People would just begin the day after to work for hire and rent their farms as they did before.

¹⁴³ Rae 1891, pp. 128-9.

¹⁴⁴ Rae 1884, p. 127. The passage comes from Marx's *Herr Vogt* (Marx 1984, p. 107). Rae's translation is rather free but (I believe) does not betray the spirit of Marx's point.

A social revolution needed other and larger preparation; it needed to have the whole population first thoroughly leavened with its principles; nay, it needed to possess an international character, depending not on detached local outbreaks, but on steady concert in revolutionary action on the part of the labouring classes everywhere. The cause was not political, or even national, but social; and society – which was indeed already pregnant with the change – must be aroused to a conscious consent to the delivery.

What was first to be done, therefore, was to educate and move public opinion, and in this work the ordinary secret society went but a little way. A secret propaganda might still be carried on, but a public and open propaganda was more effectual and more suitable to the times. There never existed greater facilities for such a movement, and they ought to make use of all the abundant means of popular agitation and intercommunication which modern society allowed. No more secret societies in holes and corners, no more small risings and petty plots, but a great broad organisation working in open day, and working restlessly by tongue and pen to stir the masses of all European countries to a common international revolution. Marx sought, in short, to introduce the large system of production into the art of conspiracy.¹⁴⁵

I present the next passage by Robert Hunter with some hesitation. I read it out in 2001 at a conference on *WITBD* in Essen, Germany, and was told later that I was perceived as making a hysterical attack on Lenin. I was also told that any comparison between Marxism and religion was nothing but a typical bourgeois ploy. But, speaking as a historian, I say that the emotional fervour and dedication evoked by this passage was an essential part of Social Democracy, very much including the Russian Social Democrat Lenin. Anyone who is embarrassed by Hunter's rhetoric will also be embarrassed by the Marxist Left at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But my motive in bringing the passage forth here is not to make the should-be-banal point that the socialism of this era can be compared to religious belief in its intensity and its demands (a point that the revolutionaries themselves often made). I rather want to demonstrate how this socialist fervour expressed itself in the story of the inspired and inspiring activist who is spreading the word of Social Democracy and by this means is building up a world-wide army of fighters for the cause.

Almost unknown to the world outside of Labour a movement wide as the universe grows and prospers. Its vitality is incredible, and its humanitarian ideals come to those who labour as drink to parched throats. Its creed and programme call forth a passionate adherence, its converts serve it with a daily devotion that knows no limit of sacrifice, and in the face of persecution, misrepresentation, and even martyrdom, they remain loyal and true... . From Russia, across Europe and America to Japan, from Canada to Argentina, it crosses frontiers, breaking through the barriers of language, nationality, and religion as it spreads from factory to factory, from mill to mill, and from mine to mine, touching as it goes with the religion of life the millions of the underworld.

Its converts work in every city, town and hamlet in the industrial nations, spreading the new gospel among the poor and lowly, who listen to their words with religious intensity. Tired workmen pore over the literature which these missionaries leave behind them, and fall to sleep over open pages; and the youth, inspired by its lofty ideals and elevated thought, leave the factory with joyous anticipation to read through the night.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Rae 1884, pp. 127-9.

¹⁴⁶ Hunter 1908, pp. v-vi. Compare to Lassalle's rhetoric half a century earlier.

Supplemental Readings

Section I: The Merger Formula

The Fight for Freedom and the Fight for Power - V.I. Lenin (short)

Real freedom only comes within a democratic republic. Whoever fights for freedom for the people, but does not fight for the sovereignty of the people in the state, is either inconsistent or insincere. The purveyors of false freedom will soon be exposed in the eyes of the masses while the program of social democracy will win hearts and minds.

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1906/may/05.htm>

Lenin - Lars Lih (long)

An accessible and comparatively short biography of Lenin that reintroduces his social democratic heritage.

<https://www.pdfdrive.com/lenin-by-lars-lih-e54934173.html>

The Historic Accomplishment of Karl Marx - Karl Kautsky (long)

One of the most influential texts of 2nd International Marxism. Kautsky provides a clear and succinct introduction to Marxism, including the merger formula.

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1908/histacc/index.html>

Section II

Economism and High Politics

Section II: Economism and High Politics

Summary

Central to the principles of our organization stands the question of what we are fighting for. Are we fighting for material demands? For the betterment of our day-to-day lot? What are our long-term goals? And how does the political aspect of our struggle factor into our goal? Such questions lay before us in DSA, as we are in the midst of our transformation from a loose group of activists into a formal socialist party. These questions were also asked by various factions and personalities within the embryonic Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP). Most important for our considerations here, and for the readers of Section Two of the MUG Reader, are the viewpoints of Lenin and of his economist rivals. The problem of economism, what it actually stands for, and its divergence from true Social Democracy, was the major theme of Lenin's *What is to be Done?*. It was critical for the socialists of Lenin's day to identify the strain of economism and clarify their own thinking and tactics to stand firm in clear Marxist orthodoxy. It is just as important for us today, for we are witnessing similar arguments and lines being taken by others on the political left, both within DSA and without. To center ourselves in the historical significance of this conflict, let us reflect on Nadezhda Krupskaya's *Reminiscences of Lenin*:

"Vladimir Ilyich read Marx's Capital to the workers and explained it to them. He devoted the second half of the lesson to questioning the workers about their work and conditions of labor, showing them the bearing which their life had on the whole structure of society, and telling them in what way the existing order could be changed. This linking of theory with practice was a feature of Vladimir Ilyich's work in the study-circles. Gradually other members of our circle adopted the same method.

"When the hectographed Vilna pamphlet On Agitation appeared the following year, the soil had been fully prepared for agitation by leaflets. The thing was to make a start. The method of agitation based on the workers' everyday needs struck deep roots in our Party work. I did not fully appreciate how efficacious this method was until years later, when, living In France as a political emigrant, I observed how, during the great strike of the postal workers in Paris, the French Socialist Party stood completely aloof from it. It was the business of the trade unions, they said. In their opinion the business of a party was only political struggle. They had no clear idea whatever about the necessity of combining the economic with the political struggle.

"Many of the comrades who worked in St. Petersburg at the time, seeing the effect this leaflet agitation had, were so carried away by the work that they entirely forgot that this was one of the forms, but not the only form of work among the masses, and took the path of notorious "Economism."

The economicistic standpoint assigns primary significance to the economic and workplace struggle. If it chooses even to acknowledge the political struggle at all, economism views politics as emerging from the economic struggle. In this formulation, the entire point of the political struggle, or the struggle for democratic rights and political freedom, is to create room, as it were, for furthering the workplace struggle. This view sees the basis of one's class position as one's day-to-day activities and present economic position within the capitalist economy. As such, just as Martynov did, economists see the workplace struggle as the most applicable form of the Social Democratic struggle. This centering of the economic struggle, however, at the expense of all else, leaves the Social Democrats unable to cope with or respond to the multi-faceted struggles they face. It also allows the bourgeoisie to lead the struggle for democracy — something they have not and will never do with sufficient energy.

Let us devise a simple illustration. Take an autoworker, a lineworker, in fact. A classic proletarian (if there ever was one) whose class position can't be doubted. The economist sees in the autoworker's workplace struggle — in their fighting for higher wages, for sick-leave, better conditions, etc., up to and including the eventual struggle for the formation of a union — as the basis for socialist struggle. The economist thinks that socialism is advanced through the struggle for workplace reforms. Now, let us consider an unfortunately common eventuality: the auto worker loses their job. They are now unemployed, perhaps sustaining themselves and their family by welfare, charity, or assistance from family and friends. This person is not currently occupied with "working," meaning that they are not currently occupied with setting the engine of capital in motion. Does this lack of work in the present moment mean that this individual is not subject to political repression? Of course not, as they still maintain the same relation to the capitalist state. Though they are not presently

engaged in the formal cycle of capital, they are still on the sidelines, waiting to be thrown into the machine of capital. Their living standards remain at the whims of the bank that control the loan for their car and mortgage on their home. They, or perhaps their children, are still at risk of falling victim to the military-industrial complex. They may decide that their best hope for a secure life is joining the military and fighting, killing, being injured, and perhaps dying on behalf of the state.

We must now make clear how the economic struggle, when left on its own, fails to rise to the level of the Social Democratic struggle. In general, the economist struggle is grounded entirely in the particular. In contrast, the Social Democratic struggle is realized through the universality of the political struggle — concretely, in centering the lack of political freedom as the nucleus of the struggle in general. Economic reforms and workplace reforms are, by their very nature, particular. They are particular both by relegating themselves to the arena of the workplace (as a societal construct) and being contingent on the particular issues in each workplace. It is particularities all the way down.

However, by saying that the Social Democratic struggle is universal while the workplace struggle is particular, we are not downplaying the importance or necessity of the economic struggle. The Social Democratic Party must at every stage contend itself with the plight of the worker in their workplace. Nor are we denying that within the workplace, we can sometimes see the most immediate arena of class conflict within capitalist society. What we are saying is that the racial, militarist, imperialist, feminist, and all other manifestations of class conflict are all possible and viable fronts for struggle as well. The Social Democratic Party must be present in each of these particular struggles. The Party's universal purpose is to tie each one of these struggles back to the lack of political power held by the working masses. The resolution of all of these apparent disparate struggles, once united within the struggle for political freedom, is the democratic republic.

The Social Democratic Party must be capable of addressing fronts for struggle that (from an agitational and tactical standpoint) are more opportune than others. Examples can be seen within the past few months. In the fall of 2023, the United Auto Workers (UAW) went on strike, and in so doing launched the largest union struggle that the United States had seen in decades. At that moment, the task was the furthering of the workplace struggle. But the strike came to an end and concessions were won. We are also seeing the repercussions of the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*. In those states unlucky enough to be under the most reactionary of governments, the abolition of abortion rights means that women must live knowing their lack of bodily autonomy. Women risk going to a doctor who may decide not to treat them out of either a fear of being prosecuted under draconian 19th-century laws or their own religious persuasion. Women in comparatively “freer” states live with the constant understanding that their present ability to control their bodies lies on shaky ground because it is entirely contingent on the decisions of white-haired, often unelected, despots at the top of the social ladder.

At the moment this is being written, arguably the most glaring public front is the anti-Zionist front: the struggle of the Palestinian people against Israel. This front functions on two levels: as a struggle of oppressed people against their oppressors, as well as a struggle against imperialism. The economicistic standpoint says that these struggles are not viable fronts for socialist struggle because they are distinct from the workplace conflict (not necessarily lesser, but fundamentally distinct, and not within the purview of a socialist party). The Social Democratic Party, on the other hand, while understanding the particular nature of each of these conflicts, sees them as part of a cohesive whole, as fronts within the same conflict, with elements of each within each other. This conflict is thus a chain with many links, separate units, yes, but intimately connected. The strength of one is only as good as the strength of every other. The task of the Social Democratic Party is to identify the weak link in the chain, whatever it may be. The Party must break that link and shatter the chain. With this in mind, Lenin says in Chapter 3 of *What is to be Done?*:

“It is not enough to explain the political oppression of the workers (just as it is not enough to explain to them the opposition between their interests and that of the owners). It is necessary to agitate in relation to each concrete manifestation of this oppression (just as we have come to agitate in relation to concrete manifestations of economic oppression). And since this oppression falls on the most various classes of society, since it appears in the most various areas of life and activity – occupational, general citizenship, personal life, religion, science, and so on and so forth – surely it is obvious that we will not carry out our task of developing political awareness of the workers, if we do not take upon ourselves the organization of an all-sided political indictment of the autocracy?”

The Party's role is to tie each front of struggle back to the lack of democratic rights and freedoms for the working masses. Lacking this all-sided nature of the political struggle advanced by the Social Democrats, we will inevitably find

Section II: Economism and High Politics

ourselves in a situation described by Kruskaya regarding the French Socialist Party. The French saw their goals as *merely* political and the workplace struggle as *merely* economic. Because they saw the struggles as entirely distinct, they decided not to *lower themselves* to the level of the trade unions. This must not be the future of our developing Party. The true Social Democratic Party, while fundamentally an all-seeing political force, does not *lessen* itself by reaching down to the workers in their economic struggle, nor does it compromise its own mission. It must reach down to the workers and meet them where they are. The Party must lift them and then carry them forward in lockstep with those engaging in every other form of struggle. Together, everyone marches toward that unifying goal: the democratic republic.

Study Questions

*Independent Study questions are italicized

1. Describe Lenin's conception of the "tribune of the people" vs. the "trade union secretary" and how it's related to political strategy in the DSA.
2. What was Lenin's objective and how did it shape his conception of necessary party organization? What was the objective of the Economists and how did it shape their conception of necessary party organization?
3. *What are the differences between economism and social democracy?*
4. How is 'What is to be Done?' relevant to our moment? In what ways is it not?
5. How has What is to be Done been used since its appearance?

What Is To Be Done?, Chapter 3: Tred-iunionist Politics and Social-Democratic Politics

by Vladimir Lenin

We start once more by praising *Rabochee delo*. 'Indictment literature and the proletarian struggle' – this is the title Martynov gives to his article in *Rabochee delo*, No.10 about the disagreements with *Iskra*. 'We cannot limit ourselves just to indictments of the system that blocks the path of its (the worker party's) development. We must also react to the urgent and current interests of the proletariat' (p.63) – thus does he formulate the essence of these disagreements. '...*Iskra*...is in actuality an organ of revolutionary opposition that indicts our system and mainly our political system.... .We, on the other hand, work and will continue to work for the cause of the workers in a close organic link with the proletarian struggle' (p. 63). We must be grateful to Martynov for this formulation. It takes on great general interest because it encompasses, in essence, not just our disagreements with *Rabochee delo* but, in general, all the disagreements between us and the 'economists' on the issue of political struggle. We have shown already that the 'economists' do not unconditionally reject 'politics', but merely stray continually from a Social-Democratic understanding of politics to a *tred-iunionist* one. Martynov strays in the same way, and so we are ready to take him and no one else as a *model* of economist confusions on this issue. As we shall demonstrate, the choice of Martynov is one which neither the authors of the Separate Supplement to *Rabochaia mysl*, nor the authors of the Worker Self-Liberation group proclamation, nor the authors of the economist letter in *Iskra*, No. 12 have a right to dispute.

Political Agitation and Its Narrowing by the Economists

Everybody knows that the wide dissemination and consolidation of the economic¹⁴⁷ struggle went hand in hand with the creation of a 'literature' of economic (factory and trade) indictments. The main content of the 'leaflets' was the indictment of factory rules, and among the workers there quickly flared up a genuine passion for indictments. As soon as the workers saw that a circle of Social Democrats wished and was able to provide them with a new kind of leaflet that said the whole truth about their poverty-stricken life, their boundlessly heavy labour and their lack of all rights – they began, so to speak, to bombard the circles with material from factories and workshops. This 'literature of indictment' created a tremendous sensation not only at the factory excoriated by a given leaflet but at all factories where anything was heard about the facts being exposed. And, since the needs and distress of the workers in different enterprises and different trades have much in common, this 'truth about the worker life' exhilarated *everybody*. Among the most backward workers there developed a real passion for 'getting into print' – a noble passion for this embryonic form of the war against the entire present-day social system that is built on looting and oppression. And the vast majority of 'leaflets' were indeed a declaration of war, because the exposure had a highly instigating effect and called forth from the workers a common demand to remove the most crying abuses and a readiness to support these demands with strikes. The factory owners themselves were in the final analysis forced to recognise the significance of these leaflets as a declaration of war, so much so that sometimes they had no desire to await the opening of hostilities [before making concessions]. The indictments, as indeed is always the case, became

¹⁴⁷ To avoid misunderstandings, please note that, in the following discussion, we always understand 'economic struggle' (following the accepted usage) to mean the 'practical-economic struggle' that Engels (in the citation given above) called 'resistance to the capitalists' and which in free countries is called the trade, syndicalist or *tred-iunionist* struggle.

powerful by the very fact of their appearance, acquired the significance of a mighty moral pressure. It happened more than once that the mere appearance of a leaflet was enough to get all or some of the demands satisfied. In a word, the economic (factory) indictments were and remain today an important tool of economic struggle. And they will retain this significance as long as capitalism exists and necessarily calls forth the self-defence of the workers. In the most advanced European countries, it is possible to observe how the indictment of abuses of some out-of-the-way business or some completely overlooked area of cottage industry serves as the starting point of the awakening of class awareness, of the beginning of the trade [*professial'nyi*] struggle and the dissemination of socialism.¹⁴⁸

The overwhelming majority of Russian Social Democrats in the period just passed were almost completely taken up with this work of organising factory indictments. It is enough to recall *Rabochaia mysl* to realise the extent of this absorption and how it was forgotten in all of this that *taken by itself*, organising economic indictments is in essence not yet Social-Democratic but only *tred-iunionist* activity. The indictments encompassed, in essence, only the relation of workers *of a given trade* to their bosses and all they accomplished was that the sellers of labour-power learned how to sell their 'commodity' more advantageously and to fight the buyer on a ground of a purely commercial deal. These indictments could have become (given some utilisation of them by an organisation of revolutionaries) a beginning and a component part of Social-Democratic activity, but they could also (and, in the context of kowtowing toward *stikhiinost*, must) lead to a 'exclusively-trade-union' struggle and to a non-Social-Democratic worker movement.

Social Democracy guides the struggle of the worker class not only for advantageous conditions in the sale of labour-power but also for the abolition of the social system that forces the have-nots to sell themselves to the rich. Social Democracy understands the worker class not only in its relation to a given group of entrepreneurs but in its relation to all classes of modern society, to the state as organised political power. It is therefore understandable that Social Democrats must not confine themselves to an economic struggle and also that they must not allow the organisation of economic indictments to be their predominant activity. We must also actively take up the political education of the worker class, the development of its political awareness. 'All are agreed' on this *now*, after the first onslaught against 'economism' by *Zaria* and *Iskra* (although some agree only in words, as we shall see soon).

Let us now consider, what should political education be? Can we limit ourselves to propagandising the idea of the enmity of the worker class towards the autocracy? Of course not. It is not enough to *explain* the political oppression of the workers (just as it is not enough to *explain* to them the opposition between their interests and that of the owners). It is necessary to agitate in relation to each concrete manifestation of this oppression (just as we have come to agitate in relation to concrete manifestations of economic oppression). And since *this* oppression falls on the most various classes of society, since it appears in the most various areas of life and activity – occupational [*professial'nyi*], general citizenship, personal life, religion, science, and so on and so forth – surely it is obvious that *we will not carry out our task* of developing political awareness of the workers, if we do not *take upon ourselves* the organisation of *an all-sided political indictment* of the autocracy? And, if we want to carry on agitation on the basis of concrete manifestations of oppression, we must create indictments of these manifestations (just as it is necessary to indict factory abuses in order to conduct economic agitation)?

¹⁴⁸ In the present chapter, we speak only of *political* struggle, of a broader or narrower conception of it. Therefore, only in passing will I mention as a curiosity the accusation of *Rabochee delo* against *Iskra* for 'excessive abstention' in relation to the economic struggle (*Two Congresses*, p. 27, and re-hashed by Martynov in his pamphlet *Social Democracy and the Worker Class*). If the accusers would measure, let's say, in pounds or printed pages (since they love doing this sort of thing) the section on economic struggle in *Iskra* for one year and compare it to the corresponding section in *Rabochee delo* and *Rabochaia mysl* taken together, then they would clearly see that they are backward in this area as well. Evidently, the awareness of this simple truth forces them to resort to statements that clearly show their embarrassment. They write that '*Iskra* is compelled(!) whether they like it or not(!) to take account of the powerful demands of life and at least(!!) to insert the news that they receive about the worker movement' (*Two Congresses*, p. 27). Now there's an argument that really destroys us!

This is all very clear, one would think? But it is precisely here that it turns out that people 'all' agree on the necessity of developing political awareness in an *all-sided* fashion only in words. Just here, it turns out that, for example, *Rabochee delo* not only did not itself take upon itself the task of organising (or laying the foundations for organising) all-sided political indictments – it also tried to *drag back Iskra*, the newspaper that did take on this task. Listen to this: 'The political struggle of the worker class is merely' (no, *not* 'merely') 'the most developed, broad and active form of economic struggle' (the programme of *Rabochee delo* in *Rabochee delo*, No. 1, p. 3). 'Now the task stands before the Social Democrats of imparting a political character to the economic struggle itself' (Martynov in No. 10, p. 42). 'The economic struggle is the most widely applicable means of drawing the masses into active political struggle' (resolution of the congress of the Union and its proposed corrections [to the draft agreement with *Iskra*]: *Two Congresses*, pp. 11 and 17). All these theses permeate *Rabochee delo* (as the reader will see) starting with its very emergence and going right up to the most recent 'instructions of the editorial board', and they all express, clearly, a single outlook on political agitation and struggle. Let us look closer at this outlook from the point of view of the opinion dominant among all the 'economists', namely, that political agitation must *follow after* economic agitation.

Is it true that economic struggle is in general¹⁴⁹ 'the most widely applicable means' of drawing the masses into the political struggle? Completely untrue. A no less 'widely applicable' means of 'drawing in' is *each and every* manifestation of police oppression and autocratic outrage – and definitely not just manifestations tied to the economic struggle. The *zemstvo* captains and their corporal punishment of the peasants, the bribe-taking of bureaucrats and the way the police treat the urban man-in-the-street, the fight against starving people and the mockery of the people's striving toward light and knowledge, the extortion of taxes and the persecution of sectarians, the harsh drill of soldiers and the treatment of students and liberal intelligentsia as if they were in the military – speaking generally, why should we consider that all of these and a thousand other similar manifestations of oppression that are not tied to the 'economic' struggle are a *less* 'widely applicable means' and an occasion for political agitation and drawing in the masses to political struggle? In fact, the opposite is the case: in the general sum of the day-to-day occurrences in which the worker suffers (either in his own person or in the person of those close to him) from lack of rights, abuse of power and violence, there is no doubt that only a small minority consists of police oppression that is specific to the economic struggle. So why *narrow* in advance the sweep of political agitation, why call only *one* of the means 'the most widely applicable', when a Social Democrat should recognise others that are, speaking generally, no less 'widely applicable'?

In the days of long ago (last year! ...), *Rabochee delo* wrote: 'Urgent political demands become accessible to the masses after one or at the most a few strikes', 'as soon as the government puts the police and the gendarmes into action' (No. 7, *August* 1900). This opportunist theory of stages has today already been rejected by the Union when they made a concession to us and wrote 'there is no need, even at the very beginning, to conduct political agitation only on economic grounds' (*Two Congresses*, p. 11). Simply this repudiation by the Union of part of its past mistakes will be more useful than any number of lengthy arguments in showing a future historian of Russian Social Democracy to what depths the 'economists' brought socialism! But what naivete on the part of the Union to imagine that, by rejecting one form of nar-

¹⁴⁹ We say 'in general', because *Rabochee delo* is talking precisely about general principles and general tasks of the Party as a whole. No doubt, there are occasions in practice where political [struggle] *should* follow after economic [struggle], - but to talk this way in a resolution that is aimed at all of Russia is something only 'economists' would do. There are also some occasions when 'at the very beginning' conducting political agitation 'only on economic grounds' is the only possibility- and nevertheless *Rabochee delo* has managed to work its way to the conclusion that 'there is no need [even at the very beginning to conduct political agitation only on economic grounds]' (*Two Congresses*, p. 11) [that is, on the issue of agitation *Rabochee delo* grasped the difference between individual cases and programmatic generalisation]. In the following chapter we will show that the tactics of the 'politicians' and revolutionaries not only do not ignore the *trede-unionist* tasks of Social Democracy but on the contrary they and they alone provide a *guarantee* that these tasks are completely carried out.

rowing politics, it could induce us to agree to another form of narrowing! Wouldn't it have been more logical to say instead that the economic struggle should be conducted on the widest possible basis, that it should always be used for political agitation, but that [nevertheless] 'there is no need' to consider economic struggle the *most* widely applicable means for drawing in the masses into active political struggle?

The Union imparts significance to the fact that it substituted the expression 'the most widely applicable means' for the expression 'best means' used in the corresponding resolution by the Fourth Congress of the Jewish Worker Union (Bund). It would be difficult, true, to say which of these resolutions is better: in our opinion, *both are worse*. Both the Union and the Bund are led astray here (in part, perhaps, even without their awareness, under the influence of tradition) toward an economist, *tred-iunionist* conception of politics. In essence, the matter is not changed a whit whether this occurs by means of the formula 'best' or by means of the formula 'most widely applicable'. If the Union had said that 'political agitation on economic grounds' is the most widely applied (not 'applicable') method, then it would have been correct in relation to a certain period in the development of our Social-Democratic movement. It would have been correct precisely in relation to the '*economists*', in relation to many *praktiki* (if not to a majority of them) from 1898 to 1901, since these *praktiki-economists* did really *apply* political agitation (insofar as they applied it at all!) *almost exclusively on economic grounds*. This kind of political agitation is recognised and even recommended, as we saw, by *Rabochaia mysl* and the Self-Liberation Group! *Rabochee delo* should have *resolutely condemned* the fact that the useful work of economic agitation was accompanied by a harmful narrowing of political struggle. Instead, it announced that the most widely *applied* means (*by 'economists'*) is the most widely *applicable!* It is not surprising that when we call such people '*economists*', they are forced to resort to loudly swearing at us and calling us '*mystifiers*' and '*disorganisers*' and '*papal nuncios*' and '*slanderers*'.¹⁵⁰ – or that they must needs sob before all and sundry that they have received a mortal insult and to state, practically with oaths: 'Not one single Social-Democratic organisation is now guilty of "*economism*".'¹⁵¹ Oh, these slanderers, these evil politicals! They must have invented this whole '*economism*', out of sheer hatred of mankind, as a way of giving people mortal insults!

When Martynov formulates the task of Social Democracy as 'imparting a political character to the economic struggle itself', what concrete, real sense does this formulation have? The economic struggle is the collective struggle of the workers with the owners for advantageous conditions of the *sale of labour-power*, for the improvement of the conditions of labour and life for the workers. This struggle is by necessity a trade [*professial'nyi*] struggle, since the conditions of labour vary extremely in different trades and consequently the struggle for the *improvement* of these conditions must be conducted along trade lines (trade unions in the West, leaflets and temporary [illegal] associations for trade struggle in Russia and so forth). To impart 'a political character to the economic struggle itself' means, therefore, to attain the implementation of these trade demands, these improvements of the conditions of labour in a particular trade by means of 'legislative and administrative measures' (as Martynov puts it on the following page of his article, p. 43). This is exactly what all worker trade unions are doing and have always done. Look at the writing of those weighty scholars (and 'weighty' opportunists), the Webbs, and you will see that the English worker unions have long, long ago become aware and have implemented the task of 'imparting a political character to the economic struggle itself'. They long ago have been fighting for the freedom of strikes, for the removal of each and every legal obstacle to the co-operative and trade[-union] movement, for the promulgation of laws in defence of women and children, for the improvement of conditions of labour by means of sanitary and factory legislation and so on.

¹⁵⁰ All expressions taken right out of *Two Congresses*, pp. 31, 32, 28 and 30.

¹⁵¹ *Two Congresses*, p. 32.

Thus behind the eloquent phrase 'imparting a political character to the economic struggle *itself*', which sounds so profound and revolutionary, is hidden in essence the traditional striving to *lower* Social-Democratic politics to *tred-iunionist* politics! Under the guise of correcting the one-sidedness of *Iskra* – which, don't you know, places 'revolutionising of dogma higher than the revolutionising of life'¹⁵² – we are given as something new *the struggle for economic reforms*. In fact, absolutely nothing but the struggle for economic reforms is contained in the phrase 'impart a political character to the economic struggle itself'. And Martynov himself would be able to arrive at this straightforward conclusion if he would just think a bit about the meaning of his own words. 'Our party' (he says while training his heaviest artillery on *Iskra*) 'can and must present the government concrete demands for legislative and administrative measures against economic exploitation, against unemployment, against hunger and so on' (pp. 42-3 in *Rabochee delo*, No. 10). Concrete demands for measures – isn't this the demand for social reforms? And we once more ask impartial readers: are we slandering the *Rabochee delo* people when we call them secret Bernsteinians, since they advance as a point of their *disagreement* with *Iskra* the thesis of the necessity of the struggle for economic reforms?

Revolutionary Social Democracy has always included and still includes in its activity the struggle for reforms. But it uses 'economic' agitation to present to the government not only the demand for this or that measure but also (and first of all) the demand to cease being an autocratic government. More than that, it regards as its responsibility to present this demand to the government *not only* on the grounds of the economic struggle, but also on the grounds of all the manifestations in general of social/political life. In a word, it subordinates the struggle for reform to the revolutionary struggle for freedom and for socialism as one part to a larger whole. Martynov resurrects the theory of stages in another form when he prescribes as obligatory a (so to speak) economic path of development for political struggle. But when he comes forth, in a moment of revolutionary upsurge, with a special so-called 'task' of a struggle for reforms, he drags the Party back and plays into the hand both of 'economist' and of liberal opportunism.

There's more. Coily hiding the struggle for reforms under the elegant thesis 'imparting a political character to the economic struggle *itself*', Martynov puts forth *economic reforms* (and even factory reforms) as something special *in and of themselves*. We don't know why he has done this. Perhaps, through carelessness? But if he has in view not just 'factory' reforms, then, in that case, his entire thesis that we have just examined loses all sense. Perhaps [he talks this way because] he considers it possible and plausible that the government will make 'concessions' only in the economic area?¹⁵³ If that is the case, then it is a strange misconception: concessions are possible and happen in other areas as well – in the field of legislation concerning corporal punishment, or internal passports, or redemption payments, or sectarian groups, or censorship, and so and so forth.'Economic' concessions (or pseudo concessions) are the cheapest and most advantageous for the government, obviously, since it hopes by this means to inspire the confidence of the worker masses [toward the government]. But just for this reason we, as Social Democrats, *should not* in any way whatsoever give grounds for the opinion (or misunderstanding) that economic reforms are the ones that we most value or the ones that we consider the most important and so forth. 'Such demands', says Martynov about the concrete demands for legislative and administrative measures advanced by him above, 'are not just an empty noise, since they promise tangible results and thus can be actively supported by the worker mass'... .We are not 'economists', oh no! All we do is grovel before the 'tangibility' of concrete results just as slavishly as Messrs. Bernsteins, Prokopovichs, Struves, R.M. and *tutti quanti*. All we do is let it be understood (along

¹⁵² *Rabochee delo*, No. 10, p. 60. This is the Martynov variant of the application to the present-day chaotic state of our movement the thesis: 'each step of genuine movement is more important than a dozen programmes' (as discussed earlier). In essence, this is only a translation into Russian of the notorious Bernstein motto: 'the movement is everything and the final aim is nothing'.

¹⁵³ Page 43: 'Of course, if we recommend to the workers to make certain economic demands to the government, we do this because in the *economic* area the autocratic government is ready if need be to make certain concessions.'

with Narcissus Tuporylov) that everything that does not 'promise tangible results' is 'an empty noise'! All we do is express ourselves in such a way that it seems as if the worker mass is not capable (and has not already demonstrated its capability, in spite of all those who endow them with their own small-mindedness) of actively supporting *each and every* protest against autocracy – even when *it promises absolutely no tangible results at all!*

Let's take even the examples, adduced by Martynov himself, of 'measures' against unemployment and hunger. At the same time as *Rabochee delo* is busying itself, judging by its own promise, with working out and elaborating 'concrete' (in the form of legislative drafts?) 'demands of legislative and administrative measures' that 'promise tangible results' – at the very same time, *Iskra* ('invariably placing the revolutionising of dogma higher than the revolutionising of life') tried to explain the unbreakable connection between unemployment and the capitalist system as a whole, warned that 'famine is coming', indicted the police 'struggle against the starving' and the outrageous 'provisional rules for forced labour', while *Zaria* published for agitational purposes a separate offprint of material dedicated to the famine. Good heavens! – These incorrigibly narrow orthodox types are so 'one-sided', these dogmatic types are so deaf to the imperatives of 'life itself'! Not a single one of these articles – horrors! – has *even one* (can you imagine it? – not even the slightest) 'concrete demand' that 'promises tangible results'! These poor unfortunate dogmatic types! Turn them over to Krichevskii and Martynov so that they can hear and be persuaded that tactics are a process of growth, growing with, etc., and that one must impart a political character to the economic struggle *itself*.

The economic struggle of the workers with the owners and the government ('economic struggle with the government!!), besides its immediate revolutionary significance, is also significant because it continually pushes the workers up against the issue of their political lack of rights' (Martynov, p. 44). We copied out this citation not in order to repeat for the hundredth and thousandth time what has already been said but in order to congratulate Martynov for this novel and outstanding formulation: 'economic struggle of the workers with the owners and the government'. What a beauty! With what inimitable talent and masterly elimination of all specific differences and distinctions in nuance between 'economists' do we find expressed here in a concise and clear thesis *the entire essence* of 'economism'. [Russian 'economism' started with] an appeal to the workers to 'a political struggle that they conduct for the common interest, having in mind the improvement of the position of all workers';¹⁵⁴ it continued with the theory of stages and ended up with the resolution of the [Union] congress about 'the most widely applicable' and so on. 'Economic struggle of the workers with the government' is precisely *tred-iunionist* politics, and there is a great gulf between it and Social-Democratic politics.

The Story of How Martynov made Plekhanov Deep

'Have you noticed how many Social-Democratic Lomonosovs one sees around lately!' remarked one comrade the other day. He had in mind that striking inclination of many of those inclined to 'economism' to arrive strictly with their own brainpower to great new truths (such as that economic struggle pushes the workers to face the issue of their lack of rights) and, at the same time, to ignore with the grand contempt of a self-educated genius everything that earlier revolutionary thought and revolutionary movement has given us. Lomonosov-Martynov is just such a self-educated genius. Take a look at his article 'Current Issues' and you will see how he with his own brainpower *comes close* to what was said long ago by Akselrod (about whom our Lomonosov of course preserves a total silence) – how he *begins* to understand, for example, that we cannot ignore the oppositional mentality of this or that stratum of the bourgeoisie (see *Rabochee delo* No. 9, pp. 61, 62, 72 in comparison to the [earlier] *Answer* to Akselrod by the editorial board of *Rabochee delo*, pp. 22, 23-4) and so

¹⁵⁴ *Rabochaia mysl*, Separate Supplement, p. 14.

forth. But – alas! – only 'comes close' and only 'begins', no more than that, because Martynov still shows he does not grasp Akselrod's meaning when he talks of 'economic struggle of the workers with the owners and the government'. In the course of three years (1898-1901), *Rabochee delo* has tried hard to understand Akselrod and – and still can't quite understand! Perhaps this is because Social Democracy, 'like mankind', always presents itself with tasks that can be carried out?

But Lomonosovs stand out not only because they don't know a lot (not so bad in itself!) but also because they themselves are unaware of their ignorance. This is bad, so bad that they are immediately moved to take to make Plekhanov more 'deep'. Lomonosov-Martynov tells us:

*Since the time that Plekhanov wrote this book (*On the Tasks of the Socialists in the Struggle with Famine in Russia [1892]*), a lot of water has flowed under the bridge. The Social Democrats who for a decade have guided the economic struggle of the worker class ...have not yet succeeded in giving a broad theoretical foundation to party tactics. Now this issue has come to a head, and if we wish to provide such a theoretical foundation, we undoubtedly would significantly deepen the principles of tactics that Plekhanov worked out earlier... We would now make the distinction between propaganda and agitation in a different way than Plekhanov did...*

.(Martynov has just cited Plekhanov's formula: 'the propagandist gives many ideas to one person or a few persons, while the agitator gives only one or a few ideas, but he gives it to a whole mass of people'.) ...By 'propaganda' we understand the revolutionary illumination of the whole existing system or its partial manifestations, irrespective of whether it is done in a form accessible to individuals or to the broad mass. By 'agitation' in the strict sense of the word (sic!), we understand the call to the mass to undertake certain concrete actions that enables the immediate revolutionary intervention of the proletariat in social life.

We congratulate Russian – and international – Social Democracy on acquiring this new Martynov-style terminology, one that is much stricter and deeper. Up to this time, we had thought (along with Plekhanov and, indeed, with all the leaders of the international worker movement) that, if the propagandist takes up the issue, for example, of unemployment, he should explain the capitalist nature of crises, demonstrate the reason for their inevitability in present-day society, describe the necessity of their transformation in socialist society and so forth. In a word, he should give 'many ideas' – so many that all these ideas in all their interconnections can only be assimilated right away by a few (comparatively few) individuals. When the agitator talks about the same issue, he will select for his example something notorious that is very well known to all his listeners – let's say, an unemployed family who perished from hunger, or the intensification of poverty, and so on – and then directs all his energy to use this fact known to each and all in order to give to the 'mass' *one idea*: the idea of the insanity of the contradiction between the growth of riches and the growth of poverty. He will try to *awaken* in the mass dissatisfaction and indignation about this crying injustice while leaving its full explanation to the propagandist. The propagandist thus acts for the most part by the *printed* word while the agitator acts by the *living* word. A good propagandist has different qualities than a good agitator. For example, we call Kautsky and Lafargue propagandists while Bebel and Guesde are agitators. To carve out a third area or third function of practical activity and define this function as 'the call to the mass to undertake certain concrete actions' is a complete hodgepodge, since any such 'call' as a separate act is *either* a natural and inevitable supplement to a theoretical treatise, to a propagandistic pamphlet, to an agitational speech, *or* it is part of direct implementation [of a particular mass action].

Take, for example, the current struggle of the German Social Democrats against grain duties. Theoreticians write investigations of customs policies and 'call', let us say, for a struggle for trade treaties and for free trade. A propagandist does the same thing in a journal and the agitator in public speeches. The 'concrete actions' of the mass in this case consists of signing petitions to the Reichstag against raising grain duties. The call to carry out these actions comes indirectly from the theoreticians, propagandists and agitators, and directly from those workers who bring around the signature lists to factories and to all sorts of living quarters. According to the 'Martynov terminology', it seems that that Kautsky and Bebel are both propagandists, while the people who bring around signature lists are agitators – have I got that straight?

This German example brings to mind the German word *Verballhornung*, which, literally translated, is 'Ballhorning'. Johann Ballhorn was a Leipzig publisher in the sixteenth century who published an alphabet book in which there was the

usual picture of a rooster – only, instead of the usual representation of a rooster with spurs, he printed one without spurs but with a pair of eggs lying near. And on the cover of the book he added: 'A *corrected* edition by Johann Ballhorn'. Since that time the Germans use *Verballhornung* to describe an 'improvement' that is really a worsening. And we can't help recall Ballhom when we see how the Martynovs 'deepened' Plekhanov...

Why did our Lomonosov 'invent' this confusion? He wanted to illustrate the charge that *Iskra* 'pays attention only to one side of the matter, just as the tasks of propaganda push the tasks of agitation into the background' (p. 52). If we translate this last thesis from Martynov language to normal human language (since humanity is not yet able to absorb the newly created terminology), then we come up with the following: in *Iskra*, the tasks of political propaganda and political agitation push to the background the task of 'presenting the government concrete demands for legislative and administrative measures' that 'promise tangible results' (or, demands for social reforms, if it is permitted to use the old terminology of backward humanity that hasn't yet got as far as Martynov). We invite the reader to compare the Martynov thesis with the following eloquent passage:

What strikes us in these programmes (the programmes of the revolutionary Social Democrats) is their eternal insistence on the advantages of the activity of the workers in parliament (which we don't have) while at the same time ignoring (due to their revolutionary nihilism) the importance of the participation of the workers in the legislative assemblies for factory owners on factory matters that do exist here [in Russia] ... or, say, the participation of workers in urban self-government...

The author of this eloquent passage expresses somewhat more straightforwardly, clearly and more openly the same thought that Lomonosov Martynov arrived at with his own brainpower. This author is – R.M. in the Separate Supplement to *Rabochiaia mysl* (p. 15).

Political Indictments and 'Education for Revolutionary Activeness'

When he advances against *Iskra* his 'theory' of 'raising the activeness of the worker mass', Martynov actually reveals an striving to *lower* this activeness, since he announces that the preferred, most particularly important, and 'most widely applicable' means of awakening and support for this activeness is the same old economic struggle before which all 'economists' grovel. This error can be called characteristic, because it certainly is not original to Martynov alone. In fact, 'raising the activeness of the worker mass' can be attained *only* under the condition that we *do not limit ourselves* to 'political agitation on economic grounds'. And one of the basic conditions of the necessary widening of political agitation is the organisation of *all-sided* political indictments. The masses *cannot* be educated in political awareness and revolutionary activeness other than on the basis of these indictments. Therefore this kind of activity is one of the most important functions of international Social Democracy as a whole, since political freedom in no way eliminates but only somewhat shifts the scope of these indictments.

For example, the German Party particularly strengthens its position and widens its influence precisely because of the unremitting energy of its campaign of political indictments. The awareness of the worker class is not genuine political awareness if the workers are not taught to respond to *each* and *every* occurrence of abuse of power and oppression, violence and malfeasance, *no matter which class* is affected; – and, in so doing, respond precisely with a Social-Democratic point of view and no other. The awareness of the worker masses cannot be a genuine class awareness if the workers do not learn, on the basis of concrete and (this is essential) topical political facts and events, to observe *each* of the other social classes in *all* the manifestations of their intellectual, moral and political life – if they do not learn to apply in practice a materialist analysis and a materialist evaluation of *all* sides of the activity and life of *all* classes, strata and groups of the population. He who focuses the attention, powers of observation and awareness of the worker class exclusively or even primarily on

itself is no Social Democrat: the self-knowledge of the worker class is inextricably tied to full clarity in its conceptions of the mutual relations of *all* classes of present-day society – conceptions that are not only theoretical ... more precisely, not so much theoretical as they are worked out via experience of political life. That is why the preaching of our 'economists' (the economic struggle is the most widely applicable means of drawing the masses into the political movement) is so deeply harmful and so deeply reactionary in its practical significance.

In order to become a Social Democrat, a worker must have a clear conception of the economic nature and the social/political profile of the landowner and the priest, the bureaucrat and the peasant, the student and the homeless tramp – know their strong sides and their weak ones, be able to analyse the catchwords and the sophisms of all possible kinds by which each class and each stratum *conceals* its selfish desires and its actual essence – a worker must be able to analyse how various institutions and laws reflect this or that interest and how they do so. And this 'clear conception' cannot be taken from any book: it can be given only by living pictures and up-to-the-minute indictments of what is happening at any given time around us – the things about which everybody has something to say or at least about which people whisper among themselves. A 'clear conception' comes when people realise what is expressed in such and such an event, in such and such statistics, in such and such a judicial decision, and so on and so on and so on. These all-sided political indictments are a necessary and *fundamental* condition of the education of the masses in revolutionary activeness.

Why does the Russian worker still show in so limited a fashion his revolutionary activeness in connection with the police's bestial treatment of the people, the persecution of sectarians, the corporal punishment of peasants, the outrages of the censor, the torment of the soldiers, the persecution of the most harmless cultural undertakings and so forth? Is it because the 'economic struggle' does not 'push him to face' the need for such activeness or that revolutionary activeness promises him so little in the way of 'tangible results', so little in the way of 'positive' results? No – such a view is, let us repeat it, nothing other than an attempt to shift the blame and to shift one's own philistinism (and Bernsteinism) over to the worker mass. We must blame ourselves, our falling behind the movement of the masses, since we have yet not been able to organise indictments of these despicable things in a sufficiently broad, clear and timely fashion. If we do this (and we must do it and we can do it), – the very simplest worker will understand, *or will feel*, that the dark force that mocks and oppresses the student and the sectarian, the *muzhik* and the writer, is the same that oppresses and weighs on him at each step of his life. And, when he does feel this, he will himself desire, with an overwhelming desire, to respond – and he will know how to do it, today setting up a chorus of catcalls for the censor, tomorrow demonstrating before the home of a governor who repressed a peasant riot, the day after tomorrow giving a lesson to the priests who are nothing but policemen in cassocks doing the work of the Holy Inquisition, and so forth. We still have done very little, almost nothing, to *throw* into the worker masses fresh and all-sided indictments. Many among the Social Democrats are not even aware that this is our *responsibility* and so they follow in *stikhiiyi* fashion the 'grey ongoing struggle' within the narrow framework of factory life. Under these circumstances, to announce that '*Iskra* has a tendency to disparage the significance of the forward march of the grey ongoing struggle in comparison with the propaganda of brilliant and self-sufficient ideas' (Martynov, p. 61) is to drag the Party backward, to defend and glorify our lack of preparation and our falling behind.

As far as the call to the masses to action is concerned, it will come of itself, once we have on hand energetic political agitation, clear and living indictments. To catch somebody red-handed and brand him immediately so that everybody knows about it – this just by itself will act as the best possible 'call'. Often, it will act in such a way that afterwards one cannot say definitely who exactly 'called' a crowd into action or who exactly came forth with this or that plan for a demonstration, and so on. To call [to action] in this way – not in the general but in the concrete sense of the word – can only be done on the field of action, and only he who himself goes there at a particular time can do the calling. But our business – the business of the Social-Democratic journalists – is to deepen, broaden and intensify political indictments and political agitation.

By the way, on the subject of 'calls'. *The only publication* that prior to the spring events called on the workers to intervene energetically in an issue that definitely promised no tangible results at all for the worker – for example, drafting the student [protesters] into the army – was *Iskra*. Immediately after the publication of the decree of January 11 about 'the drafting of 183 students into the army', *Iskra* published an article about it (No. 2, February) and – before any kind of demonstration began – directly called on the 'worker to help the student', called on 'the people' to openly respond to the government's contemptuous challenge. We ask everybody: how can we explain the extraordinary circumstance that Martynov, the one who talks so much about 'calls' and even makes 'calls' a special form of activity, does not refer to *this* call by so much as a word? And isn't it philistinism for Martynov to label *Iskra* 'one-sided' because it does not issue enough 'calls' for a struggle based on demands that 'promise tangible results'?

Our 'economists' – and *Rabochee delo* is included – met with success because they pandered to less developed workers. But the worker/Social Democrat, the worker/revolutionary – and the number of such workers grows every day – will reject with indignation all this reasoning about the struggle for demands that 'promise tangible results', and so on and so on, because he understands that all this is just a new variant of the old song about adding a kopeck to a rouble. Such a worker will say to his counsellors from *Rabochaia mysl* and *Rabochee delo*:

You worry too much to no purpose and intervene with excessive zeal in matters that we can handle ourselves, while not bothering to carry out your real responsibilities. It is far from insightful for you to say that the task of the Social Democrats consists of imparting a political character to the economic struggle itself. That is only the beginning – the main task of the Social Democrats lies elsewhere, for everywhere in the world, including Russia, *the police themselves often themselves undertake to give* a political character to the economic struggle and the workers themselves learn to understand for whom the government stands.¹⁵⁵

That 'economic struggle of the workers with the owners and the government' of which you are so proud, exactly as if you had discovered America, is being carried out in the most remote corners of Russia by the workers themselves – they've heard about strikes, even if they haven't read about or even heard of socialism. And the 'activeness' of us workers that all of you want to support by coming up with concrete demands that promise tangible results – we already have this activeness, and we ourselves, in the small, day-to-day, trade [*professial'nyi*] struggle, put forth these concrete demands, often without any help from the *intelligenty*. But *this* kind of activeness is not enough for us; we are not children whom you can feed with the thin soup of 'economist' politics by itself; we want to know everything that everyone else knows, we want to become acquainted in detail with *all* sides of political life and *actively* participate in each and every political event. For this it is necessary that the *intelligenty* spend less time repeating what we ourselves already know,¹⁵⁶ and more time giving us

¹⁵⁵ The demand to 'impart a political character to the economic struggle itself' reveals in the most vivid fashion *kow-towing before stikhiinost* in the area of political activity. The economic struggle acquires a political character in *stikhiinyi fashion*, that is, without the intervention of the 'revolutionary bacilli, the intelligentsia', without the intervention of purposive Social Democrats. For example, the economic struggle of workers in England acquired a political character without any participation by the socialists. But the task of the Social Democrats is not exhausted by political agitation on economic grounds, their task is to turn this *tred-iunionist* politics into a Social-Democratic political struggle, - to use those gleams of political awareness that the economic struggle plants in the workers in order to raise the workers up to *Social-Democratic* political awareness. But instead of raising and pushing forward this political awareness that is awakening in *stikhiinyi* fashion, the Martynovs *Jail on their face before stikhiinost* and repeat (repeat over and over to the point of nausea) that the economic struggle is what 'pushes the worker to face' the issue of their political lack of rights. It's too bad, gentlemen, that this *stikhiinyi* awakening of *tred-iunionist* political awareness doesn't 'push' you to face the issue of your Social-Democratic tasks!

¹⁵⁶ To show that we haven't made up this speech of the workers to the 'economists' out of thin air, we will refer to two witnesses who undoubtedly have an immediate knowledge of the worker movement and who are no wise inclined to be partial to us 'dogmatic types', since one of the witnesses is an 'economist' (who even considers *Rabochee delo* to be a political publication!) and the other is a terrorist. The first witness [Savinkov] is the author of an article entitled 'The Petersburg Worker Movement and the Practical Tasks of Social Democracy' that is remarkable for its truthfulness and sense of life. He divides the workers into three categories: (1) purposive revolutionaries, (2) an intermediate stratum and (3) the remaining mass [of workers]. We

what we don't know, what we ourselves will never be able to learn from our own factory and 'economic' experience, namely: political knowledge. It is you, the *intelligenty*, that can bring us this knowledge, and you are *obliged* to deliver it to us a hundred and a thousand times more than you are doing up to now, and what is more, deliver it not only in the form of disquisitions, pamphlets and articles (which are often, if you will forgive my frankness, a little boring!), but, without fail, also in the form of living *indictments* of what exactly our government and our dominant classes are doing in all areas of life. Just carry out more zealously this responsibility of yours, and *talk less about 'raising the activeness of the worker mass'*. There is a lot more activeness among us than you think, and we are able to support, with open street battle, even such demands as promise no 'tangible results' at all! And it's not you who will 'raise' our activeness, because *it so happens that it is you who aren't showing enough activeness*. Less kow-towing before *stikiinost*, gentlemen, and more thought to raising *your* activeness!

What Do Economism and Terrorism Have in common?

Earlier, in a footnote, we compared an 'economist' and a non-Social-Democratic terrorist on a point where they accidentally agreed together. But, speaking generally, there is not just an accidental but a necessary internal link between 'economism' and terrorism. This is a topic to which we will have to return later but on which we must now touch precisely because it concerns the issue of education for revolutionary activeness. The 'economists' and present-day terrorists have one common root: the very same *kow-towing before stikiinost* that we discussed in the previous chapter in general terms and that we are now examining in its influence in the area of political activity and political struggle. At first glance, our affirmation might appear to be a paradox, so great is the evident distance between people who emphasise the 'grey on going struggle' and people who call for the most self-sacrificing struggle of individuals. But it is not a paradox. 'Economists' and terrorists kow-tow before different poles of the *stikiinyyi* current: the 'economists' before the *stikiinost* of the 'exclusively worker movement' and the terrorists before the *stikiinost* of the passionate indignation of *intelligenty* who do not have the ability or who do not find it possible to link revolutionary work into a single whole with the worker movement. It is difficult for anyone who has lost faith in this possibility or who never had it to find any other outlet for his feelings of indignation and for his revolutionary energy than terror.

This kow-towing before *stikiinost* in both of these two tendencies is in this way nothing other than *the beginning of the implementation* of the famous programme of the *Credo*: the workers will conduct their own 'economic struggle with the owners and the government' (I hope the author of the *Credo* will forgive my use of Martynov's terminology! – we think we have the right to do this because the *Credo* also speaks of how the workers are 'pushed to face up to the political regime' in the economic struggle), while the *intelligenty* conduct the political struggle with their own forces, naturally, with the help of terror! This is a completely logical and inevitable *conclusion* on which we do not have to insist, *even though those* who are beginning to implement the programme *are not themselves aware* of its inevitability. Political activity has its own logic that does not depend on the awareness of those who with the very best intentions call either for terror or for imparting

find that the intermediate stratum 'is often more interested in the issues of political life than their own direct economic interests, while the connection of these interests to general social conditions has long been grasped' ... *Rabochaya mysl* is sharply criticised: 'it's always the same thing that we've known for a long time and have read for a long time', 'in the politics sections there is again nothing new' (pp.30-1).But even the third stratum 'is a worker mass that is more alert, younger, not so much led astray by the tavern and the church.Although this stratum never has even the possibility of acquiring any book with political content, it interprets in distorted fashion the phenomena of political life and uses fragmentary information about the student riots as food for thought' and so forth. And the terrorist [Nadezhdin] writes:' ... Two or three times they will read about the details of factory life in cities other than their own and then they will stop reading. ...It's boring. ...Not to talk about the state in a worker paper ...means to look on the worker as on a small child ...The worker is not a child' (*Svoboda*, published by the revolutionary-socialist group [of the same name], pp. 69 and 70).

a political character to the economic struggle itself. The road to hell is paved with good intentions and, in the present case, good intentions will not save anyone from being drawn in *stikhiinyi* fashion down the 'line of least resistance', down the line of the *purely bourgeois* programme of the *Credo*. It is therefore hardly accidental that many Russian liberals – both open liberals and those who wear a Marxist mask – sympathise wholeheartedly with terror and try to give support to the upsurge in terrorist moods at the present moment.

And, now, when the 'revolutionary-socialist group *Svoboda*' has emerged and assigned itself the task precisely of providing an all-sided assistance to the worker movement, but which also includes terror *in its programme*, thus emancipating themselves, so to speak, from Social Democracy – this fact affirms yet one more time the remarkable foresight of P.B. Akselrod, who *literally foretold* these results of Social-Democratic unsteadiness *already at the end of 1897* (in *The Contemporary Tasks and Tactics of Russian Social Democrats*) and set out his famous 'two perspectives'. These two perspectives already contain, as a seed contains a plant, all of the disputes and differences between Russian Social Democrats that followed after.¹⁵⁷ From this point of view it becomes understandable that *Rabochee delo*, unable to stand up against the *stikhiinost* of 'economism', was also unable to stand up against the *stikhiinost* of terrorism.

It is very interesting here to note the particular argumentation that *Svoboda* advances in defence of terror. It 'completely rejects' the paralysing role of terror (*Rebirth of Revolutionism*, p. 64) and in its place advances its 'excitative (instigating) significance'. This is characteristic, in the first place, because it is one of the stages in the disintegration and collapse of a traditional (pre Social-Democratic) set of ideas that led to a reliance on terror. To admit that, today, one cannot 'paralyse with fear' – and, therefore, disorganise – the government is essentially to condemn terror completely as a system of struggle, as a sphere of activity sanctified by a programme. It is even more characteristic in another respect – as a model of the lack of understanding of our present basic tasks in the matter of 'education for the revolutionary activeness of the masses'. *Svoboda* propagandises terror as a means of 'instigating' the worker movement, of giving it a 'powerful shock'. It would be difficult to find an argument that more obviously refutes itself! Let's think: are there really so few outrages in Russian life that we have to invent some special means of 'instigation'? And, from another angle, if someone is not instigated or not instigable even by Russian abuses of power, then isn't it obvious that he will also look on the duel between the government and a handful of terrorists with sublime indifference? The point is this: the worker masses *are* very much instigated by the despicable features of Russian life, but we do not yet know how to collect (if I may so express myself) and concentrate all those droplets and streams of popular indignation that percolate out of Russian life in vastly greater quantities than we think or can conceive but which indeed must be merged into *one* gigantic flood.

This task can be accomplished. This is proved irrefutably by the enormous growth of the worker movement and the greediness of the workers for political literature mentioned earlier. Calls to apply terror, exactly like calls to impart a political character to the economic struggle itself, are just different ways of *shirking* the most urgent responsibility of Russian revolutionaries: to organise the conduct of all-sided political agitation. *Svoboda* wants to *replace* agitation with terror and it openly admits that 'once intensive, energetic agitation begins among the masses, then the excitative (instigating) role of terror is done' (p. 68 of *Rebirth of Revolutionism*). As it happens, this demonstrates that both terrorists and

¹⁵⁷ Martynov sees 'another, more real(?) dilemma' ('Social Democracy and the Worker Class', p. 19): 'Either Social Democracy takes upon itself the immediate guidance of the economic struggle of the proletariat and by so doing(!) turns it into a revolutionary class struggle' ... 'By so doing', that is, evidently, by the immediate guidance of the economic struggle. Let Martynov show us where we can see *even one* case where a *tred-iunionist* struggle was turned into a revolutionary class movement simply by guidance of the trade [*professial'nyi*] struggle. Doesn't he realise that to do any 'turning into' of this kind, we must actively take on the 'immediate guidance' of *all-sided* political agitation? ... 'Or this perspective: Social Democracy distances itself from the guidance of the economic struggle of the workers and by so doing ... clips its wings' ... According to the opinion of *Rabochee delo* cited earlier, it is *Iskra* that 'distances itself'. But we have seen that *Iskra* is doing *much more than Rabochee delo* for the guidance of the economic struggle, although it does not limit itself to this kind of guidance and *does not* for the sake of this guidance *narrow* its political tasks.

'economists' *underrate* the revolutionary activeness of the masses, in spite of the clear testimony of the spring events, even though the former busy themselves in search of artificial 'instigations' while the latter talk about 'concrete demands'. Both the one and the other pay insufficient attention to the development of *their own activeness* in the matter of political agitation and the organisation of political indictments. But one cannot *replace* this task with any other, either now or at any other time.

The Worker Class as Advanced Fighter for Democracy

We saw that carrying out the broadest possible political agitation and, therefore, the organisation of all-sided political indictments are unconditionally necessary tasks – the *most urgent of all* the tasks – of our activity, if it is to be genuinely Social-Democratic activity. But we came to this conclusion based *only* on the pressing requirement of the worker class for political knowledge and political education. In itself, this way of putting the question is too narrow and ignores the general democratic tasks of any Social Democracy in general and of present-day Russian Social Democracy in particular. In order to explain this thesis as concretely as possible, let us try to approach the problem from the angle that is 'nearest' to the 'economist', that is, the practical side. 'All are agreed' that we must develop the political awareness of the worker class. Let us now ask ourselves *how* to do this and what is required for doing it. The economic struggle 'pushes the workers to face' only issues about the relation of the government to the worker class and therefore – *no matter how much we labour* over the task of 'imparting a political character to the economic struggle itself' – we will *never be able* to develop the political awareness of the workers (up to the level of Social-Democratic political awareness) within the framework of this task, because *the framework itself* is *too narrow*. Martynov's formula is valuable for us, not only because it illustrates his capacity to confuse issues, but also because it vividly expresses the basic mistake of all 'economists' – the conviction that it is possible to develop class political awareness *from within*, so to speak, the economic struggle, that is, proceeding only (or even just for the most part) from that struggle, basing oneself only (or primarily) on that struggle. This view is radically mistaken – precisely because the economists, angry as they are about our polemics against them, do not want to think hard about the source of our differences, with the result that we literally do not understand one another and we speak in different languages.

Class political awareness can be brought to the worker *only from without*, that is to say from outside the economic struggle, from outside the sphere of the relations of workers to owners. The only area from which this knowledge can be taken is the area of the relations of *all* classes and [social] strata to the state and to the government – the area of the interrelations between *all* classes. Therefore, one cannot answer the question 'what is to be done to bring political knowledge to the workers?' with the response that the majority of *praktiki* are contented with, namely: 'go to the workers'. In order to bring the *workers* political knowledge, the Social Democrats must *go to all classes of the population*, must send the detachments of its army *in all directions*.

We have deliberately chosen such a harsh formulation and deliberately expressed ourselves in sharp and simplified fashion – not because of any desire to speak in paradoxes but in order to 'push the "economists" to face' the tasks that they unforgivably disdain and the distinction that they do not want to understand between *tred-iunionist* politics and Social-Democratic politics. And, therefore, we ask the reader not to get upset but to follow us attentively to the end.

Let us examine the type of Social-Democratic circle found most commonly in recent times and look closely at its work. It has 'links with the workers' and is content with that; it publishes leaflets in which factory abuses are flayed along with police violence and the government's actions that are so biased toward the capitalists; during conferences with workers, the conversation does not ordinarily go beyond or barely goes beyond the limits of these same themes; very rarely are there reports and conversations on the history of the revolutionary movement, on issues of domestic and external policies of our

government, on issues of the economic evolution of Russia and Europe and the position in modern society of this or that class and so on; nobody even thinks of obtaining and broadening links to the other classes in society. In essence, the ideal activist as pictured by members of these circles – in the majority of cases – is something much closer to a secretary of a *tred-iunion* than to a socialist political leader [*vozhd'*]. The secretary of any, let's say, English *tred-iunion* always helps the workers conduct their economic struggle, organises factory indictments, explains the injustice of laws and of measures that hinder the freedom of strikes or the freedom to establish pickets (to warn all and sundry that there is a strike at a given factory), explains the partiality of the arbitration court judges who belong to the bourgeois classes of the people, and so on and so on. In a word, any secretary of a *tred-iunion* conducts and helps others conduct the 'economic struggle with the owners and the government'. We cannot insist too strongly that this is *not yet* Social Democratism and that the ideal of the Social Democrat should not be a secretary of a *tred-iunion* but a *people's tribune* who can respond to each and every manifestation of abuse of power and oppression, wherever it occurs, whatever stratum or class it concerns, who can generalise all these manifestations into one big picture of police violence and capitalist exploitation, who is able to use each small affair to set *before everybody* his socialist convictions and his democratic demands and to explain to each and *all* the world-historical significance of the liberation struggle of the proletariat.

Compare, for example, such activists as Robert Knight (the well-known secretary and leader of the Boiler-Makers' Society, one of the most powerful English *tred-iuniony*) and Wilhelm Liebknecht – and try to apply to them the set of contrasts by which Martynov sets forth his disagreements with *Iskra*. You will observe – I am starting to leaf through Martynov's article – that Knight is more engaged in 'calling the masses to certain concrete actions' (p. 39) while Liebknecht is more engaged in 'the revolutionary illumination of the whole system or its partial manifestations' (pp. 38-9). Knight 'formulates the urgent demands of the proletariat and shows means for their implementation' (p. 41), while Liebknecht, although he does this as well, does not refuse also to 'simultaneously guide the energetic activity of various oppositional strata' and 'dictate a positive programme of action for them' (p. 41).¹⁵⁸ Knight is the one who tries to 'impart a political character to the economic struggle itself' (p. 42) and knows very well how to 'present the government with concrete demands promising tangible results' (p. 43), while Liebknecht is much more engaged in 'one-sided' 'indictments' (p. 40). Knight gives more significance to the 'forward march of the grey ongoing struggle' (p. 61), while Liebknecht gives more significance to 'the propaganda of brilliant and self-sufficient ideas' (p. 61). Liebknecht created out of the newspaper he guided precisely 'an organ of revolutionary opposition, denouncing our institutions and particularly our political ones, insofar as they clash with the interests of the most various strata of the population' (p. 63), while Knight 'worked for the worker cause in a close and organic link with the proletarian struggle' (p. 63) – if we understand 'close organic bond' in the sense of the kow-towing before *stikhiinost* that we observed earlier in the case of Krichevskii and Martynov – and 'narrowed the sphere of his activity', no doubt assured like Martynov that he was 'by this very fact complexifying his influence' (p. 63). In a word, you will see that Martynov is de facto lowering Social Democracy to *tred-iunionizm*, although, of course, he does not do this because he wishes anything but good for Social Democracy but simply because he was just a trifle hasty in deepening Plekhanov instead of giving himself the trouble of understanding Plekhanov.

But let us return to our exposition. We said that a Social Democrat, if he insists (more than just in words) on the necessity of an all-sided development of political awareness of the proletariat, must 'go to all classes of the population'. I will be asked: how to do this? Do we have forces to do this? Is there any ground for such work among all the other classes? Will not this mean a retreat, or lead to a retreat, from the class point of view? Let us dwell on these questions.

¹⁵⁸ For example, at the time of the Franco-Prussian War, Liebknecht dictated the actions of the *entire democracy* - and Marx and Engels did this to an even greater extent in 1848.

We should 'go to all classes of the population' as theoreticians, as propagandists, as agitators and as organisers. No one doubts that the theoretical work of Social Democrats is directed toward the study of all the particularities of the social and political position of individual classes. But extremely little is being done in this connection – disproportionately little in comparison with the work aimed at the study of the particularities of factory life. In our committees and circles, you will meet people who are genuinely learned in the special subject of something like railroad manufacture – but you will find almost no examples of members of these organisations (when they are compelled, as often, to leave practical work for this or that reason) devoting themselves especially to some topical issue of our social and political life that could provide the occasion for Social-Democratic work in other strata of the population. When we talk about the lack of preparedness of the present day leader/guides of the worker movement, we must certainly also remember lack of preparation of this kind, since it is also tied closely to the 'economist' understanding of 'close and organic links with the proletarian struggle'.

But the main thing, of course, is *propaganda and agitation* in all strata of the people. This task is alleviated for the Western-European Social Democrat by popular assemblies and meetings that *anybody* who wants can attend; it is also alleviated by a parliament in which the Social Democrat speaks before deputies of *all* classes. We have neither parliament nor freedom of assembly – nevertheless, we have been able to set up meetings for workers who wish to hear a *Social Democrat*. We should also be able to set up meetings with representatives of each and every class of the population that only want to hear a *democrat* – since he is no Social Democrat who forgets in practice that 'the communists support any revolutionary movement' and that we are obliged therefore to lay out our views *in front of the whole people* and to underline *general democratic tasks*, not hiding for a moment our socialist convictions. He is no Social Democrat who forgets in practice about his responsibility to be *in advance of all* in presenting, sharpening and resolving *any* general democratic issue.

'Everybody completely agrees with this!' interrupts the impatient reader. Indeed, the new instructions for the editorial board of *Rabochee delo* that were adopted at the last congress of the Union states outright: 'All manifestations and events of social and political life must serve as occasions for political propaganda and agitation, whether they touch the proletariat either directly as a distinct class or as the *vanguard for all revolutionary forces in the struggle for freedom*' (*Two Congresses*, p. 17, my emphasis). Yes, these are very true, very good words, and we would be completely satisfied with them, if *Rabochee delo really understood* them, *if it did not at the same time say things that are in sharp contrast with them*. It is not enough just to call oneself a 'vanguard', an advance detachment – one has to act so that *all* other detachments see and are compelled to admit that we are indeed moving out ahead. And we ask the reader: are the representatives of the other 'detachments' really such fools simply to accept our word about being a 'vanguard'?

Just imagine the following concrete situation. A Social Democrat goes to the 'detachment' of educated radicals or liberal constitutionalists and says: we are the vanguard and 'before us stands the task of imparting, to the greatest extent possible, a political character to the economic struggle itself'. A moderately intelligent radical or constitutionalist (and there are lots of intelligent people among the Russian radicals and constitutionalists) will only smile when hearing such a speech and say (to themselves, of course, because most of these people are accomplished diplomats), 'Well, this is a rather simple minded "vanguard"! It doesn't even understand that it is our task – the task of the advanced representatives of the bourgeois democracy – to impart a political character to the workers' economic struggle *itself*. We, like the bourgeoisie everywhere in Western Europe, want to draw the workers into politics, *but precisely into tred-iunionist and not into Social-Democratic politics*. A *tred-iunionist* politics of the worker class is precisely a *bourgeois politics* of the worker class. And the formulation by this "vanguard" of its task is precisely a formulation of *tred-iunionist* politics! So let them call themselves Social Democrats as much as they want. I'm not a child who gets all upset about labels! I just hope they don't fall under the influence of those harmful orthodox dogmatic types – let them preserve "freedom of criticism" for those who, unaware, are dragging Social Democracy into a *tred-iunionist* channel.'

And the faint smile of our constitutionalist will turn into Homeric laughter when he learns that what these Social Democrats who talk about Social Democracy as a vanguard fear most on earth – at the present time of almost complete domination of *stikhiinost* in our movement – is 'underestimation of the *stikhiinyi* element', 'underestimating the significance of the forward march of the grey ongoing struggle in comparison with the propaganda of brilliant and self-sufficient ideas' and so on and so on. An 'advanced' detachment which fears that purposiveness might overtake *stikhiinost* and which fears to put forward a daring 'plan' that would compel general recognition even from those who disagree! Haven't these people confused the word 'vanguard' with the word 'rear-guard'?

Ponder, in this connection, the following reasoning of Martynov. He says on p. 40 that the indictment tactic of *Iskra* is one-sided and that 'no matter how much we sow mistrust and hatred toward the government, we will not achieve our aim, so long as we do not succeed in developing sufficient active social energy for its overthrow'. This, let us note in passing, is the already familiar worry about raising the activeness of the mass while at the same time striving to lower one's own activeness. But the main point is elsewhere. Martynov is speaking here, it follows, about *revolutionary* energy ('for its overthrow'). And at what conclusion does he arrive? Since, in normal times, the various social strata inevitably march separately, then

in view of this fact it is clear that we Social Democrats cannot at the same time guide the activities of different oppositional strata, we cannot dictate a positive programme of action for them, we cannot show them in what way to fight for their own interests from day to day....The liberal strata themselves will surely take care of the active struggle for their current interests, a struggle that will push them to a direct collision with our political regime. (p. 41.)

Thus, after starting to talk about revolutionary energy, about the active struggle for the overthrow of the autocracy, Martynov immediately strays off and talks about toward the energy of occupational concerns [*professional'naia energiia*], about the active struggle for current interests!

It goes without saying that we cannot guide the struggle of the students, the liberals and so forth for their 'current interests', but that's not the point, my most highly respected 'economist'! The point is, rather, the possible and the necessary participation of various social strata in the overthrow of the autocracy, and *this* 'energetic activity of various oppositional strata' we not only *can* but definitely must guide if we want to be a 'vanguard'. Our students, our liberals and so forth are not the only ones who will take care that they are 'pushed into direct collision with our political regime' – the police and the bureaucrats of the autocratic government will be the ones who first of all and most of all take care of this. But 'we', if we wish to be advanced democrats, must take care to *push* people who are personally dissatisfied only with their university or with their *zemstvo* institutions to face up to the worthlessness of our political institutions as a whole. We must take upon ourselves the task of organising an all-sided political struggle under the guidance of *our* party so that as much help as possible can be given and will be given to that struggle and to that party by each and every oppositional stratum. We must take the *praktiki* of Social Democrats and make them political leaders [*vozhdi*], leaders capable of guiding all manifestations of the all-sided struggle, capable at the crucial moment 'to dictate a positive programme of action' to the turbulent students, the dissatisfied *zemstvo* people, the indignant sectarians, the offended rural teachers and so on and so on.

Therefore Martynov's affirmation is *completely untrue* when he says that 'in relation to these strata we can come out only in the negative role of denouncers of institutions....All we can do is dissipate the hopes placed on various governmental commissions' (our emphasis). When he says this, Martynov shows that he *understands absolutely nothing* about the issue of the actual role of the revolutionary 'vanguard'. And, if the reader keeps this in mind, then he will understand the *true meaning* of Martynov's concluding words:

Iskra is an organ of revolutionary opposition that indict our system and mainly our political system, insofar as it conflicts with the interests of the most diverse strata of the population. We, on the other hand, work and will

continue to work for the cause of the workers in a close and organic link with the proletarian struggle. By narrowing our sphere of activity, we by this very fact complexify our influence. (p. 63.)

The true meaning of this conclusion is this: *Iskra* wants to *raise tred-iunionist* politics of the worker class (the politics to which our *praktiki* so often limit themselves, either through confusion, lack of preparation, or conviction) up to Social-Democratic politics. But *Rabochee delo* wants to *lower* Social-Democratic politics down to *tred-iunionist* politics. And after saying all this, they still assure all and sundry that these two positions are 'completely compatible in common work' (p. 63). O, sancta simplicitas!

Let us proceed. Do we have sufficient forces to be able to direct our propaganda and agitation to *all* classes of the population? Yes, of course. Our 'economists', often inclined to deny this, forget about the giant step forward that our movement has made from approximately 1894 to 1901. True 'tailists', they still live to some extent according to conceptions of a period at the beginning of our movement that has long since been past. At that time, we indeed had strikingly insufficient forces. The determination to go totally into work among workers and to harshly condemn any deviation from it made sense and was natural at that time. Our task at that time consisted in entrenching ourselves in the worker class. Now, a gigantic mass of forces has been drawn into the movement and the best representatives of the younger generation of the educated classes are coming to us. Everywhere throughout the provinces can be found people who are forced to live there and who are already taking part or who wish to take part in the movement – people gravitating toward Social Democracy (whereas, in 1894, you could count Russian Social Democrats on your fingers). One of the basic political and organisational inadequacies of our movement is that we *have not been able* to use all these forces, to give them all appropriate work (we will speak of this in more detail in the next chapter). The vast majority of these forces are completely deprived of the possibility of 'going to the workers', so that there is no danger of drawing forces away from our basic task. But, to provide the workers with genuinely all-sided and living political knowledge, we need 'our people', Social Democrats, to be everywhere, in all social strata, in all sorts of positions that give them the possibility to know the internal workings of our state mechanism. And these people are necessary, not only for propaganda and agitation, but even more for organisation.

Is there ground for activity in all classes of the population? He who doesn't see this is someone whose purposiveness is falling behind the *stikhiinyi* upsurge of the masses. The worker movement has called forth and will continue to call forth dissatisfaction among some, hopes for support for their opposition among others, awareness of the intolerability of the autocracy and the inevitability of its collapse in yet others. We would be 'politicals' and Social Democrats only in words (as is so very often the case) if we were not aware of our task to use all and sundry manifestations of dissatisfaction, to collect together and to cultivate every germ of even still embryonic protest. We haven't even mentioned yet the whole many-millioned mass of labouring peasantry, the artisans, the small craftsmen and so forth, who would always listen eagerly to the preaching of any decently capable Social Democrat. But really, is it possible to point to even one class of the population which does not contain people, groups and circles that are dissatisfied with their lack of rights and with abuse of power and are therefore open to the preaching of a Social Democrat as someone who expresses the most burning general democratic needs? And if anyone wishes to picture the political agitation of the Social Democrat in *all* classes and strata of the population in concrete fashion, we point to *political indictments* in the wide sense of this word as the main (but of course not the sole) means for this agitation.

As I wrote in the article 'W here to Begin', *Iskra*, No. 4, May 1901 (an article we will have to talk about in more detail later):

We must awaken a passion for political indictments in all strata of the population that are in any way purposive. We do not need to worry about the fact that the voices of political indictment are so weak, timid and rare at the present time. It is certainly not a universal reconciliation to police state abuse of power that causes this situation. The reason is this: people who are ready and able to make indictments have no tribune from which they could speak – no audience that passionately listens to and approves the orators – and they do not see anywhere

in the narod a force to whom it would be worth their effort to complain about the 'all-powerful' Russian government. We are now in a position to create a tribune for an indictment of the tsarist government addressed to the whole people [vsenarodnyi] – and we are obliged to create it. A Social-Democratic newspaper must be this kind of tribune.

Exactly such an ideal audience for political indictments is the worker class, which needs all-sided and living political knowledge first of all and most of all and which is the most able to turn this knowledge into active struggle, even though the struggle promises no 'tangible results' whatever. And a tribune for indictments *addressed to the whole people [vsenarodnyi]* can only be an all-Russian newspaper. 'In modern Europe, a movement that deserves the name of "political" is unthinkable without a political press organ' – and, in this connection, Russia undoubtedly belongs to modern Europe. The press has long ago become a force in this country – otherwise, the government would not spend tens of thousands of roubles on bribing and subsidising all of our Katkovs and Meshcherskiis. And it is no new thing in autocratic Russia that the underground press breaks through the barriers of censorship and *compels* the legally-permitted and conservative organs to talk openly about it. This happened in the 1870s and even in the 1850s. And how much broader and deeper now are those strata among the people that are ready to read the underground press and learn from it 'how to live and how to die', using the expression of the worker who sent in a letter to *Iskra* (No. 7). Political indictments are a declaration of war against the *government* in exactly the same way that economic indictments declare war against the factory owners. And this declaration of war acquires more and more moral significance as the indictment campaign becomes broader and more forceful, and the more numerous and resolute is the social *class that declares war in order to get a real war underway*. Political indictments are therefore already in and of themselves one of the most powerful means of *disintegrating* the enemy system – a means of drawing away from the enemy his accidental or temporary friends, a means of sowing enmity and distrust among those who are permanent participants in the autocratic power.

In our day, only a party that *organises* indictments genuinely addressed to the whole people [*vsenarodnyi*] can be an advance guard of revolutionary forces. And this term 'addressed to the whole people' has a very large content. The great majority of people from the non-worker classes who are engaged in indictments [of tsarism] – and to be a vanguard, it is precisely necessary to draw in other classes – are sober politicians and pragmatic, business-like people. They know perfectly well that it is dangerous to 'complain' about even the lowest bureaucrat, not to mention the 'all-powerful' Russian government. And they will turn *to us* with complaints only when they see that their complaint is genuinely capable of having a real effect and that we constitute a *political force*. In order to impress third parties this way, we must work long and hard on *raising* our purposiveness, initiative and energy – it is not enough to hang a sign saying 'vanguard' on the theory and practice of a rear-guard.

But if we are obliged to take upon ourselves the organisation of indictments of the government genuinely addressed to the whole people, then how does the class character of our movement express itself? – This is the question that will be posed and is posed to us by the overzealous worshipper of 'close and organic links with the proletarian struggle'. The class character is expressed in this: it is we, the Social Democrats, who organise these indictments addressed to the whole people. Furthermore, the illumination of all the issues raised by agitation will be carried out in an unremitting Social-Democratic spirit without the slightest indulgence toward deliberate and unintentional distortions of Marxism. The party that will carry out this all-sided political agitation is one that merges an attack on the government in the name of the whole people with the revolutionary education of the proletariat and the preservation of its political independence, along with guidance of the economic struggle of the worker class and the utilisation of its *stikhiinyi* clashes with its exploiters – clashes that lift up and draw in to our camp ever new strata of the proletariat! But one of the most characteristic traits of 'economism' is precisely this lack of understanding of the link – more than that, the complete overlap – between the most essential need of the proletariat (all-sided political education by means of political agitation and political indictments) and the needs of the general democratic movement. This lack of understanding is expressed not only in Martynov-style phrases but also in

various remarks about the class point of view that have the same basic meaning as these phrases. For example, see how the authors of the 'economist' letter to *Iskra*, No. 12 express themselves [with Lenin's interjections in parentheses]:¹⁵⁹

This same basic defect of Iskra ... (the overvaluation of ideology) ... is the reason for its inconsistency in issues concerning the relation of Social Democracy to various social classes and tendencies. Having decided through a purely theoretical exercise ... (and not by means of 'the growth of party tasks growing together with the party' [as advocated by Krichevskii]) ... that the task is the immediate transition to the struggle against absolutism and feeling, no doubt, the full difficulty of this task for the workers, given the present state of things ... (and not only feeling, but knowing very well, that this task seems more difficult to 'economist' intelligentsia who feel they are taking care of little kids [as they see the workers] than it does to the workers, since [in reality] the workers are ready to fight even for demands that do not promise, as the never-to-be-forgotten Martynov puts it, any 'tangible results') ... but lacking the patience to wait for an accumulation on the part of the workers of sufficient strength for this struggle, Iskra is beginning to search for allies in the ranks of liberals and the intelligentsia ...

Yes indeed, we really have already lost the 'patience' 'to wait' for the blessed time (promised us for so long by all manner of 'conciliators') when our 'economists' stop blaming the workers for *their* backwardness, stop justifying their own insufficient energy by the alleged lack of forces among the workers. We ask our 'economists': what exactly will the 'accumulation on the part of the workers of sufficient strength for this struggle' consist of? Isn't it obvious that it consists of the political education of the workers, in the unmasking for them of *all* sides of our contemptible autocracy? And isn't it clear that *precisely for this work* we need 'allies in the ranks of the liberals and the intelligentsia', ready to share with us indictments of the political campaign [directed by the government] against the *zemstvo* people, the teachers, the statisticians, the students and so forth? How hard can it be to grasp this fairly simple mechanism? Did not P.B. Akselrod repeat over and over again since 1897 that 'the task of obtaining supporters and direct and indirect allies among the non-proletarian classes is decided first of all and primarily by the character of the propagandistic activity conducted among the proletariat itself'? But the Martynovs and the other 'economists' nevertheless continue to think that the workers must *first* accumulate forces (for *tred-iunionist* politics) by means of 'the economic struggle with the owners and the government', and only *then* make a 'transition' – evidently, from *tred-iunionist* 'education for activeness' to Social-Democratic activeness!

The economists continue:

In its search [for allies] Iskra often strays from the class point of view by muffling class contradictions and putting the entire focus on the commonality of dissatisfaction with the government, even though the reasons and degree of this dissatisfaction among the 'allies' is extremely various. Take, for example, the relations of Iskra to the zemstvo ...

Iskra allegedly 'promises noblemen unsatisfied with government handouts the help of the worker class, without a word being said about the class hostility between these strata of the population'.

If the reader will turn to the articles 'The Autocracy and the *Zemstvo*' (*Iskra*, Nos. 2 and 4) – these are *probably* the ones the authors of the letter are talking about – he will see that these articles¹⁶⁰ are dedicated to the *government's* reaction to 'the mild agitation of the elite/bureaucratic *zemstvo*', to 'the independent activity even of the propertied classes'. The article says that the worker cannot be indifferent to the struggle of the government against the *zemstvo* and it invites the *zemstvo* people to throw away mild speeches and to speak out with sharp uncompromising words at a time when the government is faced with revolutionary Social Democracy in its full stature. It is hard to say what the authors of the letter

¹⁵⁹ Owing to lack of space, we could not give a fully detailed answer in *Iskra* itself to this letter so highly characteristic of the 'economists'. We were very happy to receive it, since allegations about *Iskra's* inability to hold to the class point of view had come to our ears for a long time and from a great variety of sources, and we were looking for a suitable opportunity or a well-formulated expression of this popular accusation in order to answer it. And we are accustomed to answer an attack not by a defence but by a counter-attack.

¹⁶⁰ Note that *in between* the appearance of these articles (in *Iskra*, No. 3) was published an article specifically about the class antagonisms in our village.

disagree with here. Do they think that the worker 'will not understand' the words 'propertied classes' and 'elite/bureaucratic *zemstvo*'? – or that this *pushing* of the *zemstvo* officials to move from gentle to sharp words is an 'overvaluation of ideology'? Do they imagine that the workers can 'accumulate sufficient forces' for the struggle with absolutism if they never know about the relation of absolutism to the *zemstvo as well*? The answers to these questions must remain unknown.

Only one thing is clear: the authors have a very confused idea of the political tasks of Social Democracy. This comes out even more clearly in this statement: '*Iskra* has the same attitude' (that is, one that 'obscures class antagonisms') 'to the student movement as well'. In *Iskra*, No. 2, there was an appeal to the workers to show by means of a public demonstration that the real source of violence and unbridled lawlessness was not the students but the Russian government. Instead of this appeal, we evidently should have published reasonings in the spirit of *Rabochaia mysl!* And such ideas are expressed by Social Democrats in the autumn of 1901 – after the February and March events, on the eve of a new student upsurge that will show in this sphere as well that the *stikhiinost* of protest against the autocracy is *overtaking* the purposive guidance of the movement on the part of Social Democracy. The *stikhiinyi* striving of the workers to come to the defence of students beaten by the police and the Cossacks is overtaking the purposive activity of the Social-Democratic organisation!

'Meanwhile, in other articles' (continue the authors of the letter) '*Iskra* sharply condemns any compromises and comes out, for example, in defence of the intolerant conduct of the Guesdists'. We advise people who habitually pronounce on the topic of the disagreements among [Russian] Social Democrats with a good deal of self-assurance but without much thought and who say that these disagreements are on inessential matters and that no schism is justified – we advise these people to think good and hard about this statement. Is successful work in a single organisation possible if one group [*Iskra*] says that we have done strikingly little in the matter of explaining the hostility of the autocracy toward the most diverse classes as well as in the matter of acquainting the workers with the opposition to the autocracy by the most diverse strata – while the other group views all this as a 'compromise', a compromise, it would seem, with the theory of 'economic struggle with the owners and the government'?

On the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the liberation of the peasants, we talked about the necessity of bringing the class struggle into the village (*Iskra*, No. 3). We talked about the irreconcilability between local self-government and the autocracy when commenting on Witte's secret memorandum (*Iskra*, No. 4). On the occasion of a new law [that made Siberian land available to landowners], we attacked the serf-owning mentality of the landowners and the government that serves them (*Iskra*, No. 8). We greeted the illegal *zemstvo* congress, encouraging the *zemstvo* people to move from groveling petitions to actual struggle. We encouraged those students who are beginning to understand the necessity of political struggle and are moving towards it (*Iskra*, No. 3), and at the same time we castigated the 'primitive lack of understanding' revealed by the advocates of the 'exclusively student' movement who tell the students not to participate in street demonstrations (*Iskra*, No. 3, on the occasion of an appeal issued by the Executive Committee of the Moscow Student Association on 25 February). We exposed the 'senseless dreams' and the 'lying hypocrisy' of the liberal tricksters of the newspaper *Rossiia* (*Iskra*, No. 5) and, at the same time, noted the fury of the government torture-chamber that 'committed outrages on peaceable writers, on elderly professors and scholars and on well-known liberal *zemstvo* people' (*Iskra*, No. 5, 'Police Raid on Literature'). We exposed the real significance of the programme of 'state concern for improving the welfare of the workers' and greeted the 'valuable admission' that 'it is better to anticipate demands from below by carrying out transformations from above than to wait for the former' (*Iskra*, No. 6). We encouraged the whistle-blowing statisticians and condemned the strike-breaking statisticians (*Iskra*, No. 9).

Anyone who views the tactic [of indictments such as these] as obscuring the class awareness of the proletariat and as a *compromise with liberalism* reveals that he has absolutely no comprehension of the true significance of the *Credo* programme and that he is *de facto carrying out exactly this programme*, no matter how much he denies it! By reason of *this very view* [of *Iskra*'s indictment tactic] he drags Social Democracy back to 'economic struggle with the owners and the

government' and *abdicates before liberalism*, since he refuses the task of actively intervening in *every* 'liberal' issue while defining *his own*, Social Democratic, attitude to that issue.

Once More 'Slanderers', Once More 'Mystifiers'

These complimentary words belong, the reader will remember, to *Rabochee delo*, which responded in this way to our accusation concerning its 'indirect preparation of the ground for turning the worker movement into a tool of the bourgeois democracy'. In all simplicity, *Rabochee delo* decided that this accusation is no more than a polemical sally: these evil dogmatic types have made up their mind (so *Rabochee delo* thinks) to say all sorts of unpleasant things about us – well, what could be more unpleasant than being a tool of the bourgeois democracy? And, so, they print in bold typeface their 'denial': 'slander without disguise' (*Two Congresses*, p. 31), 'mystification' (p. 31), 'masquerade' (p. 33). Like Jupiter (although it actually doesn't resemble Jupiter very much), *Rabochee delo* is angry precisely because it is in the wrong, and demonstrates with its hasty abuse that it lacks the ability to grasp the train of thought of its opponents. But, really, it does not take a great deal of thought to understand why *any* kow-towing before the *stikiinost* of the mass movement, *any* lowering of Social-Democratic politics to *tred-iunionist* politics is precisely preparing the ground for turning the worker movement into a tool of the bourgeois democracy. A *stikiinyi* worker movement in and of itself creates (and inevitably creates) only *tred-iunionizm*, and a *tred-iunionist* politics by the worker class means precisely a bourgeois politics by the worker class .

The participation of the worker class in the political struggle and even in the political revolution in no way ensures that its politics are Social-Democratic politics. Will *Rabochee delo* deny this? Will it finally set out for all to see its views on the burning issues of international and Russian Social Democracy, directly and without equivocation? – No, no, it will never get around to do anything like this, since it holds fast to the method of 'talking in negotiations': I'm not me, this isn't my horse, I'm not a coachman. We're not 'economists', *Rabochaia mysl* is not 'economism', there is no 'economism' in Russia at all. This is a remarkably clever and 'politic' method, having only this small inconvenience that the publications adopting it will acquire the nickname 'How may I serve you?'.

It seems to *Rabochee delo* that the bourgeois democracy in Russia is in general a 'phantom' [without existence] (*Two Congresses*, p. 32).¹⁶¹ Happy folk! Like an ostrich, they hide their head under their wing and imagine that this makes everything around them disappear. A whole series of liberal journalists who give us triumphal bulletins each month about the disintegration and even the disappearance of Marxism; a series of liberal newspapers (*SPb. Vedomosti*, *Russkie Vedomosti* and many others) that encourage liberals who carry the Brentano view of class struggle and a *tred-iunionist* view of politics to the workers; a galaxy of critics of Marxism whose real tendencies were revealed so well by the *Credo* and whose literary products are the only ones which circulate freely in Russia without hindrance; the revival of revolutionary non-Social-Democratic tendencies, especially after the February and March events – all this, evidently, is a phantom! All of this has no relation whatsoever to the bourgeois democracy!

It would behoove not just the authors of the 'economist' letter in *Iskra*, No. 12 but *Rabochee delo* to 'think a bit about why the spring events called forth such a revival of revolutionary non-Social-Democratic tendencies instead of calling forth

¹⁶¹ In the same publication, we find a reference to 'the concrete Russian conditions that push the worker movement onto the revolutionary path with fatal necessity'. People do not wish to understand that the revolutionary path of the worker movement can also be a non-Social-Democratic path! After all, in the days of absolutism in Western Europe, the entire bourgeoisie there 'pushed', purposively pushed, the workers on to the revolutionary path. But we Social Democrats cannot be contented with this. And if we in any way lower Social-Democratic politics down to *stikiinyi*, *tred-iunionist* politics, then precisely in so doing we play into the hands of the bourgeois democracy.

a strengthening of the authority and prestige of Social Democracy'. The reason is this: we were not up to our own task, the activeness of the worker masses turned out to be higher than our own activeness, we did not have on hand enough prepared revolutionary leader/guides and organisers with an excellent understanding of the mood in all oppositional strata and who were able to stand at the head of the movement, to turn a *stikhiinyi* demonstration into a political one, to broaden its political character and so on. Under these circumstances, our falling behind will inevitably be used by more flexible, more energetic non-Social-Democratic revolutionaries; the workers, no matter how energetically and with what self-sacrifice they fight with police and troops, no matter in how revolutionary a fashion they act, will prove to be merely a force supporting these [non-Social-Democratic] revolutionaries – a rearguard of the bourgeois democracy rather than a Social Democratic vanguard.

Take German Social Democracy – the ones from whom our 'economists' want to borrow only the weak aspects. Why is it that *not one* political event in Germany goes by without serving to increase the authority and prestige of Social Democracy more and more? Why is it that Social Democracy always shows itself ahead of everybody else in giving a revolutionary evaluation of such an event, in defending any protest made against abuse of power? Social Democracy [in Germany] does not lull itself to sleep with disquisitions about how the economic struggle pushes the workers to face the issue of their lack of rights or about how concrete conditions push the worker movement with the force of fate on to the revolutionary path. It intervenes in all areas and in all issues of social and political life: the issue of Wilhelm's refusal to confirm mayors who belong to the bourgeois Progressive Party (the Germans have not yet been enlightened by our 'economists' that this kind of intervention is in essence a compromise with liberalism!), the issue of the promulgation of a law against 'immoral' literary works, the issue of government influence on the selection of professors and so forth and so on. Everywhere they show themselves to be ahead of everybody, instigating political dissatisfaction in all classes, pushing the sleeping, prodding the backward, providing all-sided material for the development of the political awareness and the political activeness of the proletariat. And as a result, respect for Social Democracy as the advanced political fighter [for democracy] penetrates even purposive enemies of socialism – it often happens that an important document not only from bourgeois but even from bureaucratic and court circles ends up by some miracle in the editorial offices of *Vorwärts* [the main SPD newspaper].

Here is the solution to the seeming 'contradiction' that surpasses the comprehension of *Rabochee delo* so much that it can only throw up its hands and shout 'masquerade!' Just imagine: we here, at *Rabochee delo*, regard the *mass* movement as the cornerstone (and say so with italicised emphasis!), we warn all and sundry against underestimating the significance of the *stikhi inyi* element, we wish to impart a political character to the economic struggle itself, *itself*, its very self, we wish to remain in a close and organic link with the proletarian struggle! And then we are told that we are preparing the ground for turning the worker movement into a tool of bourgeois democracy. And who says this? People who make 'compromises' with liberalism, who intervene in various 'liberal' issues (what a misunderstanding of the 'organic link with the proletarian struggle'!), who devote a great deal of attention to the students and even (horrors!) to the *zemstvo* people! People who, in general, want to devote a greater percentage (in comparison to 'economists') of their forces to activity among non-proletarian classes of the population! Can this be anything but a 'masquerade'?

Poor *Rabochee delo*! Will it ever manage to think its way through to the solution of this complicated affair?

Lenin's Political Thought, Vol. 1, Chapter 6: Turn-of-the-Century Crisis – The Threat to Orthodoxy (conclusion)

by Neil Harding

The crisis which Russian Marxism faced at the turn of the century was, in the opinion of many commentators, no real crisis at all. It was invented by Lenin and the Iskrists as a convenient way of attaching pejorative labels (economist, revisionist, etc.) to their competitors for the leadership of the Party. It is suggested that Lenin invented a straw man when he accused the *Rabochaya Mysl* and *Rabochee Delo* adherents of abstaining from the political struggle. Lenin's view, they say, would not withstand an impartial examination of the evidence, for, particularly after 1901, even *Rabochaya Mysl* advocated a distinctly political line.

In considering these charges there is, I think, one major point which rather tends to be overlooked but which cannot be stressed too forcibly in our conclusion. The struggle within the movement was not so much a battle for control over an existing established party, for, as we have seen, there did not exist a Russian Social Democratic Labour Party [RSDLP] in any meaningful sense of the word. It was, rather, a more elemental battle about how the RSDLP should be constituted, a battle about what sort of party Russia needed. It was fundamentally a fight between two clearly distinct trends. On the one hand there were the Iskrists, who reaffirmed the central idea of Russian Marxist orthodoxy, that the class struggle was, definitionally, a political struggle and that in Russian conditions the proletariat would have to assume hegemony over the democratic revolution. To fulfil the role of leading all anti autocratic strata, the party of the proletariat had to assume awesome organisational tasks which, in turn, demanded a centralised all Russian party structure. On the other hand the *Rabochaya Mysl* and *Rabochee Delo* adherents considered the gradual piecemeal improvement of the workers' material conditions to be the proper centre of Social-Democratic activity. They did not deny that politics could be a useful adjunct of this work but they *did* deny Iskrist politics in the sense that they never aspired to establish proletarian hegemony over the democratic movement. The difference of orientation between these two trends was not, as many commentators suggest, lacking in historical foundation. It certainly would not be traducing the evidence to contend that the Iskrists emphatically orientated themselves towards revolutionary politics whereas their opponents, equally emphatically, considered that the gradual winning of economic reforms was the appropriate focus for Party activity at this time and in the foreseeable future.

The fact that there was no party in existence is of cardinal importance in understanding the passion and earnestness of Lenin and the orthodox in getting an undiluted, revolutionary, Marxist programme adopted for the reconstituted RSDLP. The situation in the Russian movement was such that they felt they could not afford to allow a large minority (perhaps even a majority) of avowed revisionists a prominent role in deciding the composition of the programme and the governing organs of the Party. It was, they felt, imperative that the programme, which defined the ethos and long-term objectives of the Party, and would therefore determine its strategy for decades to come, must reflect the expressly political revolutionary strivings of the Russian proletariat. The German Party could, in Lenin's view, afford the luxury of a large revisionist minority within its ranks only because it had a clearly defined Marxist programme, authoritative leaders, an established Party press and settled traditions for resolving disputes. In Russia *none* of those conditions prevailed. Worse still the effect of police persecution had been to deprive the movement of virtually all its experienced and theoretically trained leadership cadres, leaving it easy prey to the green enthusiasm of ill-informed and ill-prepared youngsters infatuated with immediate bread-and-butter problems. It was unthinkable to Lenin and Martov, even more unthinkable was it to Plekhanov and Akselrod, that such men should be entrusted with drafting the programme and defining the whole future orientation of the Party, which they were all trying to re-establish.

Lenin's Political Thought, Vol. 1, Chapter 7: The Reaffirmation of Orthodoxy Social-Democratic Consciousness and the Party

The Reaffirmation of Orthodoxy Social-Democratic Consciousness and the Party

The ideas which Lenin set out in *What Is To Be Done?*, were, as we have seen from the previous chapter, inextricably connected with the power struggle proceeding within the RSDLP in the years from 1899 to 1903. The bulk of the pamphlet is quite unintelligible if divorced from this immediate context. In 1907 Lenin insisted that the arguments and organisational principles of *What Is To Be Done?* were not intended as general statements of everlasting applicability but were, on the contrary, pertinent to a particular situation faced by the Russian movement at a particular moment of its development.

Concerning the essential content of this pamphlet it is necessary to draw the attention of the modern reader to the following.

*The basic mistake made by those who now criticise What is To Be Done?, is to treat the pamphlet apart from its connection with the concrete historical situation of a definite, and now long past, period in the development of our Party.*¹⁶²

The whole purpose of the book, Lenin went on, was to provide 'a controversial correction of Economist distortions and it would be wrong to regard the pamphlet in any other light.'¹⁶³ Its elements of exaggeration were, in Lenin's later considered view, very necessary since seemingly minor differences of orientation at the beginning of this new work, at the beginning of the Social-Democratic movement 'would very substantially affect propaganda, agitation and organisation'.¹⁶⁴ The significance of *What is To Be Done?*, was, therefore, that it 'straightens out what had been twisted by the Economists'.¹⁶⁵

The primary goal of Lenin's pamphlet was to state the orthodox case that the Party, at the forthcoming 'constitutive' Congress, should commit itself to a frankly revolutionary political strategy in which the proletariat and its Party would feature as the vanguard of the democratic movement against autocracy. It was, in this sense, primarily a statement about the proper goals of Social Democracy at this time – an orthodox insistence that economic goals be subordinated to political goals and not vice versa. Put in another way, Lenin was asserting that the strategic transition from economic agitation to political agitation had been signalled by the actions of the masses and could no longer be delayed.

Lenin's ideas on organisation and consciousness were derivative of his basic objective. The argument was that if the Party was to lead all the democratic forces in a concerted all-Russian revolutionary movement to topple autocracy then it must have an appropriately cohesive and efficient all-Russian structure. The general pattern of the organisation was, therefore, according to Lenin, entailed by the specification of the objectives appropriate to the Party – the one was a function of the other. Demonstration of this truth was, for Lenin, afforded by the attitude of the Economists to this question. Their specification of the Party's primary objective – improving the economic lot of the workers – inevitably led them to recommend a loosely structured Party where local committees had to enjoy ample initiative to pursue the specific local conditions of employment, pay, fines, housing, etc.

¹⁶² CW, 13, 101.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 108.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 106.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 107.

Social-Democratic Consciousness and the Development of Socialism

Part of the reason why the Economists set the objectives of the movement at so low a level, and, consequently could rest content with a primitive 'handicraft-type' organisation, lay, in Lenin's view, in their inability to understand the history of the development of socialism and of working-class consciousness. The Economists' belief that socialism was immanent within the workers' movement and would ineluctably work its way through quite unaided, was based, in Lenin's view, on a gross misconception about the history of socialism as a tradition of thought and a no less inadequate grasp of the history of the workers' movement – notably in England. Fundamentally the Economists failed to grasp the dynamic relationship between theory and practice. Lenin, in his reflections on consciousness, was doing no more than restating the perfectly orthodox proposition developed long previously by Plekhanov, that the duty of the Party was always to be one step ahead of the workers' movement. Its theoretical prescience must so guide the practice of the workers' movement as to encourage it to achieve the next phase of the ascent towards fully socialist consciousness – otherwise the Party had no *raison d'être*.

To clarify this position, we must examine more closely Lenin's account of the development of 'Social-Democratic consciousness'. Our first step, quite clearly, is to discover quite what Lenin intended by this phrase. True to his didactic temperament Lenin provided us with a lengthy definition:

The consciousness of the working masses cannot be genuine class consciousness unless the workers learn, from concrete, and above all from topical, political facts and events to observe every other social class in all the manifestations of its intellectual, ethical, and political life; unless they learn to apply in practice the materialist analysis and the materialist estimate of all aspects of the life and activity of all classes, strata and groups of the population. Those who concentrate the attention, observation, and consciousness of the working class exclusively, or even mainly, upon itself alone are not Social Democrats; for the self knowledge of the working class is indissolubly linked up, not solely with a fully clear theoretical understanding – it would be even truer to say, not so much with the theoretical, as with the practical, understanding – of the relationships between all the various classes of modern society, acquired through the experience of political life...

In order to become a Social Democrat, the worker must have a clear picture in his mind of the economic nature and the social and political features of the landlord and the priest, the high state official and the peasant, the student and the vagabond; he must know their strong and weak points; he must grasp the meaning of all the catchwords and sophisms by which each class and each stratum camouflages its selfish interests and its real 'inner workings'; he must understand what interests are reflected by certain institutions and certain laws and how they are reflected.¹⁶⁶

We noticed earlier that Lenin's style was often that of a headmaster; he was, quite clearly, a headmaster who demanded a very great deal from his pupils. His specification of what constituted adequate class or Social-Democratic consciousness was extraordinarily rigorous and severe. Intrinsic to it was his insistence that the essential character of Social-Democratic activity was to represent the workers on the national political plane, i.e. it represented the working class 'not in its relation to a given group of employers alone, but in its relation to all classes of modern society and to the state as an organised political force.'¹⁶⁷ This, of course, followed from the orthodox axiom which has earlier been noted, that the working class began to emerge with its essential attributes only when it constituted itself a political party and articulated the general-national demands of the class. To this extent Lenin's severe specification of the constituents of adequate consciousness was no more than an elaboration of what was entailed in the phase of *political* activity of the working class. The obligation to

¹⁶⁶ CW, 5, 412-3.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 400.

be aware of the economic, social and political situations of all other classes and strata was, of course, heightened by the equally orthodox insistence that the leadership of all the varied groups comprising the democratic movement in Russia must devolve upon the proletariat, with Social Democracy as its political representative. In other words the level of consciousness demanded was that appropriate to, and flowing from, the political tasks the Russian Social Democrats were duty bound to carry out.

Let us notice for the time being that Lenin's account of Social Democratic consciousness was extremely broad and demanding, involving as it did a total composite picture of the social subdivisions of contemporary Russia. The problem which emerged was, was it reasonable or indeed possible for the worker to acquire *such* consciousness from the economic struggle for existence? Could political and Social-Democratic consciousness arise, in Lenin's view, from what we have termed the *industrial practice* of the working class? Lenin answered, unequivocably, in the negative.

The sphere of activity of industrial practice was too narrow, its confines too restrictive, for the worker to be able to come to adequate political consciousness. Within the economic sphere the clash was exclusively between those who hired themselves as wage labourers and their employers. At its broadest this could amount only to a clash between the whole class of labourers and the owners of capital. Even at this maximum extension the owners were confronted precisely as such, as a group disposing of capital; they were not typically confronted as disposer of political power allied with other classes and groups.

*Consequently, however much we may try to 'lend the economic struggle itself a political character', we shall never be able to develop the political consciousness of the workers (to the level of Social-Democratic political consciousness) by keeping within the framework of the economic struggle, for that framework is too narrow.*¹⁶⁸

According to Lenin the advanced workers were already discontented with the economic struggle. They already recognised the necessity for decisive and unified political activity but of themselves lacked a national organisational focus and lacked the necessary knowledge to elaborate an independent political strategy. Lenin's imaginary worker in *What Is To Be Done?* became the mouthpiece of the advanced workers now chafing against the short reign on which they were held by *Rabochaya Mysl* and *Rabochee Delo*.

*...We are not children to be fed on the thin gruel of 'economic' politics alone; we want to know everything that others know, we want to learn the details of all aspects of political life and to take part actively in every single political event. In order that we may do this, the intellectuals must talk to us less of what we already know and tell us more about what we do not yet know and what we can never learn from our factory and 'economic' experience, namely, political knowledge. You intellectuals can acquire this knowledge, and it is your duty to bring it to us...*¹⁶⁹

Lenin's position with regard to the development of consciousness at this time was quite clear and intelligible. He made no attempt to dissimulate; on the contrary, he stated his position openly and systematically. He contended that the experience of the economic class struggle of the proletariat could not, of itself, lead to adequate political consciousness because political consciousness demanded a knowledge of all classes and strata in their inter relationships. The economic 'spontaneous' struggle of the workers could not lead to Social-Democratic consciousness for that entailed *leading* all other classes and strata in the democratic revolution. It necessarily involved, therefore, knowledge of the political interests, strengths and weaknesses of every opposition group. It involved, further, a national political organisation to co-ordinate *all* anti-autocratic manifestations, and the creation of a vehicle of systematic national propaganda and agitation through which the grievances of all groups and classes could find an outlet. Interests must be generalised, must be articulated, must be seen

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 421. Emphasis in original.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 416-7.

in relation one with another before consciousness could dawn upon the masses. We should be clear at this stage that Lenin's evaluation of the immediate tasks confronting the movement was shared by all the orthodox. Plekhanov and Akselrod were stating the same position, Potresov and Martov were in complete accord. Furthermore, they all believed that those tasks could not be accomplished by relying upon the localised, and therefore weak, Social-Democratic Groups in Russia. More significantly, perhaps, they were at one with Lenin in believing that the expansion of consciousness among the workers, which the implementation of these tasks demanded, could not issue from the narrow compass of Economist politics. At the very least none of the orthodox registered any disapproval of Lenin's thesis that, *left to themselves* the workers would only develop trade-union consciousness, i.e., an awareness of a shared set of economic interests.

In view of the forcefulness with which he put his position, and in view of the almost universal opinion that Lenin was here departing from Marxist orthodoxy, it is more than surprising that the recognised guardians of that orthodoxy in Russia should have entered no reservations at the time. Nor can it be maintained that Lenin suddenly and unexpectedly sprang this upon his colleagues, throwing them into temporary confusion. In the very first number of *Iskra*, Lenin's editorial, *The Urgent Tasks of Our Movement*, set out quite clearly the orthodox position with regard to the development of consciousness. We must regard this as a joint statement of the whole editorial board – both Akselrod and Plekhanov as fellow-editors had seen and approved the article.

In it Lenin contended that the mischief wrought by the Economists consisted primarily in splitting the working class from its connection with the broader goals of socialism through concentrating almost exclusively on localised work and the economic struggle. 'Isolated from Social Democracy', Lenin contended 'the working-class movement becomes petty and inevitably becomes bourgeois. In waging only the economic struggle, the working class loses its political independence; it becomes the tail of other parties...'¹⁷⁰ The task of the Social Democrats was stated quite clearly: it was 'to imbue the masses of the proletariat with the ideas of socialism and political consciousness and to organise a revolutionary party inseparably connected with the spontaneous working-class movement'.¹⁷¹ Unless this were done, that is, unless the Social-Democratic intelligentsia brought consciousness and organisation to the workers,

*the proletariat will never rise to the class-conscious struggle; without such organisation the working-class movement is doomed to impotency...Not a single class in history has achieved power without producing its political leaders, its prominent representatives able to organise a movement and lead it.*¹⁷²

We have seen in Chapter Two, how Plekhanov repeatedly emphasised the responsibility of the Social-Democratic intelligentsia to bring consciousness and organisation into the labour movement. We have seen above how Akselrod insisted that without the determined intervention of the Social Democrats the labour movement was doomed to subserve the interests of bourgeois politics. Lenin's formulations in polemic with the Economists might well have been sharper but they were hardly innovative. Lenin himself had insisted in 1899 that it was a gross error to identify the strivings of the labour movement with socialism. The two were, he maintained, distinct, though each needed the other. Social Democracy as a movement of men and ideas could only exist, in Lenin's view, as a fusion of the two; he maintained that 'Social Democracy is not confined to simple service of the working class movement'; it represented '*the combination of socialism and the working-class movement*' (to use Karl Kautsky's definition which repeats the basic ideas of the *Communist Manifesto*)¹⁷³.

¹⁷⁰ CW, 4, 368.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 369.

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 370.

¹⁷³ Ibid., p.217.

Earlier still, in 1894, Lenin had emphatically rejected the 'fatalistic' interpretation foisted on to Marx by 'cowardly petty-bourgeois' interpreters who asserted that working-class political and socialist organisations were the spontaneous product of capitalist development. This contention Lenin argued:

*is refuted by all the activities of the Social Democrats in all countries; it is refuted by every public speech made by any Marxist. Social Democracy – as Kautsky very justly remarks – is a fusion of the working-class movement and socialism.*¹⁷⁴

The distinction which Lenin invoked in *What Is To Be Done?*, between the labour movement and Social Democracy, was, as we have seen, intrinsic to the position of all the orthodox. None of them had rebuked him earlier for drawing attention to it, nor were they to do so in 1902-3.

It was indeed to the impeccable authority of Karl Kautsky that Lenin again appealed when he maintained in *What Is To Be Done?* that socialism was not purely and simply a product of the labour movement, but arose as a body of ideas within the intelligentsia. He cited from Kautsky's recently published *Programme for the Social Democratic Party of Austria*¹⁷⁵ in defence of his position:

*The vehicle of science is not the proletariat, but the bourgeois intelligentsia [K. K.'s italics]: it was in the minds of individual members of this stratum that modern socialism originated, and it was they who communicated it to the more intellectually developed proletarians who, in their turn, introduce it into the proletariat class struggle where conditions allow that to be done. Thus, socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without [von Aussen Hineingetragen] and not something that arose within it spontaneously [urwilchsig]. Accordingly, the old Hainfeld programme quite rightly stated that the task of Social Democracy is to imbue the proletariat [literally: saturate the proletariat] with the consciousness of its position and the consciousness of its task. There would be no need for this if consciousness arose of itself from the class struggle.*¹⁷⁶

Many present-day students of Marxism might well see some large theoretical problems emerging from Kautsky's assessment of the evolution of consciousness but what cannot be denied is that, at this time Kautsky was unquestionably regarded as the guardian and oracle of Marxist orthodoxy. Those who dispute Lenin's conclusions on the genesis of socialist consciousness must it seems, also dispute Kautsky's claim to represent Social-Democratic orthodoxy for Lenin's elaboration of this theme in *What Is To Be Done?* was but an exegesis of Kautsky whose views were, as we have seen, very closely similar to those of the other orthodox within the Russian movement.¹⁷⁷

The rest of Lenin's analysis of consciousness in *What Is To Be Done?* was no more than a development of Kautsky's views in the Russian context. He used Kautsky's conclusions as a lever to demonstrate the untenability of his opponents' views. One of these views, widely canvassed by *Rabochee Delo*, commended 'tactics as process'. This suggested that, through the dialectics of its own development the workers' movement would, in time, come to political and Social-Democratic consciousness. The implication of this was again that socialism was immanent within the strivings of the working class, and would be actualised by it quite unaided. For Lenin, this position stood in flat contradiction to Kautsky's insistence

¹⁷⁴ CW, 1, 320. Notes and References to pages 161-9

¹⁷⁵ K. Kautsky, 'Die Revision des Programms der Sozialdemokratie in Österreich', *Die Neue Zeit* (1902) band 1, pp. 68-82.

¹⁷⁶ CW, 5, 383-4. The insertions in square brackets are Lenin's. It is very regrettable that this quotation, the latest word on the question of consciousness by Europe's most respected Marxist, a quote which is clearly central to Lenin's justification of his own position, should be edited out of S. V. Utechin's version of 'What Is To Be Done?'

¹⁷⁷ Roger Garaudy is one of the few to notice the implications of Lenin's debt to Kautsky on the question of consciousness. It is difficult to dispute Garaudy's conclusion that, in this respect 'les thèses principales sont explicitement empruntées à Kautsky ... Il n'y a donc rien de spécifiquement léningradaise dans ces thèses sur "le Parti d'avant-garde" exposées dans *Que Faire?* Cette conception est celle de Kautsky et Lénine le souligne expressément.' *Lénine* (Paris, 1968) p. 20.

that socialism could only be introduced from without.¹⁷⁸ The position of the 'tactics as process' men was not only theoretically incorrect, it raised great practical dangers for the movement. Lenin's argument might have appeared rather strange, but it did have a certain implacable logic. Given that the workers, of themselves, could not evolve socialist ideas, given that they could not articulate an independent and consistent political strategy of their own, it followed that simply to sit by waiting for the impossible to occur, meant, in practice, delivering them into the hands of bourgeois politicians. This must follow because in the first place bourgeois ideology was much older and better established; secondly, the bourgeoisie controlled the media for the dissemination of ideas; and, finally, its task would be greatly eased in Russia because the workers' movement was so young and ill organised.¹⁷⁹

Part of Lenin's case rested upon Marx's own analysis which we have already broached. Marx's economic and historical analysis pointed in particular to the emergence of class polarity within society. Since ideologies and parties expressed, more or less adequately, class interests, these must reduce themselves to two totally opposed political courses – bourgeois or proletarian. There could be no middle way, for all intermediary classes and ideologies were progressively swept aside. Given the fact (which none of the orthodox disputed) that the working class of itself could not elaborate an independent political standpoint, the choice presented was clear – *either* it would be won over by the bourgeoisie (who, as Lenin noted, had many advantages in the struggle) *or* it would be won over to the socialist views and organisation outlined by the intelligentsia Social Democrats.

*Since there can be no talk of an independent ideology formulated by the working masses themselves in the process of their movement, the only choice is either bourgeois or socialist ideology. There is no middle course (for mankind has not created a 'third' ideology, and, moreover, in a society torn by class antagonisms, there can never be a non-class or above-class ideology). Hence, to belittle the socialist ideology in any way, to turn aside from it in the slightest degree means to strengthen bourgeois ideology. There is much talk of spontaneity. But the spontaneous development of the working-class movement leads to its subordination to bourgeois ideology, to its development along the lines of the Credo programme; for the spontaneous working-class movement is trade-unionism, is Nur-Gewerkschaftlerei, and trade unionism means the ideological enslavement of the workers by the bourgeoisie. Hence, our task, the task of Social-Democracy, is to combat spontaneity to divert the working-class movement from this spontaneous trade-unionist striving to come under the wing of the bourgeoisie, and to bring it under the wing of revolutionary Social Democracy.*¹⁸⁰

Lenin's position here did not differ in any essentials from the viewpoint of Akselrod cited above; it was a position which Plekhanov had himself expressed in his *Preface to the 'Vademecum' for the Editorial Board of Rabochee Delo*. There Plekhanov similarly insisted that the policy of trusting the workers to elaborate their own political strategy, of

¹⁷⁸ At this stage, Lenin could have further bolstered his claim to orthodoxy by quoting the same article by Kautsky in which the Austrian variant of 'socialism as process' – a spontaneous emanation of the labour movement – had been firmly and decisively rounded on. 'In this connection', Kautsky argued,

socialist consciousness appears as the necessary direct result of the proletarian class struggle. That is, however, false. Socialism as a teaching [*Lehre*] is rooted in any case both in contemporary economic relationships, and in the class struggle of the proletariat, and springs just like the latter from the struggle against the mass poverty and mass suffering that capitalism produces; both arise beside one another and not from one another, and under differing presuppositions. Modern socialist consciousness can only arise on the basis of profound scientific insight. In fact contemporary economic science/knowledge [*Wissenschaft*] is as much a precondition for socialist production as contemporary technology, but with the best will in the world the proletariat can create the one as little as it can the other; they both result from the contemporary social process.

This passage immediately precedes the lengthy passage quoted in 'What Is To Be Done?'; it is to be found in *Neue Zeit*, op. cit., p. 70.

¹⁷⁹ CW, 5, 386.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 384-5.

concentrating on the economic struggle and of utilising only those legal outlets of representation available to the workers, would, in the absence of a strong party guided by the revolutionary bacilli of the intelligentsia, be tantamount to delivering the workers up to the radical or liberal bourgeoisie who would fashion them into a pliant tool of their political objectives.¹⁸¹ The same argument was pursued at length in his *Once Again Socialism and the Political Struggle* where he introduced an argument which is also crucial to *What Is To Be Done?* and Lenin's whole account of the development of consciousness in the mass.

Plekhanov insisted that a main cause of the Economists' dereliction of duty was their failure not merely to keep one step ahead of the workers in general, but of the *advanced workers* in particular. As far as the *Party* was concerned it must distinguish levels of consciousness within the working class and it must seek always to be one step ahead of its leading stratum in defining the immediate tasks of the movement.

*In the words of the author the agitator should always be one step ahead of the masses. So let it be. But precisely which stratum should the party be ahead of? Precisely which stratum should we precede by one step? If it is the most advanced one, then the moment of transition to the political struggle has probably arrived...All these difficulties disappear as soon as we remember that it is one thing for the whole working class, and another for the Social-Democratic Party to represent itself as the most advanced section of the working class, even if, at the outset [that section is] small in numbers.*¹⁸²

Plekhanov made it quite clear that, for the Party the base-line had to be the most advanced section of the working class and that section was already groping towards revolutionary politics. Unless the Party acted as the guide for this section, unless also it reorganised itself on a cohesive basis, then the danger existed, for Plekhanov, as for Lenin and Akselrod, that the whole movement would be deflected into the political camp of the bourgeoisie. This indeed, was the logical outcome, in Plekhanov's opinion, of the Economist tactic.

*But such an outcome is, as far as we are concerned, totally undesirable. If in the struggle which must begin in Russia – in the struggle for political freedom – our workers, among whom class-consciousness is already awakening, come out as the vassals of others, alien to the party, then the advantage will accrue to no one except the bourgeoisie. Let the ideologist of the bourgeoisie try to lead the workers along that path. We, Social Democrats, will try to move them along another.*¹⁸³

Clearly, for Plekhanov, as for Lenin, as for Kautsky and Akselrod, there was no necessary determinism at work which ineluctably propelled the working class towards socialism. The emphasis of all Plekhanov's works at this time was the same; only the determined intervention of the Social-Democratic intelligentsia, only the infusion of socialism into the working class, only the creation of a strong centralised party, could prevent the workers becoming the tool of bourgeois politics. It is on this note that he ended his *Once Again Socialism and the Political Struggle*, invoking Akselrod's two perspectives.

The triumph of the 'economic' trend would lead to the political exploitation of the Russian working class by the democratic and liberal bourgeoisie.

*The tactic which I defend in this article would as inevitably give to Russia Social Democracy – to that most advanced section of the Russian working class – the political hegemony in the struggle for emancipation from tsarism.*¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ Plekhanov, *Sochineniya*, 12, especially p. 36.

¹⁸² Ibid., pp. 80-1.

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. IOI.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 102.

It is hardly to be wondered at that Plekhanov, neither at the time nor for some time after its publication, criticised *What is To Be Done?* Its basic theses were his own.

Let us now consider the reorientation of Social-Democratic activity which Lenin thought necessary for the evolution of properly socialist consciousness. The assumptions which formed the basis of his view were in every respect similar to those we have already encountered in discussing Lenin's ideas on 'industrial' or economic practice. Even in that primary phase of the solidification of the working class, the workers did not *commence* the struggle with their employers with anything like adequate consciousness of the irreconcilability of their respective economic interests. They did not, even at this stage, comprehend their situation theoretically. Comprehension came only in and through practice; it came from experience of strikes and economic struggle. For the broad mass even the first steps towards a recognition of shared economic interests did not come from books; it came from following the advanced workers into the actual struggle. The chain of consciousness which Lenin presented was roughly as follows. The Social Democrats, armed through theory with the ability to generalise, undertook relentless exposures of the nature of Russian capitalism by seizing upon particular keenly felt abuses and demonstrating their general significance. The *advanced* workers responded to the Social-Democratic call to action and drew with them the mass of the workers. In the course of the struggle the *mass* too came to appreciate the general nature of the system of exploitation. This, we have contended, was Lenin's view of the way in which the primary elements of class *economic* solidarity were forged. An exactly similar progress was invoked in the case of *political* and Social-Democratic consciousness. The process would be the same, only the object of attention and the focus of activity had to change. In an article written at the end of 1899¹⁸⁵ Lenin quite explicitly emphasised that his conception of the growth of this second phase, or political consciousness, followed the same path as his analysis of the first or economic phase. In both it was the advanced workers who were crucial; with Plekhanov he agreed that they determined the character of the movement.

It is the task of Social Democracy to develop the political consciousness of the masses and not to drag along at the tail-end of the masses that have no political rights; secondly, and this is most important, it is untrue that the masses will not understand the idea of the political struggle. Even the most backward worker will understand the idea, provided, of course, the agitator or propagandist is able to approach him in such a way as to communicate the idea to him, to explain it in understandable language on the basis of facts the worker knows from everyday experience. But this condition is just as indispensable for clarifying the economic struggle; in this field too, the backward workers from the lower or middle strata of the masses will not be able to assimilate the general idea of economic struggle; it is an idea which can be absorbed by a few educated workers whom the masses will follow, guided by their instincts and their direct, immediate interests.

This is likewise true of the political sphere, of course; only the developed worker will comprehend the general idea of the political struggle, and the masses will follow him because they have a very good sense of their lack of political rights ... and because their most immediate, everyday interests regularly bring them into contact with every kind of manifestation of political oppression. In no political or social movement, in no country has there ever been, or could there ever have been, any other relation between the mass of the given class or people and its numerically few, educated representatives than the following: everywhere and at all times the leaders of a certain class have always been its advanced, most cultivated representatives. Nor can there be any other situation in the Russian working-class movement.¹⁸⁶

The main emphasis of the work in the second phase, must, in Lenin's view, be shifted from economic exposure to political exposure. This imperative arose not only because the advanced workers were already engaging in political demonstrations but also because political exposures touched upon the conditions of life of all opposition sections of the populace.

¹⁸⁵ CW, 4, A propos of the Profession de Foi, 286-96.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 291-2.

Only by becoming acquainted with these broader issues could the proletariat attain consciousness and impress its leadership.

The Social Democrats must change their role from being trade union secretaries to becoming tribunes of the whole people.¹⁸⁷ The working class as a whole could come to adequate consciousness only by being led into the struggle, by themselves participating in every aspect of the democratic revolution, by encountering in practice the dispositions of *all* social strata.

*It is not enough to explain to the workers that they are politically oppressed (any more than it is to explain to them that their interests are antagonistic to the interests of the employers). Agitation must be conducted with regard to every concrete example of this oppression (as we have begun to carry on agitation round concrete examples of economic oppression). In as much as this oppression affects the most diverse classes of society, in as much as it manifests itself in the most varied spheres of life and activity – vocational, civic, personal, family, religious, scientific, etc. etc. – is it not evident that we shall not be fulfilling our task of developing the political consciousness of the workers if we do not undertake the organisation of the political exposure of the autocracy in all its aspects?*¹⁸⁸

Repeatedly Lenin made the same point: only by participating in the broader democratic struggle, by fusing itself with Social Democracy, would the mass of workers acquire adequate consciousness.

*A basic condition for the necessary expansion of political agitation is the organisation of comprehensive political exposure. In no way except by means of such exposures can the masses be trained in political consciousness and revolutionary activity... Working-class consciousness cannot be genuine political consciousness unless the workers are trained to respond to all cases of tyranny, oppression, violence, and abuse, no matter what class is affected.*¹⁸⁹

Unless this were done then Social Democracy might as well in Lenin's view, concede its leading role and cease pretending to assume hegemony over the democratic movement.

*Those who refrain from concerning themselves in this way...in actuality leave the liberals in command, place in their hands the political education of the workers, and concede the hegemony in the political struggle to elements which, in the final analysis, are leaders of bourgeois democracy.*¹⁹⁰

The road to mass political consciousness lay, according to Lenin, through political practice under the guidance of the Social Democrats. This view which is intrinsic to *What Is To Be Done?* had been formulated, like so many of Lenin's other arguments there, some three years earlier. In 1899 he had already come to his conclusion.

*Surely there is no need to prove to Social Democrats that there can be no political education except through political struggle and political action. Surely it cannot be imagined that any sort of study circles or books, etc., can politically educate the mass of the workers if they are kept from political activity and political struggle.*¹⁹¹

At about the same time that Lenin formulated this view he was also evolving his conception of the appropriate organisational mode for conducting the cross-class democratic struggle. The linchpin here was, of course, the rather singular importance accorded to the Party newspaper.

¹⁸⁷ CW, 5, 423.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 400-1.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 412.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 341; cf. p. 319.

¹⁹¹ CW, 4, 288.

The Role of the Newspaper

Lenin's project for a newspaper, whose function was to serve as a 'proto-party', first appeared in rounded form in some of the articles he prepared for *Rabochaya Gazeta* while he was still in Siberian exile. Although these articles remained unpublished until 1925 they are of outstanding importance in establishing the continuity of Lenin's thought during the period 1899 to 1902. In the first of them, *Our Immediate Task*, the characteristics and functions of the newspaper were already set out in fully-developed form. 'The founding of a Party organ that will appear regularly and be closely connected with all the local groups'¹⁹² was discerned by Lenin as the most urgent task confronting the movement. Without it local work would remain amateurish and narrowly conceived. Furthermore:

*An economic struggle that is not united by a central organ cannot become the class struggle of the entire Russian proletariat. It is impossible to conduct a political struggle if the Party as a whole fails to make statements on all questions of policy and to give direction to the various manifestations of the struggle. The organisation and disciplining of the revolutionary forces and the development of revolutionary technique are impossible without the discussion of all these questions in a central organ, without the collective elaboration of certain forms and rules for the conduct of affairs, without the establishment – through the central organ – of every Party member's responsibility to the entire Party.*¹⁹³

All the movement's resources and organisational ability must, Lenin insisted, be concentrated on this objective. In default of such an organisational and theoretical focus of the movement, local work, in Lenin's opinion, lost nine-tenths of its significance. Moreover, the creation of an illegal newspaper was particularly vital to the development of *Russian Social Democracy* since all other organisational means enjoyed by the movement in other countries, were proscribed.

In his next article, *An Urgent Question*, Lenin sought to demonstrate how the constraints of producing the newspaper, collecting material for it and ensuring its efficient distribution, would, of themselves remedy the abuses of localism, disorganisation and inefficient distribution of forces from which the labour movement and Social Democracy so palpably suffered. Specialisation and division of labour would have to be introduced to ensure the efficient production and distribution of the paper. Such detail-labour was even more necessary in conditions of illegality. Specific and limited functions could be allocated to particular groups; the legal, semi-legal and illegal aspects of the work could then proceed in a co-ordinated way and, moreover, the minimum number of people would have to expose themselves to real risk. Lenin already broached an idea which was later to become a bone of contention at the Second Party Congress – the distinction between 'active' Party members and those who 'assist' the Party in legal and semi legal activities; these latter Lenin referred to here as the 'reserve.' Talking of the advantages of a functional division of labour he maintained that

*making affairs of this sort the specific function of a special contingent of people would reduce the strength of the revolutionary army 'in the firing line' (without any reduction of its 'fighting potential') and increase the strength of the reserve, those who replaced the 'killed and wounded.' This will be possible only when both the active members and the reserve see their activities reflected in the common organ of the Party and sense their connection with it.*¹⁹⁴

Finally, the creation of a regular Party newspaper would be, in Lenin's view, the indispensable means for realising the hegemonic role of the proletariat vis-a-vis other classes in the democratic revolution. The newspaper in its editorial emphasis must undertake the leadership of the whole political opposition to tsarism and the nature of this task set it way beyond the capacities of local groups. 'Only a common Party organ, consistently implementing the principles of political

¹⁹² Ibid., p. 218.

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 219.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 225.

struggle and holding high the banner of democracy will be able to win over to its side all militant democratic elements and use all Russia's progressive forces in the struggle for political freedom.¹⁹⁵ The local organisations had neither the financial resources nor the organisational ability and literary expertise to create such a paper.

The fundamental characteristics of the Party organisation which Lenin was later to elaborate in *What Is To Be Done?* were clearly present in these articles of 1899 – functional division of labour, with the more hazardous functions reserved to the 'active' forces, and the broader, legal ones to the 'reserve.' Specialisation, in turn, presupposed unification and a centralised body with the authority to allocate functions and the right to expect the membership to be accountable for their performance – all of this was already developed in Lenin's mind. To this extent his ideas on the newspaper were inseparable from his ideas on the Party. The two became almost identified, particularly since Lenin argued that the foundation of a Party organ was a vital precondition for the reconstitution of the Party itself.

Only through its columns and through open controversy over theory and strategy was it possible, he maintained, for the bases of a principled unity to be elaborated. Lenin was quite clear, however, that the unity sought for could not be the unity of the lowest common denominator; it could not for him be a consolidation of compromises worked out by the representatives of the movement in its current state of dissolution and theoretical wavering. On the contrary, in Lenin's words, unity 'must be worked for.'¹⁹⁶ By this he meant that the competing trends must first openly declare their views and expose their differing standpoints so that the movement might clearly appreciate what was at issue.

*Before we can unite, and in order that we may unite, we must first of all draw firm and definite lines of demarcation. Otherwise our unity will be purely fictitious.... We do not intend to make our publication a mere storehouse of various views. On the contrary, we shall conduct it in the spirit of a strictly defined tendency. This tendency can be expressed by the word Marxism.... Only in this way will it be possible to establish a genuinely all-Russian, Social-Democratic organ. Only such a publication will be capable of leading the movement on to the high road of political struggle.*¹⁹⁷

Lenin was here speaking in the name of the whole editorial board of *Iskra*, for by this time (September 1900) the Russian trio of Lenin, Potresov and Martov, had teamed up with the emigre trinity of Plekhanov, Akselrod and Zasulich to pursue the scheme which Lenin had conceived a full year earlier. They were now jointly and explicitly engaged on an audacious enterprise. The objective of that enterprise may be simply stated as the capture of the Social-Democratic and labour movements in Russia by the orthodox – by the ones whom Lenin described with characteristic gall as the representatives of *Marxism*. It was they who explicitly took upon themselves the establishment of a Party centre comprised of orthodox veteran Social Democrats able to give, through their newspaper, authoritative guidance to all sections of the Marxist and labour movements in Russia. In choosing to focus all their attention on the newspaper the veterans chose judiciously. Not only would they have a vehicle for the expression of their views, they would also build up an organisational network bound to them by ties of personal loyalty. In choosing to hazard all on the newspaper they knew full well that they were playing to their strong hand. Theirs were the big names; they had the theoretical, literary and financial advantage over their opponents. They had the connections (via Akselrod and Plekhanov) with the German Social Democrats through whose good offices the venture of large scale publication could be commenced.

It would be naive to imagine that their enterprise did not involve personal factors and the bids of differing factions to establish their pre-eminence. Disagreements about political principle are always intertwined with issues of political lead-

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 226.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 354.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 354-5.

ership; that has ever been the case with political parties and we should not be surprised to find that it was so with the Russian Social Democratic Party. When the *stariki* and the Emancipation of Labour Group found their position of hitherto unchallenged pre-eminence being eroded at the end of the nineteenth century, when they were faced with the old dread and terror of the Russian intelligentsia – becoming alienated and isolated – they responded as one might expect seasoned politicians anywhere to respond. They restated their principles as the orthodoxy of the movement and did their best to associate their rivals with heresy and betrayal – especially to emphasise their rivals' connections with, and indebtedness to, Bernstein. They indulged in intrigue, they rigged conferences and congresses to their own advantage, above all they used their newspaper as their main weapon in the struggle. In short they used every trick in their considerable repertoire of political wiles to re-establish their pre-eminence. We must again be clear that Lenin was by no means the only one to pursue this strategy. He was certainly in the thick of the struggle and increasingly assumed the role of main polemicist and publicist for the old orthodoxy, but he did so with the support and collaboration of *all* the *stariki*, of *all* the Emancipation of Labour Group.

For the *Iskra* board the newspaper was to be the nucleus of the Party; its network of agents were to be tied to them. The plan of the newspaper involved specialisation of function. Therefore it presumed a centre to allocate function; it presumed professional revolutionaries; it presumed leadership of all the scattered groups and expected them to respond to directives. The newspaper was to be (as Lenin quite openly expressed it in *Iskra*, no. 4) 'not only a collective propagandist and a collective agitator, it is also a collective organiser'.¹⁹⁸ The newspaper was, in the context of Russian Marxism at that time, consciously setting out to establish its organisational centre, *its* power-base against all comers. The editorial board gave notice that it sought to establish 'a network of agents' to form the skeleton of precisely the kind of organisation we need – one that is sufficiently large to embrace the whole country; sufficiently broad and many-sided to effect a strict and detailed division of labour; sufficiently well-tempered to be able to conduct steadily *its own* work under any circumstances.¹⁹⁹

This network would, through its newspaper, consolidate and co-ordinate the activities of all the scattered groups so that Social Democracy (the Editorial Board) would be in a position to harness the forces necessary for its leading role in the democratic struggle, to 'provide a tribune for the nation-wide exposure of the tsarist government, ... That tribune must be a Social-Democratic newspaper'.²⁰⁰ Finally, and with no trace of false modesty, Lenin in his lead article revealed the final advantage:

*If we join forces to produce a common newspaper, this work will train and bring into the foreground, not only the most skilful propagandists, but the most capable organisers, the most talented political party leaders capable, at the right moment, of releasing the slogan for the decisive struggle and of taking the lead in that struggle.*²⁰¹

This was no more than a plea for a vote of confidence in what had already been decided. The newspaper had already been established. Its guiding spirits were well-known. The invitation amounts to no more than an invitation to work under them and to admit past errors. In the context of Russian Marxism at that time the message of Lenin's article must have been crystal clear. It stated unashamedly that the paper was in the hands of the orthodox and most capable leaders. They would direct their agents within the labour movement, they would decide Social-Democratic policy and they would, by dint of

¹⁹⁸ CW, 5, 22.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 23.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 22.

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 24.

that fact, become the leaders of the democratic revolution. It is not too much to maintain that *What is To Be Done?* merely reiterated these claims to hegemony: the hegemony of the Editorial Board within Social Democracy, the hegemony of Social Democracy over the labour movement, the hegemony of the revolutionary proletariat within the democratic movement as a whole.

Organisational Principles and Objectives

In view of all that is alleged about *What is To Be Done?*, actually reading the text must come as a grave disappointment to revolutionaries expecting to discover a primer on revolutionary conspiracy. Far from codifying rules of conspiratorial procedure, or specifying precisely the chain of command and lines of communication from central directorate down the pyramid to the primary cells (as, for instance, Buonarotti did in his *Conspiration des Egaux*), Lenin's 'manual' contained not even a recipe for invisible ink. His organisational principles were developed only in the most general terms. *What is To Be Done?* was the embodiment of Lenin's attempt to express in a systematic way the principles of party building long expressed in the editorials of *Iskra*. It was intended to reinforce the Editorial Board's claim that the Party should be reconstituted under its aegis and in its image. There is no doubt that it was used by all the Iskrists in their struggle to establish their pre-eminent position at the Second Party Congress.²⁰²

In Lenin's view of things the principles upon which the reorganisation of the Party must be based were determined directly by the tasks confronting the Party. For him these organisational principles and these tasks stood in a one-to-one relationship; to assent to the tasks was to assent to the organisation. It was for this reason that by far the greater part of *What Is To Be Done?* was not concerned at all with organisational questions *per se*. The first three chapters were concerned with restating the urgency of assuming the role of vanguard fighter in the democratic revolution and criticising in turn each of the heretics who had departed from this course. The first three chapters represented no more than a summary compilation of *Iskra*'s case against Economists and terrorists, a case which had been consistently advanced over the previous two years, the outlines of which we are already familiar with.

Only in the fourth chapter, 'The Primitiveness of the Economists and the Organisation of the Revolutionaries', did Lenin move on to consider the organisational entailments of actually fulfilling the 'vanguard role'. Even here his method was more negative than prescriptive. His ideas on organisation were broached only after demonstrating the deficiencies in the organisational notions of his opponents. Their incorrect ideas on organisation were seen as a function and necessary reflection of their restricted view of the tasks confronting the Party. At the very beginning of Chapter IV, in controversy with *Rabochee Delo*, Lenin emphatically stated the interconnection of the two elements.

*The 'economic struggle against the employers and the government' does not at all require an All-Russian centralised organisation, and hence this struggle can never give rise to such an organisation as will combine, in one general assault, all the manifestations of political opposition, protest, and indignation, an organisation that will consist of professional revolutionaries and be led by the real political leaders of the entire people. This stands to reason. The character of any organisation is naturally and inevitably determined by the content of its activity.*²⁰³

²⁰² Lenin later pointed to the irony of Martov's supporters utilizing 'What is To Be Done?' precisely in order to justify their formulation of the contentious Article 1 of the Party Rules which defined a Party member (See CW, 7, 27J).

²⁰³ CW, 5, 440.

The question which now needed to be settled was, given Lenin's description of the 'content of activity' appropriate to the Party, what was the nature of the determination this exercised upon the organisational precepts it should have embraced? How, in other words, did the tasks set dictate the Party's organisation?

The Party's primary and immediate task, according to all the orthodox, was to assume the leading role in the democratic revolution. They were equally agreed that it must therefore be an all-Russian task, in the sense that the Party must recognise its obligations to represent all classes, all groups, all regions hostile to the autocracy and to co-ordinate all manifestations of discontent. As Lenin put it in *What Is To Be Done?*:

*We must take upon ourselves the task of organising an all round political struggle under the leadership of our Party in such a manner as to make it possible for all oppositional strata to render their fullest support to the struggle and to our Party.*²⁰⁴

To articulate and to co-ordinate all these elements of discontent the Party had to have an all-Russian newspaper. The creation of this newspaper was, however, as we have seen, beyond the capabilities of scattered Social-Democratic groups.²⁰⁵ Their resources must therefore be pooled and utilised to prevent duplication of effort. A centralised allocation of the scarce resources available to the Party was, in Lenin's view, virtually entailed in the full elaboration of party tasks.

The main justificatory argument Lenin leaned upon in *What Is To Be Done?* for the kind of organisation he proposed, was that the winning of mass support for the struggle against the autocracy had to be achieved in conditions of utmost danger and illegality. Part of his argument was that while many groups and individuals might be hostile to the autocracy, they were understandably loath to expose themselves to the severe penalties attaching to organising opposition activity. These reservations became hardened almost into abstention from the struggle whenever attempts to organise were seen to founder through lack of preparation, expertise, secrecy or co-ordination on the part of Social-Democratic groups. There was evidence, already, according to Lenin, that sections of the advanced workers were becoming alienated from the Party because they considered that their heroic actions had issued in disaster because of such organisational amateurism.

*Things had indeed reached such a pass that in several places the workers, because of our lack of self-restraint and the ability to maintain secrecy, begin to lose faith in the intellectuals and to avoid them; the intellectuals, they say, are much too careless and cause police raids!*²⁰⁶

There was a huge credibility gap, in Lenin's opinion, between the pretensions of the Party to lead the onslaught against autocracy, and the seriousness with which it trained and organised its forces to perform this role. Until the gap was closed, until the Social Democrats could minimise the risks entailed in political opposition – for all sections of the opposition movement – they could not hope to gain the necessary mass support. Lenin's point was that there must be gradations of skill, expertise and conspiratorial training appropriate to the levels of risk involved in each facet of oppositional activity. At each level the degree of risk could be minimised by introducing specialisation of function, so that, at no matter what level, activists would have the opportunity to become expert and efficient in dealing with their particular and restricted aspect of the work. At the lower levels this division of labour would serve a number of functions. It would increase efficiency through specialisation. It would make the task of the police more difficult since each activist, even if he volunteered evidence, would only be in a position to expose a relatively small area of activity. It would prompt more people to come forward and be active since they would realise the difficulties the authorities would have in making a case out against them for the 'minor' roles they played.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 428.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 484.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 443.

At the higher level, the domain of co-ordinating the activities of a multiplicity of groups, maintaining and establishing contacts, re-establishing groups after arrests, seeing to the nation-wide distribution of the newspaper and maintaining contact with the emigre centre, far more developed skills and expertise were called for. Here, according to Lenin, nothing but professionals would do. Cadres would have to be trained who were conversant with the wiles of the political police who would, obviously, concentrate their main attention on the big fish, the co-ordinators and planners: 'The struggle against the *political* police requires special qualities; it requires *professional* revolutionaries.'²⁰⁷ These cadres must be skilled in conspiratorial technique, skilled that is, in minimising the risks to themselves (through proper use of codes, avoiding surveillance, arranging contacts, etc.) and, more importantly, skilled in minimising the risks run by the groups they served. The professionals were never conceived by Lenin as an end in themselves, as a self-sufficient revolutionary force. On the contrary, their justification was that they alone had the requisite skills and knowledge to co-ordinate and guide the mass of semi-legal and illegal oppositional groupings scattered throughout Russia. The whole *raison d'être* of the corps of professional revolutionaries was to serve as a medium of communication and as an inspiring force to the growing mass movement of political discontent. It was the workers, the 'average people of the masses', who, in Lenin's estimation, 'are capable (in fact, are alone capable) of *determining* the outcome of the movement.'²⁰⁸ The revolutionaries were not to 'usurp' the functions allotted by history to the mass; on the contrary, Lenin was insistent that the emergence of mass political unrest was the *occasion for* and *object of* his organisational plan.

*The active and widespread participation of the masses will not suffer; on the contrary, it will benefit by the fact that a 'dozen' experienced revolutionaries, trained professionally no less than the police, will centralise all the secret aspects of the work – the drawing up of leaflets, the working out of approximate plans, and the appointing of bodies of leaders for each urban district, for each factory district, and for each educational institution, etc... Centralisation of the most secret functions in an organisation of revolutionaries will not diminish, but rather increase the extent and enhance the quality of the activity of a large number of other organisations, that are intended for a broad public and are therefore as loose and as non-secret as possible, such as workers' trade unions; workers' self-education circles and circles for reading illegal literature; and socialist, as well as democratic, circles among all other sections of the population; etc., etc. We must have such circles, trade unions and organisations everywhere in as large a number as possible and with the widest variety of functions; but it would be absurd and harmful to confound them with the organisation of revolutionaries, to efface the border-line between them, to make still more hazy the all too faint recognition that in order to 'serve' the mass movement we must have people who will devote themselves exclusively to Social-Democratic activities, and such people must train themselves patiently and steadfastly to be professional revolutionaries.*²⁰⁹

The professional revolutionaries were, in Lenin's view, necessary if the Party was to fulfil its vanguard role *in Russian conditions*. How else except secretly and conspiratorially were groups which were themselves illegal and semi-legal to be organised in Russian conditions? The primary oppositional groupings must, however, if the objective of leading the masses was to be attained, be as broad and open and non-secret as was possible within the narrow constraints of autocracy.

*The workers' organisation must in the first place be a trade union organisation; secondly, it must be as broad as possible; and thirdly, it must be as public as conditions will allow (here, and further on, of course, I refer only to absolutist Russia). On the other hand, the organisation of the revolutionaries must consist first and foremost of people who make revolutionary activity their profession...*²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 450.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 450.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 465-6.

²¹⁰ Ibid., p. 452.

At the primary level, then, the organisations must be diffuse, as broadly based as possible, loose in organisational structure to make them more difficult for the police to crack. Preferably they should be legalised, thus freeing the revolutionaries for other work.²¹¹ In Russian conditions it would, Lenin argued, be suicidal to make a fetish of the organisational mode of procedure current in other Social-Democratic parties and the West European labour movement. 'Only an incorrigible utopian would have a *broad* organisation of workers, with elections, reports, universal suffrage, etc., under the autocracy.'²¹² The very conditions for operating democratic principles within the party likewise did not exist. For inner-party democracy to be meaningful there must, Lenin said, be 'first, full publicity, and secondly election to all offices.'²¹³ To advance the slogan of a democratic party, while simultaneously being obliged to recognise the impossibility of establishing the preconditions for it, amounted, in Lenin's view, to deceit. It made 'broad democracy' into 'nothing more than a *useless and harmful toy*'²¹⁴ – a demagogic device utilised by the worker-philes. It was a recipe for exposing the movement to the depredations of the police. A democratic structure might be appropriate in Germany,²¹⁵ Lenin argued, but even there the leadership rejected the sort of primitive democracy insisted upon by some Russians, and preserved the prerogatives of the professionals.²¹⁶

From these arguments, Lenin concluded that in Russia 'the only serious organisational principle for the active workers of our movement should be the strictest secrecy, the strictest selection of members, and the training of professional revolutionaries'.²¹⁷ Only in this way, given the conditions of illegality in which they worked, could the Social Democrats hope to co-ordinate, provide stability and a cohesive national plan for all opposition groups – for what we would now term the front organisations. But, and on this Lenin was clear, it was the mass movement and only the mass movement which would eventually decide the outcome. The *raison d'être* of the professional was, as we have seen, to expand and organise the mass of political opposition – not to displace it but to enhance it and give it coherence. This was Lenin's justification for his conception of the nature of the Party at this juncture. It stemmed directly from his understanding of what was involved in Social Democratic hegemony over the democratic revolution in the conditions of tsarist autocracy.

That Lenin laid claim to being a spokesman for the old orthodoxy in all his writings up to and including *What Is To Be Done?* should not surprise us. Certainly none of his contemporaries disputed his claim, and it was one which was insistently made in virtually all his writings during this period. Constantly he held up Plekhanov's writings as the guide for Russian Marxists and lambasted the temerity of youngsters presuming to improve upon Plekhanov.²¹⁸ The texts of ortho-

²¹¹ Ibid., p. 455; cf. CW, 4, 224-5.

²¹² CW, 5, 459.

²¹³ Ibid., p. 477.

²¹⁴ Ibid., p. 479.

²¹⁵ Ibid., p. 478.

²¹⁶ Ibid., p. 481.

²¹⁷ Ibid., p. 480; cf. p. 459 and CW, 4, 324.

²¹⁸ See, for example, CW, 5, 446. Furcher approving references to Plekhanov's writings can be found throughout CW, 4 and 5.

doxy, Akselrod's *Present Tasks and Tactics*,²¹⁹ the *Minsk Manifesto*,²²⁰ the *1885 Draft Programme*²²¹ of the Emancipation of Labour Group, were all pointedly utilised to show how the political line of the veterans (and, evidently of Lenin) has always been correct, and to show how the Economists had strayed from the foundation theses of Russian Marxism.

We must conclude that Lenin's views of the Party as presented in his writings from 1899 to 1902 are not to be regarded as extraordinary, innovative, perverse, essentially Jacobin or unorthodox. On the contrary, they had long been canvassed in *Iskra* and accepted by Lenin's co-editors who were the only ones who could reasonably be described as having a claim to expressing the orthodoxy of Russian Marxism. Recondite references to Nechaev or playing Tkachev's phrases off against Lenin's, the whole industry of delving into the history of Russian Jacobinism to discover 'the origins of Bolshevism', are all alike misconceived and to no effect unless they can be established as central to the context in which Lenin and his co-editors were working. Lenin's pamphlet was read and discussed by them all; there is no evidence of any significant contemporary disagreement within the *Iskra* camp on his main themes. 'Plekhanov and Akselrod merely made minor suggestions in the draft which Lenin adopted.'²²²

It is equally certain that, in the intrigues which preceded the convocation of the Second Party Congress, it was precisely *What Is To Be Done?*, which was used as the touchstone of orthodoxy in nominating, selecting or electing delegates. Adherence to it was seen as a measure of adherence to *Iskra* policies. According to Lepeshinskii, *Iskra* prevailed in Moscow and in other centres of the revolutionary movement only because the *Iskra* agitators had in their hands *Chто Delat?* [i.e., *What Is To Be Done?*?]²²³ Even Valentinov, one of the main contributors to the Lenin-as-Jacobin interpretation, conceded that at the time of its publication, *What Is To Be Done?* was regarded as quite unexceptional in its political line and was enthusiastically welcomed as a resume of the *Iskra* position. 'We took *What Is To Be Done?* as a catechism and we welcomed it for the lead it gave us in practical and organisational matters.'²²⁴ On the basis of the available evidence it is difficult to deny the accuracy of the summary Lenin made some five years after his pamphlet had been published:

What Is To Be Done? is a summary of Iskra tactics and Iskra organisational policy in 1901 and 1902. Precisely a 'summary,' no more and no less.²²⁵ It is, of course, generally contended that What Is To Be Done?, far from representing the orthodoxy of Russian Marxism is, rather, a most un-Marxian work and its implications are fully in tune with a premature – by Marxist standards – advocacy of proletarian revolution.²²⁶

The insuperable problem for this line of interpretation is that what are alleged to be the most significant and outrageous revisions ever to be introduced into Marxism went unnoticed and uncontested by Plekhanov and Akselrod. Akselrod's biographer, who retains the axiomatic character of Lenin's Jacobinism as a dramatic foil for Akselrod's more 'Western' and optimistic Social Democracy, concedes that his failure to oppose Lenin's ideas is indeed a very considerable puzzle.

²¹⁹ See, for example, CW, 4, 178-9, 267; CW, 5, 388, 433.

²²⁰ CW, 4, 180-1, 323, 366.

²²¹ Ibid., p. 231-2.

²²² L. Schapiro, *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (London, 1963) p. 39.

²²³ Cited in Wildman, p. 235.

²²⁴ N. Valentinov (Volsky), *Encounters with Lenin* (London, 1968) p. 27.

²²⁵ CW, 13, 102.

²²⁶ J. C. Rees, 'Lenin and Marxism' in *Lenin the Man, the Theorist, the Leader*, ed. P. Reddaway and L. S. Schapiro (London, 1970) p. 102 n.

*One of the most puzzling aspects of this period in the history of Russian Social Democracy is the failure of the older Marxists publicly to voice serious criticisms of Lenin's ideas on the organisation of the party, which he had first developed in 1900 but elaborated most extensively in 1902 in *What Is To Be Done?*²²⁷*

He admits that: 'When all the bits of evidence indicating that Akselrod objected to *What Is To Be Done?* are pieced together, they still amount to a meek protest.'²²⁸ Unfortunately we are not told when even *these* shreds amounting cumulatively to a 'meek protest' were made, or of what they consisted.

We are asked to believe that on such fundamental issues as Lenin's alleged 'commitment to permanent tutelage of the proletariat by the intelligentsia,' his 'lack of faith in the capacity of the proletariat as a class ever to attain that degree of consciousness necessary for it to take a decisive part in the coming revolutionary events without outside leadership' – on such fundamental issues as these Akselrod and Plekhanov held their peace. Had they ever before tolerated such theoretical enormities to pass uncontested? Were they ever to do so again? The actions were not in keeping with the men. On earlier and on subsequent occasions they used the full weight of their dialectical and polemical skills in ruthless critiques of far more trivial deviations. We are asked to believe too much. Such an explanation is none at all; it is a total mystery. The only way to dispel the mystery is to accept *What Is To Be Done?* for what it represented at the time – a restatement of the principles of Russian Marxist orthodoxy.

The Bolshevik / Menshevik Dispute

During the years 1899 to 1903 Lenin, as we have seen, concentrated all his attention on the internal crisis confronting the Party and the Russian labour movement. In common with the other editors of *Iskra* he firmly believed that the Second Congress of the Party to be summoned in 1903 under their aegis would at last put to rout the heretics of various hues and firmly implant the principles of orthodoxy and its veteran exponents in their deserved places at the leadership of the movement.

For much of the Congress things proceeded according to plan. The Economists' objections to Lenin's organisational plan were, despite the cogent pleadings of Martynov and Akimov, rejected out of hand by the *Iskra* caucus.²²⁹ The same fate befell the claims of the *Bund* to be admitted into the Party as an autonomous unit with full jurisdiction over the Jewish labour movement. In Lenin's view the application of the principle of autonomy within a federal Party, which the *Bund* desired, would not only harm the unity of the Social-Democratic Party in Russia it was also harmful to the Jewish cause since 'it sanctions segregation and alienation, elevates them to a principle, to a law.'²³⁰ The Iskrists were again unanimous in opposing any dilution of the Party's centralism by the federalist concessions which the *Bund*'s claim entailed.

It was not until the debate on the Party Statutes that the unanimity of the *Iskra* caucus was abruptly and unexpectedly shattered. There had already been some heated discussions in the *Iskra* closed sessions with regard to the composition of the Praesidium of the Congress. Martov wanted a body of nine which would include representatives of the *Bund* and the journal *Rabochee Delo*. Lenin and Plekhanov however persuaded the majority of the Iskrists to opt for a smaller exclusively

²²⁷ Ascher, Axelrod, p. 176.

²²⁸ Ibid., pp. 179-80.

²²⁹ Akimov's account of the Second Congress is to be found in Vladimir Akimov on the Dilemmas of Russian Marxism 1895-1903, edited and introduced by Jonathan Frankel (Cambridge, 1969). Frankel's lengthy introduction is one of the most sophisticated accounts of the development of Russian Marxism during this period.

²³⁰ CW, 6, 486.

Iskrist Praesidium of three. In a way the controversy which now erupted reflected a similar controversy; the crucial difference was that it took place not behind locked doors in the *Iskra* caucus meetings, but in heated exchanges on the conference floor.

Lenin and Martov proposed differing drafts of Article I of the Party's Rules, the object of which was to define the qualifications for Party membership. According to Lenin's formulation a party member was one 'who recognises the Party's programme and supports it by material means and by personal participation in one of the Party's organisations.' According to Martov a member 'recognises the Party's programme and supports it by material means and by regular personal assistance under the direction of one of the party organisations'. The difference between these drafts may perhaps seem as insignificant to the contemporary reader as it did to many rather bemused delegates to the Congress, but out of such mole-hills, politics, particularly revolutionary politics, has a talent for creating great mountains. There was perhaps a difference between 'personal participation in one of the party's organisations' and 'regular personal assistance under the direction of one of the party's organisations' and a great deal of ink has been spilt on elaborating it, yet it must have struck many of the delegates as an extremely fine one. What sort of candidate for membership would be excluded by the first formulation yet accommodated by the second? How in actual practice would committees of the Party be able to decide that a man was rendering 'regular personal assistance under the direction of a party organisation' and yet was not 'personally participating' in it?

Lenin himself, at the Second Congress, maintained that his formulation...narrows this concept [of a party member], while Martov's expands it, for (to use Martov's own correct expression) what distinguishes his concept is its 'elasticity.' And in the period of Party life that we are now passing through it is just this 'elasticity' that undoubtedly opens the door to all element of confusion, vacillation, and opportunism.²³¹

There can be no doubt that Lenin believed that this was the essence of the matter; all his subsequent moves at the Congress confirm that he did feel that this was an issue of considerable importance. And yet, simply examining the wording of the rival drafts one is hard put to it to understand how Lenin could put so decisive a construction upon the dispute. A good case could indeed be made out for the argument that, of the two formulations, Martov's was the more exclusive in that its specifications might be regarded as more demanding. 'Regular assistance' which is, moreover, expressly 'under the direction of one of the Party's organisations' seems to entail at least as much commitment and activism as 'personal participation in' a Party organisation. We should, in any case, be clear that neither specification had in mind the sort of broad open Social-Democratic Party of the West where the only condition of Party membership amounted to the token payment of dues.

In the event the delegates voted twenty-eight to twenty-two for Martov's revision to the *Iskra* draft which Lenin and Plekhanov defended. It was, as Lenin was later to put it, no great disaster for the Party – certainly not a matter of life and death. Even at the Second Congress he declared that 'we shall certainly not perish because of an unfortunate clause in the Rules.'²³² None the less Lenin, Plekhanov and the majority of the Iskrists who had endorsed Lenin's Article I against Martov's (Akselrod and Zasulich had, significantly, voted for Martov's) were now doubly determined that this abrupt display of 'softness' be checked. Lenin carefully laid his plans to ensure that the 'widening' of the Party base be compensated by a 'narrowing' of the leading bodies of the Party – the Central Committee and the editorial board of the Party organ (which was, of course, to be *Iskra*).

²³¹ Ibid., p. 502.

²³² Ibid., p. 501.

The 'hard' Iskrists were by this time assured of a majority on the floor of the Congress since the *Bund* representatives as well as the two *Rabochee Delo* men had voted with their feet and departed in umbrage at earlier decisions. At this point the supporters of Lenin and Plekhanov became the majority, the *bolsheviki*, and they used their new-found strength to implement Lenin's two-trio plan – a three-man editorial board of *Iskra* to be complemented by a three-man Central Committee. This and not the squabble over Article I of the Rules proved to be the great divide.

Issues of wounded pride immediately became inseparable from issues of principle and this was inevitable in a situation where some of the legendary heroes of the movement were being asked to withdraw from the limelight and accept a more humble role. Potresov, Zasulich and Akselrod were wounded to the quick, for Lenin's plan meant their effective demise as leaders of the movement – they were to be retired as editors of *Iskra* and their whole lives were suddenly robbed of meaning. Martov sprang to their defence (though, according to Lenin, he had earlier approved the plan²³³), reviling both Plekhanov and Lenin for their heartlessness and refusing outright to accept the place alongside them on the editorial board which the Congress had allotted him.

If the reactions of Akselrod, Potresov, Zasulich and Martov were quite understandable, so too were Lenin's motives. His proposal did no more than bring into the open in a formal and frank way the situation which had *de facto* prevailed on *Iskra* for some time. As journalists Akselrod, and Zasulich particularly, were disastrous. Their productivity was dismal and their reliability to produce material on time equally so. They had, moreover, no knowledge whatever of the practical movement in Russia and were quite incompetent as organisers. There can be no question that, in terms of proven ability to produce good material inside the deadlines that a regular newspaper necessarily demanded, Lenin's proposed editorial board stood to lose very little from the exclusion of Zasulich, Akselrod and Potresov but stood to gain a great deal in terms of expediting the paper's production with just the three most active editors at the helm.

In his *Account of the Second Congress of the RSDLP*, written shortly after it adjourned, Lenin outlined some of his reasons for insisting on a trio – with powers, if necessary, to co-opt additional members.

*The old board of six was so ineffectual that never once in all its three years did it meet in full force. That may seem incredible, but it is a fact. Not one of the forty-five issues of *Iskra* was made up (in the editorial and technical sense) by anyone but Martov or Lenin. And never once was any major theoretical issue raised by anyone but Plekhanov. Akselrod did no work at all (he contributed literally nothing to *Zarya* and only three of four articles to all the forty-five issues of *Iskra*). Zasulich and Starover [Potresov] only contributed and advised; they never did any actual editorial work.*²³⁴

The best composition of the editorial board was, Lenin rather naively felt, 'as clear as daylight' to everyone at the Congress – it could only be Plekhanov, Lenin and Martov. To suggest as many have done, that this proposal was further evidence of Lenin's desire to impose his personal dictatorship upon the Party is to betray volumes of ignorance on the characters of his proposed fellow-editors. Plekhanov was an imperious prima donna who had always insisted on his own star-billing and his absolute right to criticise everyone around him. Martov, as the earlier proceedings of the Congress had demonstrated, had a mind of his own and was far from being a pliant tool of Lenin. Lenin's naivety, and his evident surprise at the uproar which greeted his proposal, stemmed from his inability to appreciate that many of the delegates found it impossible to view the matter in his cold rational way – what was best for the Party was demonstrated 'as clear as daylight' by past experience of a board of six and the actual performance of the old editors, and there was an end to it.

²³³ Whether or not Martov had approved the plan, or whether Lenin was lying in asserting that he had, itself became a major issue in the split and was taken up in the bitter debates at the Conference of The Foreign League of Russian Social Democracy in October 1903. See CW, 7, 84-90.

²³⁴ Ibid., p. 31.

What Lenin failed to take into account was the immense emotional and psychological hurt that this entailed for Akselrod and Zasulich in particular. Earlier, in the debate over Article I, Plekhanov had openly ridiculed Akselrod's objections to Lenin's formulations, pouring public scorn on the man who had, for so long, been his friend and who had been so utterly dependent upon him. Now the final blow was to deprive him of that one mark of prestige which might have given him sorely-needed esteem in the eyes of the movement and recognition of a life-time devoted to it. Much the same would have applied to Zasulich and Potresov and many more felt the awful embarrassment of having to tell them that they were almost superfluous to the Party's needs. Martov rallied to their defence, as they had earlier supported him, and categorically refused to serve on the editorial board which was, none the less, ratified by the majority.

The party had no sooner been re-established than it split. In the aftermath of the Congress the bitterest enemies of a few months previously suddenly found common purpose. Menshevik Iskrists rapidly forgot the great divide which separated them from the Economists and joined forces against the 'state of seige' which Lenin and Plekhanov were enforcing on the Party. The victory of the Bolsheviks proved short-lived. The Foreign League of Russian Social Democracy at its conference in October 1903 saw the first rallying of the varied Menshevik camp which secured a small majority to condemn many of the decisions of the second Congress and the 'bureaucratic centralism' from which the Party suffered. In the following month Lenin suffered an even more severe setback. Plekhanov insisted on restoring the old editorial board of *Iskra* in spite of the decision of the Congress. Lenin resigned, the Mensheviks appeared to have secured the only objective which united them, the arch-villain had been ousted. He had, however, clearly emerged as the single most important leader of the Russian movement and the Mensheviks had, paradoxically, assisted his rise to pre-eminence by concentrating all their fire upon him.

By constantly attacking Lenin as would-be dictator as well as crude, tactless, ruthless and intolerant, the Mensheviks augmented his importance. No Russian Social Democrat could doubt any longer that he was a figure to be reckoned with. The concentration on personal vilification

further played into Lenin's hands by seeming to confirm his insistence that the Mensheviks were motivated not by principle but wounded feelings,

hurt pride and private resentments.²³⁵

It happens to suit both left and right to read back the subsequent divide between Social Democracy and Communism to its 'roots' at the Second Congress of the RSDLP, where, it is made to appear, two starkly contrasted sets of principles were first fully exposed. On the one hand was the Menshevik, open, democratic, Western-style party, placing its trust in the spontaneous socialist strivings of the working class; on the other, Lenin's vision of a strictly disciplined party of the 'new type' in which the professional revolutionaries were to play the role of the working class in history. The great confrontation of pluralism versus totalitarianism is seen at its inception and with such great causes on the march it is hardly surprising that much of the historical evidence gets trampled.

There is, for instance, the evidence of Akselrod himself who had, in all conscience, reason enough to feel piqued and humiliated at Lenin's actions and was well enough versed in theory to find the slightest chink in his defences. And yet when attempting to explain the dispute to Kautsky he was obliged to confess that the issue was not one of principle but of personality.

As late as May 1904 Akselrod wrote that there were 'still no clear, defined differences concerning either principles or tactics,' that the organisational question itself 'is or at least was' not one of principle such as 'centralism, or democracy, autonomy, etc.,' but rather one of differing opinions as to the 'application or execution of

²³⁵ Ascher, Axelrod, pp. 193-4.

*organizational principles...we have all accepted. 'Lenin had used the debate on this question 'in a demagogic manner' to 'fasten' Plekhanov to his side and thus win a majority 'against us'.*²³⁶

Kautsky's response was that since the controversy was one of political expediency rather than one of principle, the adoption of Lenin's organisational plan would cause far less harm than continuing dissension, particularly since, as he understood it (Akselrod being his main informant), 'the Bolsheviks did not explicitly repudiate any of the central tenets of orthodoxy.'²³⁷

Curiously enough the Mensheviks themselves appear to have accepted Kautsky's conclusion that the organisational question was entirely peripheral to the dispute. In late 1905 sitting in conference they formally rejected Martov's version of Article I and accepted Lenin's.²³⁸ Subsequently, at the Fourth (or Unity) Congress of the R.S.D.L.P., which they dominated, Lenin's formulation was adopted unanimously.²³⁹

Paradoxically, as we shall see, by this time Lenin was insisting upon a far more open party organised from top to bottom on the elective principle, which conditions of political freedom now, for the first time, made possible. He remarked ironically that *none* of the prominent Mensheviks in late 1905 or early 1906, when conditions of political life were freer than they had ever been, chose to do away with the underground or relax the centralised structure of the Party.

There is, finally, no evidence that after 1903 the Mensheviks did in actual practice make the local committees they controlled any more 'democratic,' 'open' or 'proletarian' in composition than those of their Bolshevik opponents. Indeed, the one thorough study we have of the organisational structure and social composition of the two factions concludes that:

*The Menshevik elite was, on average, forty-five years old – fifteen years older than the local leaders, whereas the top Bolsheviks, whose average age was thirty-four, were only seven years older. Unlike the Menshevik organisational structure, the Bolshevik was more open. The young Bolsheviks were able to advance rapidly to positions of authority – which may help to explain the faction's more radical activity.*²⁴⁰

We must conclude that the 'organisational question' has been given a position of unwarranted importance as the occasion for the Bolshevik/Menshevik dispute which much of the evidence will not support. It was not until 1905 and especially 1906 that clear differences between the factions, in political strategy and understanding of the objectives of the democratic revolution, first became apparent.

²³⁶ Ibid., p. 208.

²³⁷ Ibid., p. 213.

²³⁸ Schapiro, p. 72.

²³⁹ CW, 10, 372. See Resolutions and Discussions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, ed. R. C. Elwood, 2 vols (Toronto, 1974) vol. I, pp. 93-4.

²⁴⁰ D. Lane, The Roots of Russian Communism (Assen, 1968) pp. 214-5.

Political Agitation and “The Class Point of View”

by Vladimir Lenin

Let us begin with an illustration.

The reader will remember the sensation that was created by the speech delivered by M. A. Stakhovich, Marshal of the Nobility of Orel Gubernia, at a missionary congress, in the course of which he urged that *freedom of conscience* be recognised by law. The conservative press, led by *Moskovskiye Vedomosti*, is conducting a furious campaign against Mr. Stakhovich. It cannot find names vile enough with which to call him and almost goes so far as to accuse the entire Orel nobility of high treason for having re-elected Mr. Stakhovich as Marshal. Now, this re-election is indeed very significant and to a certain degree it bears the character of a demonstration of the nobility against police tyranny and outrage.

Stakhovich, says *Moskovskiye Vedomosti*, “is not so much Marshal of the Nobility, as the oh, so gay Misha Stakhovich, the life and soul of the party, the clever conversationalist...” (No. 348, 1901). So much the worse for you, gentlemen, defenders of the bludgeon. If even our jovial landlords begin to talk about freedom of conscience, then the infamies of the priests and the police must verily be without number...

“What does our ‘intellectual’, frivolous crowd that instigates and applauds the Stakhoviches care for the affairs of our sacred orthodox faith and our time-honoured attitude towards it?”... Once again, so much the worse for you, gentlemen, champions of the autocracy, the orthodox faith, and the national essence. A fine system indeed our police ridden autocracy must be, if it has permeated even religion with the spirit of the prison-cell, so that the “Stakhoviches” (who have no firm convictions in matters of religion, but who are interested, as we shall see, in preserving a stable religion) become utterly indifferent (if not actually hostile) to this notorious “national” faith.” ... They call our faith a delusion!! They mock at us because, thanks to this ‘delusion’, we fear and try to avoid sin and we carry out our obligations uncomplainingly, no matter how severe they may be; because we find the strength and courage to bear sorrow and privation and forbear pride in times of success and good fortune...” So! The orthodox faith is dear to them because it teaches people to bear misery “uncomplainingly”. What a profitable faith it is indeed for the governing classes! In a society so organised that an insignificant minority enjoys wealth and power, while the masses constantly suffer “privations” and bear “severe obligations”, it is quite natural for the exploiters to sympathise with a religion that teaches people to bear “uncomplainingly” the hell on earth for the sake of an alleged celestial paradise. But in its zeal *Moskovskiye Vedomosti* became too garrulous. So garrulous, in fact, that *unwittingly it spoke the truth*. We read on: "...They do not suspect that if they, the Stakhoviches, eat well, sleep peacefully, and live merrily, it is thanks to this ‘delusion’.”

The sacred truth! This is precisely the case. It is because religious “delusions” are so widespread among the masses that the Stakhoviches and the Oblomovs²⁴¹, and all our capitalists who live by the labour of the masses, and even *Moskovskiye Vedomosti* itself, “sleep peacefully”. And the more education spreads among the people, the more will religious prejudices give way to socialist consciousness, the nearer will be the day of victory for the proletariat — the victory that will emancipate all oppressed classes from the slavery they endure in modern society.

But having blurred out the truth on one point, *Moskovskiye Vedomosti* disposed, far too easily, of another interesting point. It is obviously mistaken in believing that the Stakhoviches “do not realise” the significance of religion, and that they demand liberal forms out of sheer “thoughtlessness”. Such an interpretation of a hostile political trend is too childishly naïve. The fact that in this instance Mr. Stakhovich came forward as advocate of the entire liberal trend was proved best of

²⁴¹ Oblomov — the central character in the novel of that name by I. Goncharov. Oblomov was the personification of routine, stagnation, and inertia.

all by *Moskovskiye Vedomosti* itself; otherwise, what need was there for waging such a campaign against a single speech? What need was there for speaking, not about Stakhovich, but about the Stakhoviches, about the “intellectual crowd”?

Moskovskiye Vedomosti’s error was, of course, deliberate. That paper is more unwilling than it is unable to analyse the liberalism it bates from the class point of view. That it does not desire to do so goes without saying; but its inability to do so interests us very much more, because this is a complaint that even very many revolutionaries and socialists suffer from. Thus, the authors of the letter published in No. 12 of *Iskra*, who accuse us of departing from the “class point of view” for striving in our newspaper to follow all manifestations of liberal discontent and protest, suffer from this complaint, as do also the authors of *Proletarskaya Borba*²⁴² and of several pamphlets in “The Social-Democratic Library”,²⁴³ who imagine that our autocracy represents the absolutist rule of the bourgeoisie; likewise the Martynovs, who seek to persuade us to abandon the many-sided campaign of exposure (i.e., the widest possible political agitation) against the autocracy and to concentrate our efforts mainly upon the struggle for economic reforms (to give something “positive” to the working class, to put forward in its name “concrete demands” for legislative and administrative measures “which promise certain palpable results”); likewise, too, the Nadezhdins, who, on reading the correspondence in our paper on the statistical conflicts, ask in astonishment: “Good Lord, what is this — a *Zemstvo* paper?”

All these socialists forget that the interests of the autocracy coincide only with certain interests of the propertied classes, and only under certain circumstances; frequently it happens that its interests do not coincide with the interests of these classes, as a whole, but only with those of certain of their strata. The interests of other bourgeois strata and the more widely understood interests of the *entire* bourgeoisie, of the development of capitalism as a whole, necessarily give rise to a liberal opposition to the autocracy. For instance, the autocracy guarantees the bourgeoisie opportunities to employ the crudest forms of exploitation, but, on the other hand, places a thousand obstacles in the way of the extensive development of the productive forces and the spread of education; in this way it arouses against itself, not only the petty bourgeoisie, but at times even the big bourgeoisie. The autocracy guarantees (?) the bourgeoisie protection against socialism, but since the people are deprived of rights, this protection is necessarily transformed into a system of police outrages that rouse the indignation of the entire people. What the result of these antagonistic tendencies is, what relative strength of conservative and liberal views, or trends, among the bourgeoisie obtains at the present moment, cannot be learned from a couple of general theses, for this depends on all the special features of the social and political situation at a given moment. To determine this, one must study the situation in detail and carefully watch all the conflicts with the government, no matter by what social stratum they are initiated. It is precisely the “class point of view” that makes it *impermissible* for a Social-Democrat to remain indifferent to the discontent and the protests of the “Stakhoviches”.

The reasoning and activity of the above-mentioned socialists show that they are indifferent to liberalism and thus reveal their incomprehension of the basic theses of the *Communist Manifesto*, the “Gospel” of international Social-Democracy. Let us recall, for instance, the words that the bourgeoisie itself provides material for the political education of the proletariat by its struggle for power, by the conflicts of various strata and groups within it, etc.²⁴⁴ Only in politically free countries has the proletariat easy access to this material (and then only to part of it). In enslaved Russia, however, we Social-Democrats must work hard to obtain this “material” for the working class, i.e., we must *ourselves undertake* the

²⁴² The collection *Proletarskaya Borba* (Proletarian Struggle), No. 1, was published by the Ural Social-Democratic Group in 1899. The authors, who espoused “Economist” views, denied the necessity of establishing an independent working-class political party and believed that a political revolution could be accomplished by means of a general strike, without the preliminary organisation and preparation of the masses and without an armed uprising.

²⁴³ “The Social-Democratic Workers’ Library” — a series of pamphlets published illegally in Vilno and St. Petersburg in 1900-01.

²⁴⁴ See The Manifesto of the Communist Party, Marx and Engels, Selected Works, Vol. I, Moscow, 1959, pp. 21-65.

task of conducting general political agitation, of carrying on a public exposure campaign against the autocracy. This task is particularly imperative in periods of political ferment. We must bear in mind that in one year of intensified political life the proletariat can obtain more revolutionary training than in several years of political calm. For this reason the tendency of the above-mentioned socialists consciously or unconsciously to *restrict* the scope and content of political agitation is particularly harmful.

Let us recall also the words that the Communists support *every* revolutionary movement against the existing system. Those words are often interpreted too narrowly, and are not taken to imply support for the liberal opposition. It must not be forgotten, however, that there are periods when every conflict with the government arising out of progressive social interests, however small, may under certain conditions (*of which our support is one*) flare up into a general conflagration. Suffice it to recall the great social movement which developed in Russia out of the struggle between the students and the government over academic demands,²⁴⁵ or the conflict that arose in France between all the progressive elements and the militarists over a trial in which the verdict had been rendered on the basis of forged evidence.²⁴⁶ Hence, it is our bounden duty to explain to the proletariat every liberal and democratic protest, to widen and support it, with the active participation of the workers, be it a conflict between the Zemstvo and the Ministry of the Interior, between the nobility and the police régime of the Orthodox Church, between statisticians and the bureaucrats, between peasants and the “Zemstvo” officials, between religious sects and the rural police, etc., etc. Those who contemptuously turn up their noses at the slight importance of some of these conflicts, or at the “hopelessness” of the attempts to fan them into a general conflagration, do not realise that all-sided political agitation is a focus in which the vital interests of political education of the proletariat coincide with the vital interests of social development as a whole, of the entire people, that is, of all its democratic elements. It is our direct duty to concern ourselves with every liberal question, to determine our Social-Democratic attitude towards it, to help the proletariat to take an active part in its solution and to accomplish the solution in its own, proletarian way. Those who refrain from concerning themselves in this way (whatever their intentions) in actuality leave the liberals in command, place in their hands the political education of the workers, and concede the hegemony in the political struggle to elements which, in the final analysis, are leaders of bourgeois democracy.

The class character of the Social-Democratic movement must not be expressed in the restriction of our tasks to the direct and immediate needs of the “labour movement pure and simple”. It must be expressed in our leadership of every aspect and every manifestation of the great struggle for liberation that is being waged by the proletariat, the only truly revolutionary class in modern society. Social-Democracy must constantly and unswervingly spread the influence of the labour movement to all spheres of the social and political life of contemporary society. It must lead, not only the economic, but also the political, struggle of the proletariat. It must never for a moment lose sight of our ultimate goal, but always carry on propaganda for the proletarian ideology — the theory of scientific socialism, viz., Marxism — guard it against distortion, and develop it further. We must untiringly combat any and every bourgeois ideology, regardless of the fashionable and striking garb in which it may drape itself. The socialists we have mentioned above depart from the “class” point of view also because, and to the extent that, they remain indifferent to the task of combating the “criticism of Marxism”. Only the blind fail to see that this “criticism” has taken root more rapidly in Russia than in any other country, and has been more

²⁴⁵ The reference is to the general strike of students organised in the winter of 1901-02. Some 30,000 students took part in the strike.

²⁴⁶ Lenin refers to the case of Dreyfus, a French General Staff officer, a Jew, who, in 1894, was court-martialled and sentenced to life imprisonment on an obviously trumped-up charge of espionage and high treason. That provocative trial was organised by French reactionary circles. The general movement for the defence of Dreyfus that developed in France exposed the corruption of the court and sharpened the struggle between republicans and royalists. In 1899 Dreyfus was pardoned and released. It was not until 1906, after a fresh examination of the case, that Dreyfus was rehabilitated.

enthusiastically taken up by Russian liberal propaganda than by any other, precisely for the reason that it is one of the elements of the bourgeois (now consciously bourgeois) democracy now in formation in Russia.

It is particularly in regard to the political struggle that the “class point of view” demands that the proletariat *give an impetus* to every democratic movement. The political demands of working-class democracy do not differ in principle from those of bourgeois democracy, they differ only in degree. In the struggle for economic emancipation, for the socialist revolution, the proletariat stands on a basis different in principle and it stands alone (the small producer will come to its aid only to the extent that he enters, or is preparing to enter, its ranks). In the struggle for political liberation, however, we have many allies, towards whom we must not remain indifferent. But while our allies in the bourgeois-democratic camp, in struggling for liberal reforms, will always glance back and seek to adjust matters so that they will be able, as before, “to eat well, sleep peacefully, and live merrily” at other people’s expense, the proletariat will march forward to the end, without looking back. While the confreres of R. N. S. (author of the preface to Witte’s Memorandum) haggle with the government over the rights of the authoritative Zemstvo, or over a constitution, we will struggle for the democratic republic. We will not forget, however, that if we want to push someone forward, we must continuously keep our hands on that someone’s shoulders. The party of the proletariat must learn to catch every liberal just at the moment when he is prepared to move forward an inch, and make him move forward a yard. If he is obdurate, we will go forward without him and over him.

Supplemental Readings

Section II: Economism and High Politics

The Urgent Tasks of Our Movement - V.I. Lenin (short)

In this text - in many ways, a miniature 'What is to be Done?' penned one year prior - Lenin lays out the orthodox social democratic merger formula and applies it to the specific conditions of Russia.

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1900/nov/tasks.htm>

The Tasks of the Russian Social Democrats - V.I. Lenin (short)

Just before writing 'What is to be Done?' Lenin described the growth of social democracy in Russia and demanded clarity regarding the party's political program, methods, and tactics. The RSDLP must lead the struggle for socialism (the destruction of capitalism) and democracy (the overthrow of Tsarist despotism and the creation of the democratic republic).

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1897/dec/31b.htm>

Lenin's Political Thought - Neil Harding (long)

The complete text of Harding's two major works, along with works by Hal Draper, led the way in dispelling the various Lenin myths drawn from 'What is to be Done?'

<https://redyouthnwa.files.wordpress.com/2018/05/lenins-political-thought-harding.pdf>

Section III

The Classical Marxist Minimum-Maximum Program

Section III: The Classical Marxist Minimum-Maximum Program

Summary

This section begins with Mike Macnair's reflections on the Erfurt program, which was adopted by the Social Democratic Party of Germany in 1891. The document marks an important moment because this was the first time a mass social democratic party came into existence formed around a program of minimum and maximum sections, rather than around the ideas of an individual, manifesto or charter. In the Erfurt program (and with many successive programs covered in this section), the minimum program amounts to the immediate aims a social democratic party will pursue once they come to power, while the maximum goals lay out the necessity of communism.

Macnair traces the history of this document, beginning with Chartism in England. The Chartists are generally thought of as one of the first class-conscious working-class formations. Marx and Engels brought two major ideas from the Chartists and their People's Charter of 1838 into scientific socialism. First: "the working class needs to be organized for political power in the form of radical democracy." Second, the "worker's movement" must be "founded on a short statement of principles". Marx and Engels integrated these two ideas into *The Communist Manifesto* alongside the importance of internationalism, polemics against feudal and bourgeois socialists, and their dialectical understanding of history. Unfortunately, state repression following the revolutions of 1848 quashed the hopes of the Chartists, the newly self-identified working class in other European nations was thrown to the winds, and Marx and Engels went back into exile.

Eventually, The International Working Men's Association (otherwise known as the First International) was founded in 1864 for a very different exigency: practical solidarity between British workers, the North in the American Civil War, and the Polish national movement. The First International similarly fell apart due to witch-hunting after The Paris Commune in 1871, the perceived effectiveness of bourgeois reformism in England in the 1870s, and the well-known split between Marx and the Bakuninists. However, as the First International crumbled, the Social Democratic Party of Germany was taking shape through the merger of two strains of German social democracy.

Ferdinand Lasalle formed the General Association of German Workers (ADAV) in 1863 around Lasalle's charismatic leadership and ideals. The group made only two demands: universal suffrage and producer cooperatives. They also operated under what Lasalleans called "democratic centralism": congress elected a single political and trade union leader with dictatorial powers.

The Eisenach party began as Wilhelm Liebknecht's internal opposition to the ADAV and then later within a Saxon liberal party, which won over August Bebel. This ultimately became the Social Democratic Workers Party, which was internally democratic and had a clear party platform (The Eisenach Platform) with six general principles and ten demands. The two organizations ultimately merged in 1875 under the Gotha program based on Liebknecht and Bebel's principled stance against war credits for the Prussian military during the Franco-Prussian War and increasing ADAV frustration with the dictatorial powers of their singular leader.

While the Gotha program was critiqued by both Marx and Bakunin, Macnair draws our attention to an important point about the "snowball effect" of unification: despite political differences, the working class can only take on necessary mass actions (such as strikes, forming trade unions, etc.) when they are unified. The SPD was relatively small at its inception point (less than twenty thousand people) but just a few years later they were hundreds of thousands strong.

The Parti Ouvrier or French Workers Party crafted a similar program to Gotha in 1880, which moved this idea further and was drafted by Marx himself. It contains a preamble, political section, and economic section, rather than revolving around principles and political demands as the Gotha program does. After the French Workers Party platform, the Erfurt

program offers us the first true glimpse into a minimum-maximum program, which was written after the SPD was legalized in Germany. Despite appreciating this progression, Engels remained critical of the program's failure to confront the absolutist constitution of Imperial Germany. In a later reading in this section, he writes: "If one thing is certain it is that our party and the working class can only come to power under the form of a democratic republic. This is even the specific form for the dictatorship of the proletariat, as the Great French Revolution has already shown".

After the Erfurt program, many other social democratic parties followed suit and created minimum-maximum programs as they formed. The party platforms of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP) and the Socialist Party of America (SPA) can be found at the end of this section. It's notable that the RSDLP spilled much ink over the importance of a democratic republic and constitution to our goals as socialists, while the SPA focused on political demands such as abolishing the Senate, the Supreme Court and calling for a constitutional convention. The U.S. was a plutocracy, not a democracy, and the country's rulers had never been "restrained" or "threatened by any Republican or Democratic executive". Unimpeded legislative authority belonged in the hands of the people. The state needed to be subject to the will of the majority. Then, and only then, could the working class realize a cooperative commonwealth.

Study Questions

*Independent Study questions are italicized

1. What is the background of socialists building a party around a program of the Erfurt type? What is the advantage?
2. *How can we define the minimum/maximum program?*
3. *Why does the unification of socialists on a principled basis create a new dynamic leading to a snowball effect?*
4. In what way did the various political documents - from the (more limited) charter of the Chartists to the Gotha Program and Program of the Parti Ouvrier, to the Erfurt program - represent steps in the development of the minimum/maximun program?
5. Macnair writes that "the working class objectively needs unity..." How can this necessary, principled unity be achieved in the context of DSA? What lessons can we learn from the Erfurt program?
6. What similarities does the Program of the RSDLP share with other programs discussed? Does it constitute a progression, or an adaptation, of the minimum-maximum program?
7. What is the role of the economic and political demands? How do they relate to the general aims?
8. How would you relate the US Socialist Party Platform to the fight for programmatic unity in DSA? What would such a program contribute to socialist politics in the United States?

Programme: Lessons of Erfurt

By Mike Macnair

Was the Second International based on 'parties of the whole class'? Mike Macnair looks at the real history of working class organisation

The Erfurt programme was adopted in 1891 by the Social Democratic Party of Germany. It is famous (or notorious, depending on your point of view) for its division into a maximum part (the ultimate aims) and a minimum part (immediate demands). This article is not about the proximate origins and detail of the Erfurt programme. Rather, it is about parties and programmes in a longer view. What is the background to socialists building a party round a programme of the Erfurt type?

We have to start for this purpose with the origins of political parties in the modern sense. This goes back to the years 1679-83 in England. There was then a crisis of the restored monarchical regime, and an opposition to it which was looking for constitutional government in some sense came into being. Its opponents gave it a name intended as an insult - they called it a 'party,' the 'Whiggamores,' which meant 'Scottish Presbyterian rebels', shortened to 'Whigs.' The Whigs retaliated against their opponents, who called themselves the supporters of the king and church, referring to them as the 'Tory' 'party.' 'Tory' meant 'Irish Catholic rebels.'

So 'Whig' and 'Tory' are both insults in origin. The Whigs were largely suppressed from 1681, and the Tories were in the ascendant until 1687. Then they refused to accept James II's policies of Catholics taking positions in the army and the University of Oxford. These policies sent the Tories into opposition. James II briefly and without much success tried to bring the Whigs on board, but the end was 1688 and the 'Glorious Revolution'. The period between 1688 and 1714 was referred to at the time as the period of the "rage of party": general elections every three years and many more of them contested in the parliamentary seats. From this period, the Whig and Tory parties became more or less established parliamentary and election campaigning groups, and the names ceased to be mere insults.

How were these parties organised? There were parliamentary caucuses. The existence of the parliamentary parties as ideological formations has been disputed, but recent historical work has tended to reaffirm that there really were parliamentary parties that voted together en bloc. There were London party clubs, like the Whig Kit-Cat club and Tory October Club in the early 18th century, or the Tory Carlton Club and Liberal Reform Club in the 19th. And there were local clubs and societies in the parliamentary constituencies. There were vague ideological attachments – to 'liberty' for Whigs, to 'church and king' for Tories – but no definite political platform. This very loose type of party organisation continues to exist in the Democratic and Republican parties in the United States, and the Tory Party still shows some remnant features; but it was gradually superseded with the coming into existence of parties like the SPD, which have organised memberships, conferences and a political platform.

This loose structure was combined with a sense that continued into the 19th century of the underlying illegitimacy of political parties: that it would be better if the 'political classes' (meaning the propertied classes) were all united in a uniform point of view. The idea that 'party' was an insult persisted in political discourse. (There is actually a worthwhile and provocative article by Chris Cutrone, 'Lenin's liberalism,' on the Platypus website,²⁴⁷ where Cutrone argues that the idea of the illegitimacy of political differences persisted into the workers' movement and that Lenin helped legitimise such differences with the split in 1903).

²⁴⁷ <http://platypus1917.org/2011/06/01/lenin%20%99s-liberalism>. Compare also David Adam's reply to Cutrone: <http://platypus1917.org/2011/09/26/lenin-the-liberal>.

From sect to Workers' Party

The workers' movement in the early 19th century was characterised by the dominance of what are widely known as sects. They are called sects because they usually arose as a result of an individual writing a long, theoretical book, attracting a group of adherents. So in England there were Owenites based on Robert Owen's ideas, Paineites based on Thomas Paine's ideas, Spencean communists based on Thomas Spence's ideas, and so on. In France there were Saint-Simonians, Fourierists and from the late 1840s on Proudhonists, and so on.

The new idea of a workers' political movement founded on a short summary statement of principles began in 1838 with Chartism and the six points of the People's Charter: A vote for every man over the age of 21; the secret ballot; no property qualification for members of parliament; payment for MPs (so poor men could serve); constituencies of equal size; annual elections.

Chartism as a movement remained half within the tradition of British political parties like the Whigs and Tories. It consisted of local organisations loosely tied together, but unified by the goals of the Charter.

Engels' *Socialism: utopian and scientific* offers a narrative of a passage from utopian socialism, through Hegel's philosophy of history as human evolution, to historical materialism, grounded in political-economic analysis and class. Karl Kautsky in 1908 rendered this narrative into the idea that Marxism comes from the union of German philosophy, English political economy and French socialism.²⁴⁸ Lenin, in turn, developed this idea of Kautsky's further in his 'The three sources and three component parts of Marxism' in 1913.²⁴⁹

There is an unfortunate gap in both these texts, caused by Kautsky's belief in 1908 that British politics was already in the 1830s-40s dominated by 'compromise' and 'pragmatism'. The fundamental influence of Chartism on Marx's and Engels' political ideas has gone missing. Chartism was already a guiding light for Marx and Engels in 1846, when the 'German Democratic Communists of Brussels' congratulated Feargus O'Connor on his election as a Chartist MP in July 1846.²⁵⁰ Engels wrote, towards the end of chapter 2 of *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*:

... already much earlier certain historical facts had occurred, which led to a decisive change in the conception of history. In 1831, the first working class rising took place in Lyons; between 1838 and 1842, the first national working class movement, that of the English Chartists, reached its height.

And in the 1892 English *Introduction*:

During the reform agitation, the working men constituted the radical wing of the reform party; the act of 1832 having excluded them from the suffrage, they formulated their demands in the People's Charter, and constituted themselves, in opposition to the great bourgeois Anti-Corn Law party, into an independent party, the Chartists, the first working men's party of modern times.

From the Chartists Marx and Engels obtained two ideas which are really fundamental to their politics. One, that the working class needs to be organised for political power in the form of radical democracy. And two, the idea of a workers' movement which is founded on a short statement of principles.

The *Communist manifesto* is a different sort of entity. It conceives the communists as *part* of the organised Chartist movement, not a separate party, a part whose role is expressed in the following statement:

The Communists are distinguished from the other working class parties by this only:

²⁴⁸ 'Les trois sources du Marxisme: l'oeuvre historique de Marx': www.marxists.org/francais/kautsky/works/1908/00/kautsky_190800004.htm.

²⁴⁹ www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1913/mar/x01.htm.

²⁵⁰ www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1846/07/17.htm.

Section III: The Classical Marxist Minimum-Maximum Program

12. In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality.
13. In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole.

This conception means that the *Manifesto* contains a description of the historical context within which the workers' movement appears, and polemic against the various forms of the sect, against 'feudal' and 'bourgeois' socialisms, and so on. Even so, towards the end there is a short general statement of the measures which the working class would need to undertake in power in order transform society.

Another version, containing a political programme derived from the Charter plus the anti-feudal policy of the French revolution, together with social and economic demands, is provided by the 1848 *Demands of the Communist Party in Germany*.²⁵¹ Unlike the *Manifesto*, but like the Charter, the *Demands* is merely a bullet-point list without overarching goals.

In 1848-49 the British state smashed Chartism by repression, as is detailed in John Saville's *1848: the British state and the Chartist movement* (Cambridge 1990). At the same time or slightly later, the revolutions of 1848 in France, Germany and so on were defeated. Marx and Engels went back into exile, the Communist League, the organisation founded on the basis of the *Communist manifesto*, fell apart politically.

First International

The International Working Men's Association or First International founded in 1864 was a very different project. It started with an actually existing political movement: the solidarity of the British workers with the north in the American civil war and, arising out of that solidarity, the effort to set up a movement in solidarity with the Polish national movement. On that basis the First International was formed.

The First International was not a party founded on a platform. It was an organisation based on immediate practical solidarity on an international level, but also the proposal that working class organisations of all political shades should get together and organise, and discuss what working class policy should be. That is what the international actually did. It engaged in practical solidarity work: the general council did far more in the way of appeals for practical solidarity in relation to strikes in various parts of Europe than either the bureau of the Second International or the international executive committee of the Communist International, the Third International. But it was also an organisation which discussed what working class policy should be in relation to land, education, the question of nationalities, and so on.

The First International broke up because it was witch-hunted after the Paris Commune. The Proudhonists in France, who were a substantial component of it, were smashed by executions, exile and imprisonment. The British trade union leaders took fright from the Commune, but the other side of the coin was the Reform Act of 1867 and the Trade Union Act 1871, which enabled the bourgeois parties to claim that they could 'do something for the working class.'

At the same time there was a split between those who sided with Marx and the Bakuninists. The Bakuninists argued for the immediate abolition of the state and introduction of communal anarchy. Their conduct led to a split because that they insisted that the International should be a broad front, with a revolutionary Bakuninist minority which organised secretly within it.

There were two other projects going on at the same time in Germany.

²⁵¹ www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/03/24.htm.

Germany

One was the General Association of German Workers (ADAV), initially organised by Ferdinand Lassalle in 1863. The ADAV was not a Chartist or 1848-style communist party committed to political democracy. When founded, it adopted as its platform a 40-page article by Lassalle, the 'Open letter.'²⁵² In spite of its length, this document proposed the idea of a workers' party independent of the liberals, on the basis of two demands only: universal suffrage, and state-supported producer cooperatives. The rest of the text was theoretical argument, principally the "iron law of wages."

The ADAV operated what Lassalleans called "democratic centralism". By this they meant that a congress elected a leader ('democratic' – first Lassalle, then later Schweitzer after Lassalle was killed in a duel), and the leader had dictatorial powers ('centralist') over the party organisation – and equally over the trade unions, which were later founded in association with the party organisation. In addition, Lassalle, and after him Schweitzer, were happy to say that the working class could ally with Bismarck and with the Prussian monarchists against the liberals, because the liberals represent the capitalist class, while the monarchists were prepared to make social concessions to the working class.

The second project was what became the Eisenach party. This started with Wilhelm Liebknecht attempting to organise an opposition within the Lassallean ADAV in Berlin; but Bismarck, hearing of this, had Liebknecht deported from Prussia to Saxony. Liebknecht went into a Saxon liberal party called the *Volkspartei* (People's Party) and organised a left tendency within it, in the process winning August Bebel. In 1869 this tendency fused with a split from the ADAV, and created the Social Democratic Workers' Party or 'Eisenach party.' This organisation was based on a clear platform, the Eisenach programme, which has a set of six general principles and a set of 10 specific demands.²⁵³ The general principles are:

The current political and social conditions are extremely unjust and thus have to be combated with the utmost energy.

The struggle for the liberation of the working class is not a struggle for class privileges and special rights, but for equal rights and obligations and for the abolition of class rule.

The economic dependency of the worker on the capitalists constitutes the basis of any form of servitude, and therefore the Social Democratic Workers' Party aims for each worker to get the full earnings from labour through a cooperative system; concomitant to this is the abolition of the current method of production (wage system).

Political freedom represents the most essential precondition for the economic liberation of the labouring classes. Consequently, the social question is inseparable from the political one; its solution is conditional on the latter and is only possible in a democratic state.

Considering that the political and economic liberation of the working class is only possible if the struggle is conducted under common, united principles, the Social Democratic Workers' Party is adopting a unified organisation, which nevertheless allows each individual member to assert influence for the general welfare.

Considering that the liberation of labour is neither a local nor a national but rather a social task, encompassing all countries with a modern [form of] society, the Social Democratic Workers' Party regards itself, to the extent that the associational laws permit, as a branch of the International Workers' Association and is affiliated with the efforts of that body.

²⁵² http://debs.indstate.edu/l346l3_1901.pdf.

²⁵³ http://archive.org/stream/EisenachProgram/725_socDemWorkersParty_230_djvu.txt.

It is important to be clear that the Eisenach programme has within itself most of the faults which Marx criticises in the Gotha programme. Indeed, Bakunin wrote a critique of the Eisenach programme, parts of which Marx plagiarised in the *Critique of the Gotha programme*.²⁵⁴ At the same time, the concept of the Eisenach programme is the same concept as that of the Charter, or the *Demands of the Communist Party in Germany*. It is a departure in that sense from the First International idea of a general association, which does not have a definite programme, but provides a framework within which the working class can discuss what its policy ought to be, and a return to the idea of a workers' political movement founded on a short, clear political platform.

Between 1869 and 1875 the main political event was the Franco-Prussian war. Bebel and Liebknecht, who had been elected to the parliament of the north German confederation as Eisenach party MPs, refused (against the advice of Marx and Engels) to vote for credits for the Prussian war effort. The ADAV in contrast gave clear support to the Prussian war effort. Bebel's and Liebknecht's decision was retrospectively validated by the military victories of the Prussians and also by the fact that the Prussians turned out to be annexationist, seizing Alsace-Lorraine. In retrospect the two were seen to have made an enormous stand on principle against Prussian military aggression.

At the same time, the organisers of trade unions under the framework of the ADAV were becoming increasingly opposed to the system under which Schweitzer as the elected leader was simultaneously the president of every trade union associated with the ADAV. There was also opposition to the fact that Schweitzer had the right to intervene in local parties, appoint their organisers and even dissolve them. In contrast, the Eisenachers regarded the effective autonomy of the branches, trade unions and so on as being a fundamental part of their political conception – that the working class needs political democracy; and that implied democracy in its own movement as well, and the opportunity for creativity in the localities, in the branches and so on. All this is very explicit in the Eisenach programme.

The result of these developments was that there were not only further splits from the Lassalleans towards the Eisenachers, but also pressure for unification of the two organisations.

Gotha

At Gotha in 1875 the two organisations unified, on the basis of the Gotha programme.²⁵⁵ Marx's *Critique of the Gotha programme* more or less says that the non-Marxist content of this programme resulted from Wilhelm Liebknecht's concessions to the Lassalleans. But in fact the Gotha programme was completely drafted by Liebknecht.

The Gotha programme is a step further forward relative to the Eisenach programme, in that it does two things. Again, it is a short document. It begins with a *short statement of general principles* (to which most of Marx's critique is addressed):

1. Labour is the source of all wealth and all culture, and, since universal productive labour is possible only through society, therefore to society – that is, to all its members – belongs the collective product of labour. With the universal obligation to labour, according to equal justice, each should have in proportion to his reasonable needs. In the present society the means of labour are the monopoly of the capitalist class; the servitude of the labouring class, which is the outgrowth of this, is the cause of misery and of slavery in all forms.

²⁵⁴ <http://libcom.org/library/a-critique-of-the-german-social-democratic-program-bakunin>.

²⁵⁵ www.archive.org/stream/GothaProgramme/726_socWrksParty_gothaProgram_231_djvu.txt.

The liberation of labour demands the transformation of the means of production into the common property of society and the associative regulation of the collective labour with general employment and just distribution of the proceeds of labour.

The emancipation of labour must be the work of the labouring class, opposed to which all other classes are only a reactionary body.

Proceeding from this principle, the Socialist Labour party of Germany seeks through all legal means the free state and the socialist society, the destruction of the iron law of wages, the overthrow of exploitation in all forms and the abolition of all social and political inequality.

The Socialist Labour party of Germany, though working chiefly in national boundaries, is conscious of the international character of the labour movement and is resolved to fulfil every duty which is laid on the workers in order to realise the brotherhood of humanity.

The Socialist Labour party of Germany demands as a step to the solution of the social question the erection, with the help of the state, of socialistic productive establishments under the democratic control of the labouring people. These productive establishments are to place industry and agriculture in such relations that out of them the socialist organisation of the whole may arise.

Then comes a section of *political demands*, "as the foundation of the state"; and finally, a section of "demands within the present society" largely addressed to the immediate situation.

Here, in a sense, is the beginning of the idea of having a maximum programme and a minimum programme. There is a separation between the overall aims, the political element of the programme, and the social reform demands tailored to the immediate circumstances. The overall aims add to the immediate demands in politics and economics the element of inspiration: the idea that, to use the Social Forums tag, 'another world is possible.'

In spite of what was said in the *Critique of the Gotha programme*, the unification of the Eisenach party and the ADAV created a snowball effect. The German socialist groups were not so large (about 12,000 in the ADAV and about 7,000 Eisenachers), but within a very few years the united party reached hundreds of thousands of members.

The snowball effect of unification is equally true in relation to the history of the Second International in general. The 1889 Hainfeld programme of the Austrian social democracy was a fusion programme. The Italian Socialist Party, the French Section Francaise de l'Internationale Ouvriere (SFIO) and the Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party all originated as a fusion of a number of different groups. The creation of a unified organisation enables it to advance massively compared to the disunited forces which existed beforehand.

We have seen this phenomenon again more recently, even if it has taken place on a less than principled basis, in the Brazilian Workers Party (PT); in Rifondazione Comunista's opening up to forces to its left; in the Scottish Socialist Party; in the Left Bloc in Portugal; in the Red-Green alliance in Denmark. The unification of relatively small forces of socialists *in itself* creates a different dynamic.

If we ask ourselves why that should be so, the answer is actually perfectly obvious. The working class as a class has a profound interest in united action in spite of political differences. Because without the framework for united action among people who have political differences, you cannot organise a strike, you cannot form trade unions, credit unions or cooperatives. The working class objectively needs unity. Hence, insofar as the left sets itself up against unity in favour of purity, it takes us back to the times before Chartism, and we are forced to give all the competing tendencies the names of their theoretical leaders. To take just Britain, the Cliffites, the Mandelites, the Healyites, the Matgamnaites, etc – like the Painites, Spenceans, Owenites, and so on.

Section III: The Classical Marxist Minimum-Maximum Program

Parti Ouvrier

The next step forward from the Gotha programme is the programme of the Parti Ouvrier, the French Workers Party.

The preamble drafted by Marx simply states:

Considering

That the emancipation of the productive class is that of all human beings without distinction of sex or race;

That the producers can be free only when they are in possession of the means of production;

That there are only two forms under which the means of production can belong to them:

1. *The individual form, which has never existed in a general state and which is increasingly eliminated by industrial progress;*
1. *The collective form, the material and intellectual elements of which are constituted by the very development of capitalist society;*

Considering

That this collective appropriation can arise only from the revolutionary action of the productive class – or proletariat – organised in a distinct political party;

That such an organisation must be pursued by all the means the proletariat has at its disposal, including universal suffrage, which will thus be transformed from the instrument of deception that it has been until now into an instrument of emancipation ...²⁵⁶

This short statement of general aims is followed by a section of political demands, quite similar to those of Gotha; and an *ad hoc* collection of immediate economic and social demands.

The organising framework of the PO programme is thus that of the Gotha programme. The introductory part is much more general. Its character is still within the framework of the Charter. The working class needs political power and pursues that aim by laying collective hands on the means of production. The fact that the working class aims for political power means that it has to be thoroughly democratic in its political orientation.

It was in the context of this programme that Marx seems (in correspondence) to have coined the phrase, 'minimum programme,' bringing together the political section and the section of immediate demands.²⁵⁷

In 1888-89 the Austrian social democratic groups unified on the basis of the Hainfeld programme. The design and length is broadly the same. Hainfeld also displays a lengthened version of the general principles from the programme of the Parti Ouvrier.

Erfurt

After the legalisation of the SPD in Germany there was felt to be a need to revise the Gotha programme. Germany had changed enormously in the period since its formulation. There had been major industrialisation; there were large state welfare institutions and so on; and Germany had begun to be an imperial power.

²⁵⁶ www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/05/parti-ouvrier.htm.

²⁵⁷ Marx to Sorge, November 5 1880: www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/letters/80_11_05.htm (original emphasis).

Again it was Wilhelm Liebknecht who wrote the first draft of the Erfurt programme.²⁵⁸ Engels wrote a fairly sharp critique of it, regarding it as a step forward from Gotha, but not much more. Then there was discussion in the SPD executive, with the result that Karl Kautsky drafted the introductory section.

The whole programme is still pretty short, though the introduction is longer than any previous version. It is followed, as in Gotha and the Parti Ouvrier programmes, with a political section and an economic/social section.²⁵⁹

Engels criticised Liebknecht's first draft, among other things, for failing to demand the republic, though he admitted: "It would seem that from a legal point of view it is inadvisable to include the demand for a republic directly in the programme." He suggested "the concentration of all political power in the hands of the people's representatives" and "Complete self-government in the provinces, districts and communes through officials elected by universal suffrage. The abolition of all local and provincial authorities appointed by the state."²⁶⁰ The final version used a version of the second formula: "Self-determination and self-government of the people in Reich, state, province and municipality. Election by the people of magistrates, who are answerable and liable to them."

Just for completeness we can look at the roughly three pages of the programme of the Russian Social Democratic and Labour Party adopted in 1903. The explanatory part is a little bit longer than Erfurt, but the specific demands are more extensive. They are again divided into political and economic. The latter are of a very different character because of the different situation of tsarist Russia, in that they are longer and much more detailed.

Basic Character

What is to be drawn from this history? To start with, the whole idea that the Second International was a movement 'of the whole class' is quite false. The First International was indeed conceived as a movement of the whole class, which then worked out its politics through discussion. But the Second International and its parties were political parties founded on the basis of a definite political platform.

And this definite political platform, first, excludes the anarchists by insisting on the *political action* of the working class. And, second, when the Lassalleans signed up to the Gotha programme (contrary to what Marx said in the *Critique*), they broke with the labour monarchism of Lassalle and Schweitzer and their 'labour dictator' centralism in party organisation, and adopted the idea that the proletariat has an interest in political democracy, which is the line of the Charter, the Communist manifesto and the Eisenach programme. So actually, in spite of Liebknecht's muddled theoretical explanations, it was the Lassalleans that gave up the most in the Gotha unification.

The programme therefore forms a definite political conception. The working class has to take control of the means of production and it can do so by taking political power. To take political power it needs political democracy. There follow a common body of political demands. Attached to that basic idea is a set of current economic and social demands of one sort and another. This is a conception of the party and a conception of a programme which derives ultimately from the Charter.

The result has become substantially more complex; and indeed party programmes of this type tend to become longer. Partly they do so just as a product of political experience: when the working class is contesting elections, and all the more

²⁵⁸ MECW Vol 27, note 184.

²⁵⁹ www.marxists.org/history/international/social-democracy/1891/erfurt-program.htm.

²⁶⁰ www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1891/06/29.htm.

Section III: The Classical Marxist Minimum-Maximum Program

when it is represented in a parliament, the workers' parties and representatives are forced to take positions on current policy debates.

But the very elementary conception is that of a programme for political power: that the working class needs political democracy as the means of its own emancipation, on the road to the emancipation of all human beings without regard to sex or race; that the working class aims to take power in order to supersede itself; that it has to take collective control of the means of production.

This elementary idea turns out to be the engine for the creation of enormous, mass socialist parties and even broader, mass socialist sentiment. And it is the existence of those mass socialist parties, and that mass socialist sentiment, across most of Europe, that makes it possible for the question of the working class *actually taking power* to be posed in 1916-18.

Without working class political organisation and effective unity for this project, the class becoming conscious of its own strength and hence of the *possibility* of taking power, the question of actually taking power could not in fact have been posed.

This very basic conception of programme and party – which stems from the Charter, through the 1848 Demands, the Eisenach programme, the Gotha programme, the French Parti Ouvrier programme, the Erfurt programme and its imitators across Europe – is, I think, a lesson to which the present-day left needs to pay serious attention.

The Programme of the Parti Ouvrier

by Karl Marx and Jules Guesde

This document was drawn up in May 1880, when French workers' leader Jules Guesde came to visit Marx in London. The Preamble was dictated by Marx himself, while the other two parts of minimum political and economic demands were formulated by Marx and Guesde, with assistance from Engels and Paul Lafargue, who with Guesde was to become a leading figure in the Marxist wing of French socialism. The programme was adopted, with certain amendments, by the founding congress of the Parti Ouvrier (PO) at Le Havre in November 1880.

Concerning the programme Marx wrote: "this very brief document in its economic section consists solely of demands that actually have spontaneously arisen out of the labour movement itself. There is in addition an introductory passage where the communist goal is defined in a few lines."²⁶¹ Engels described the first, maximum section, as "a masterpiece of cogent argumentation rarely encountered, clearly and succinctly written for the masses; I myself was astonished by this concise formulation"²⁶² and he later recommended the economic section to the German social democrats in his critique of the draft of the 1891 Erfurt Programme.²⁶³

After the programme was agreed, however, a clash arose between Marx and his French supporters over the purpose of the minimum section. Whereas Marx saw this as a practical means of agitation around demands that were achievable within the framework of capitalism, Guesde took a very different view: "Discounting the possibility of obtaining these reforms from the bourgeoisie, Guesde regarded them not as a practical programme of struggle, but simply ... as bait with which to lure the workers from Radicalism." The rejection of these reforms would, Guesde believed, "free the proletariat of its last reformist illusions and convince it of the impossibility of avoiding a workers '89."²⁶⁴ Accusing Guesde and Lafargue of "revolutionary phrase-mongering" and of denying the value of reformist struggles, Marx made his famous remark that, if their politics represented Marxism, "*ce qu'il y a de certain c'est que moi, je ne suis pas Marxiste*" ("what is certain is that I myself am not a Marxist").²⁶⁵

The introductory maximum section of the PO programme appears in the Penguin collection of Marx's political writings, *The First International and After*, in a translation from the German text in the *Marx-Engels Werke*. So far as we know the rest of the programme has not been published in English before. The translation which appears here is from the original French version in Jules Guesde, *Textes Choisis, 1867-1882*, Editions Sociales, 1959, pp.117-9. We are grateful to Bernie Moss for providing a copy of the text.

The Programme of the Workers Party

Preamble

²⁶¹ Marx and Engels, Selected Correspondence, 1975, p.312.

²⁶² Ibid., p.324.

²⁶³ Engels, "A Critique of the Draft Social-Democratic Programme of 1891", in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, 1983, Vol.3, p.438.

²⁶⁴ Bernard H. Moss, *The Origins of the French Labour Movement, 1830-1914*, 1976, p.107.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., p.11. Marx's famous remark, quoted by Engels in a letter to Eduard Bernstein, can be found in Marx and Engels, *Werke*, Vol. 35. p.388.

Section III: The Classical Marxist Minimum-Maximum Program

Considering,

That the emancipation of the productive class is that of all human beings without distinction of sex or race;

That the producers can be free only when they are in possession of the means of production²⁶⁶; That there are only two forms under which the means of production can belong to them:

2. The individual form which has never existed in a general state and which is increasingly eliminated by industrial progress;
3. The collective form the material and intellectual elements of which are constituted by the very development of capitalist society;

Considering,

That this collective appropriation can arise only from the revolutionary action of the productive class – or proletariat – organized in a distinct political party;

That such an organization must be pursued by all the means the proletariat has at its disposal including universal suffrage which will thus be transformed from the instrument of deception that it has been until now into an instrument of emancipation;

The French socialist workers, in adopting as the aim of their efforts the political and economic expropriation of the capitalist class and the return to community of all the means of production, have decided, as a means of organization and struggle, to enter the elections with the following immediate demands:

I. Political Section²⁶⁷

1. Abolition of all laws over the press, meetings and associations and above all the law against the International Working Men's Association. Removal of the livret,²⁶⁸ that administrative control over the working class, and of all the articles of the Code²⁶⁹ establishing the inferiority of the worker in relation to the boss, and of woman in relation to man;
2. Removal of the budget of the religious orders and the return to the nation of the 'goods said to be mortmain, movable and immovable' (decree by the Commune of 2 April 1871), including all the industrial and commercial annexes of these corporations;
3. Suppression of the public debt;
4. Abolition of standing armies and the general arming of the people;
5. The Commune to be master of its administration and its police.

²⁶⁶ Our thanks to Graham Taylor for pointing out that the words "(land, factories, ships, banks, credit)" which were added here in the text supplied, but were not included in Marx's original wording, and have been deleted, as according to the text printed in *L'Égalité*.

²⁶⁷ The text from here is not authored exclusively by Marx, though he worked on it with Guesde.

²⁶⁸ The 'livret' was a certificate which a worker was legally obliged to present when taking up a new job, confirming that his debts and obligations to his previous employer had been discharged. The practice was finally abolished in 1890.

²⁶⁹ The Code Napoleon, the French law.

2. Economic Section

1. One rest day each week or legal ban on employers imposing work more than six days out of seven. Legal reduction of the working day to eight hours for adults. A ban on children under fourteen years working in private workshops; and, between fourteen and sixteen years, reduction of the working day from eight to six hours;
2. Protective supervision of apprentices by the workers' organizations;
3. Legal minimum wage, determined each year according to the local price of food, by a workers' statistical commission;
4. Legal prohibition of bosses employing foreign workers at a wage less than that of French workers;
5. Equal pay for equal work, for workers of both sexes;
6. Scientific and professional instruction of all children, with their maintenance the responsibility of society, represented by the state and the Commune;
7. Responsibility of society for the old and the disabled;
8. Prohibition of all interference by employers in the administration of workers' friendly societies, provident societies, etc., which are returned to the exclusive control of the workers;
9. Responsibility of the bosses in the matter of accidents, guaranteed by a security paid by the employer into the workers' funds, and in proportion to the number of workers employed and the danger that the industry presents;
10. Intervention by the workers in the special regulations of the various workshops; an end to the right usurped by the bosses to impose any penalty on their workers in the form of fines or withholding of wages (decree by the Commune of 27 April 1871);
11. Annulment of all the contracts that have alienated public property (banks, railways, mines, etc.), and the exploitation of all state-owned workshops to be entrusted to the workers who work there;
12. Abolition of all indirect taxes and transformation of all direct taxes into a progressive tax on incomes over 3,000 francs. Suppression of all inheritance on a collateral line²⁷⁰ and of all direct inheritance over 20,000 francs.

²⁷⁰ i.e. not by direct descendants.

A Critique of the Draft Social-Democratic Program of 1891

by Friedrich Engels

June 18 and 29, 1891

The present draft differs very favourably from the former programme [at Gotha]. The strong survivals of outmoded traditions – both the specific Lassallean and vulgar socialistic – have in the main been removed, and as regards its theoretical aspect the draft is, on the whole, based on present-day science and can be discussed on this basis.

It is divided into three sections: I. The Preamble, II. Political Demands, III. Demands for Measures of Protection for the Workers.

Preamble in Ten Paragraphs

In general it suffers from the attempt to combine two things that are uncombinable: a programme and a *commentary* on the programme as well. The fear that a short, pointed exposition would not be intelligible enough, has caused explanations to be added, which make it verbose and drawn out. To my view the programme should be as short and precise as possible. No harm is done even if it contains the occasional foreign word, or a sentence whose full significance cannot be understood at first sight. Verbal exposition at meetings and written commentaries in the press take care of all that, and the short, precise phrase, once understood, takes root in the memory, and becomes a slogan, a thing that never happens with verbose explanations. Too much should not be sacrificed for the sake of popularity, and the mental ability and educational level of our workers should not be underestimated. They have understood much more difficult things than the shortest, most concise programme can offer them; and if the period of the Anti-Socialist Law has made more difficult, and here and there even prevented the spreading of comprehensive knowledge among the masses joining the movement, now that our propagandist literature can again be kept and read without risking trouble, lost time will soon be made up for under the old leadership.

Political Demands

The political demands of the draft have one great fault. It *lacks* precisely what should have been said. If all the 10 demands were granted we should indeed have more diverse means of achieving our main political aim, but the aim itself would in no wise have been achieved. As regards the rights being granted to the people and their representatives, the imperial constitution is, strictly speaking, a copy of the Prussian constitution of 1850, a constitution whose articles are extremely reactionary and give the government all the real power, while the chambers are not even allowed to reject taxes; a constitution, which proved during the period of the conflict that the government could do anything it liked with it. The rights of the Reichstag are the same as those of the Prussian chamber and this is why Liebknecht called this Reichstag the fig-leaf of absolutism. It is an obvious absurdity to wish "to transform all the instruments of labour into common property" on the basis of this constitution and the system of small states sanctioned by it, on the basis of the "union" between Prussia and Reuss-Greiz-Schleiz-Lobenstein, in which one has as many square miles as the other has square inches.

To touch on that is dangerous, however. Nevertheless, somehow or other, the thing has to be attacked. How necessary this is is shown precisely at the present time by opportunism, which is gaining ground in a large section of the Social-Democratic press. Fearing a renewal of the Anti-Socialist Law, or recalling all manner of over-hasty pronouncements made

during the reign of that law, they now want the party to find the present legal order in Germany adequate for putting through all party demands by peaceful means. These are attempts to convince oneself and the party that "present-day society is developing towards socialism" without asking oneself whether it does not thereby just as necessarily outgrow the old social order and whether it will not have to burst this old shell by force, as a crab breaks its shell, and also whether in Germany, in addition, it will not have to smash the fetters of the still semi-absolutist, and moreover indescribably confused political order. One can conceive that the old society may develop peacefully into the new one in countries where the representatives of the people concentrate all power in their hands, where, if one has the support of the majority of the people, one can do as one sees fit in a constitutional way: in democratic republics such as France and the USA, in monarchies such as Britain, where the imminent abdication of the dynasty in return for financial compensation is discussed in the press daily and where this dynasty is powerless against the people. But in Germany where the government is almost omnipotent and the Reichstag and all other representative bodies have no real power, to advocate such a thing in Germany, when, moreover, there is no need to do so, means removing the fig-leaf from absolutism and becoming oneself a screen for its nakedness.

In the long run such a policy can only lead one's own party astray. They push general, abstract political questions into the foreground, thereby concealing the immediate concrete questions, which at the moment of the first great events, the first political crisis automatically pose themselves. What can result from this except that at the decisive moment the party suddenly proves helpless and that uncertainty and discord on the most decisive issues reign in it because these issues have never been discussed? Must there be a repetition of what happened with protective tariffs, which were declared to be a matter of concern only to the bourgeoisie, not affecting the interests of the workers in the least, that is, a matter on which everyone could vote as he wished? Are not many people now going to the opposite extreme and are they not, in contrast to the bourgeoisie, who have become addicted to protective tariffs, rehashing the economic distortions of Cobden and Bright and preaching them as the purest socialism - the purest Manchesterism? This forgetting of the great, the principal considerations for the momentary interests of the day, this struggling and striving for the success of the moment regardless of later consequences, this sacrifice of the future of the movement for its present, may be "honestly" meant, but it is and remains opportunism, and "honest" opportunism is perhaps the most dangerous of all!

Which are these ticklish, but very significant points?

First.

If one thing is certain it is that our party and the working class can only come to power under the form of a democratic republic. This is even the specific form for the dictatorship of the proletariat, as the Great French Revolution has already shown. It would be inconceivable for our best people to become ministers under an emperor, as Miquel. It would seem that from a legal point of view it is inadvisable to include the demand for a republic directly in the programme, although this was possible even under Louis Philippe in France, and is now in Italy. But the fact that in Germany it is not permitted to advance even a republican party programme openly, proves how totally mistaken is the belief that a republic, and not only a republic, but also communist society, can be established in a cosy, peaceful way.

However, the question of the republic could possibly be passed by. What, however, in my opinion should and could be included is the demand for *the concentration of all political power in the hands of the people's representatives*. That would suffice for the time being if it is impossible to go any further.

Second.

The reconstitution of Germany. On the one hand, the system of small states must be abolished – just try to revolutionise society while there are the Bavarian-Württemberg reservation rights – and the map of present-day Thuringia, for example,

Section III: The Classical Marxist Minimum-Maximum Program

is such a sorry sight. On the other hand, Prussia must cease to exist and must be broken up into self-governing provinces for the specific Prussianism to stop weighing on Germany. The system of small states and Prussianism are the two sides of the antithesis now gripping Germany in a vice, in which one side must always serve as the excuse and justification for the existence of the other.

What should take its place? In my view, the proletariat can only use the form of the one and indivisible republic. In the gigantic territory of the United States, the federal republic is still, on the whole, a necessity, although in the Eastern states it is already becoming a hindrance. It would be a step forward in Britain where the two islands are peopled by four nations and in spite of a single Parliament three different systems of legislation already exist side by side. In little Switzerland, it has long been a hindrance, tolerable only because Switzerland is content to be a purely passive member of the European state system. For Germany, federalisation on the Swiss model would be an enormous step backward. Two points distinguish a union state from a completely unified state: first, that each member state, each canton, has its own civil and criminal legislative and judicial system, and, second, that alongside a popular chamber there is also a federal chamber in which each canton, whether large or small, votes as such. The first we have luckily overcome and we shall not be so childish as to reintroduce it, the second we have in the Bundesrat and we could do very well without it, since our "federal state" generally constitutes a transition to a unified state. The revolution of 1866 and 1870 must not be reversed from above but supplemented and improved by a movement from below.

So, then, a unified republic. But not in the sense of the present French Republic, which is nothing but the Empire established in 1799 without the Emperor. From 1792 to 1799 each French department, each commune, enjoyed complete self-government on the American model, and this is what we too must have. How self-government is to be organised and how we can manage without a bureaucracy has been shown to us by America and the First French Republic, and is being shown even today by Australia, Canada and the other English colonies. And a provincial and communal self-government of this type is far freer than, for instance, Swiss federalism, under which, it is true, the canton is very independent in relation to the federation, but is also independent in relation to the district and the commune. The cantonal governments appoint the district governors and prefects, which is unknown in English speaking countries and which we want to abolish here as resolutely in the future as the Prussian Landrate and Regierungsräte.

Probably few of these points should be included in the programme. I mention them also mainly to describe the system in Germany where such matters cannot be discussed openly, and to emphasise the self-deception of those who wish to transform such a system in a legal way into communist society. Further, to remind the party executive that there are other important political questions besides direct legislation by the people and the gratuitous administration of justice without which we can also ultimately get by. In the generally unstable conditions these questions may become urgent at any time and what will happen then if they have not been discussed by us beforehand and no agreement has been reached on them?

However, what can be included in the programme and can, at least indirectly, serve as a hint of what may not be said directly is the following demand:

"Complete self-government in the provinces, districts and communes through officials elected by universal suffrage. The abolition of all local and provincial authorities appointed by the state."

Whether or not it is possible to formulate other programme demands in connection with the points discussed above, I am less able to judge here than you can over there. But it would be desirable to debate these questions within the party before it is too late.

1. I fail to see the difference between "election rights and voting rights," between "elections and voting" respectively. If such a distinction should be made, it should in any case be expressed more clearly or explained in a commentary appended to the draft.

2. "The right of the people to propose and reject" *what?* All laws or the decisions of the people's representatives – this should be added.
 5. Complete separation of the Church from the State. All religious communities without exception are to be treated by the state as private associations. They are to be deprived of any support from public funds and of all influence on public education. (They cannot be prohibited from forming their *own* schools out of their *own* funds and from teaching their own nonsense in them).
 6. In that case the point on the "secular character of the school" no longer arises, since it relates to the preceding paragraph.
- 8&9. Here I want to draw attention to the following: These points demand that the following should be taken over by the state: (1) *the bar*, (2) *medical services*, (3) *pharmaceutics, dentistry, midwifery, nursing*, etc., etc., and later the demand is advanced that workers' insurance become a state concern. Can all this be entrusted to Mr. von Caprivi? And is it compatible with the rejection of all state socialism, as stated above?
10. Here I should say: "Progressive... tax to cover all expenditure of the state, district and community, insofar as taxes are required for it. Abolition of all indirect state and local taxes, duties, etc." The rest is a redundant commentary or motivation that tends to weaken the effect.

Economic Demands

To item 2. Nowhere more so than in Germany does the right of association require guarantees also from the *state*.

The closing phrase: "for the regulation", etc., should be added as *item 4* and be given a corresponding form. In this connection it should be noted that we would be taken in good and proper by labour chambers made up half of workers and half of entrepreneurs. For years to come the entrepreneurs would always have a majority, for only a single black sheep among the workers would be needed to achieve this. If it is not agreed upon that in cases of conflict *both halves* express *separate* opinions, it would be much better to have a chamber of entrepreneurs and *in addition an independent chamber of workers*.

In conclusion, I should like to request that the draft be compared once more with the French programme where some things seem better precisely for Section III. Being pressed for time, I unfortunately cannot search for the Spanish programme, which is also very good in many respects.

The Erfurt Program

First Published: *Protokoll des Parteitages der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands: Abgehalten zu Erfurt vom 14. bis 20. Oktober 1891* [Minutes of the Party Congress of the Social Democratic Party of Germany: Held in Erfurt from October 14–October 20, 1891].

Although the following reform program, enacted at an Erfurt assembly in 1891, continues to call for revolution, it also provides evidence of a new practical orientation within the Socialist Party – one that encouraged its members to work through existing political institutions. The resignation of Bismarck a year earlier and the expiration of the Anti-Socialist Law had ended a state-sanctioned policy of persecution against the party.

The economic development of bourgeois society invariably leads to the ruin of small business, which is based on the private ownership by the worker of his means of production. It separates the worker from his means of production and turns him into a propertyless proletarian, while the means of production become the monopoly of a relatively small number of capitalists and large landowners.

Hand in hand with this monopolization of the means of production goes the displacement of these fractured small businesses by colossal large enterprises, the development of the tool into a machine, the gigantic growth in the productivity of human labor. But all the benefits of this transformation are monopolized by the capitalists and large landowners. For the proletariat and the sinking middle classes – petty bourgeoisie and farmers – it means an increase in the insecurity of their existence, of misery, of pressure, of oppression, of degradation, of exploitation.

Ever greater becomes the number of proletarians, ever more massive the army of excess workers, ever more stark the opposition between exploiters and the exploited, ever more bitter the class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, which divides modern society into two hostile camps and constitutes the common characteristic of all industrialized countries.

The gulf between the propertied and the propertyless is further widened by crises that are grounded in the nature of the capitalist mode of production, crises that are becoming more extensive and more devastating, that elevate this general uncertainty into the normal state of society and furnish proof that the powers of productivity have grown beyond society's control, that the private ownership of the means of production has become incompatible with their appropriate application and full development.

The private ownership of the means of production, once the means for securing for the producer the ownership of his product, has today become the means for expropriating farmers, artisans, and small merchants, and for putting the non-workers – capitalists, large landowners – into possession of the product of the workers. Only the transformation of the capitalist private ownership of the means of production – land and soil, pits and mines, raw materials, tools, machines, means of transportation – into social property and the transformation of the production of goods into socialist production carried on by and for society can cause the large enterprise and the constantly growing productivity of social labor to change for the hitherto exploited classes from a source of misery and oppression into a source of the greatest welfare and universal, harmonious perfection.

This social transformation amounts to the emancipation not only of the proletariat, but of the entire human race, which is suffering from current conditions. But it can only be the work of the working class, because all other classes, notwithstanding the conflicts of interest between them, stand on the ground of the private ownership of the means of production and have as their common goal the preservation of the foundations of contemporary society.

The struggle of the working class against capitalist exploitation is necessarily a political struggle. Without political rights, the working class cannot carry on its economic struggles and develop its economic organization. It cannot bring

about the transfer of the means of production into the possession of the community without first having obtained political power.

It is the task of the Social Democratic Party to shape the struggle of the working class into a conscious and unified one and to point out the inherent necessity of its goals.

The interests of the working class are the same in all countries with a capitalist mode of production. With the expansion of global commerce, and of production for the world market, the position of the worker in every country becomes increasingly dependent on the position of workers in other countries. The emancipation of the working class is thus a task in which the workers of all civilized countries are equally involved. Recognizing this, the German Social Democratic Party feels and declares itself to be one with the class-conscious workers of all other countries.

The German Social Democratic Party therefore does not fight for new class privileges and class rights, but for the abolition of class rule and of classes themselves, for equal rights and equal obligations for all, without distinction of sex or birth. Starting from these views, it fights not only the exploitation and oppression of wage earners in society today, but every manner of exploitation and oppression, whether directed against a class, party, sex, or race.

Proceeding from these principles, the German Social Democratic Party demands, first of all:

13. Universal, equal, and direct suffrage with secret ballot in all elections, for all citizens of the Reich over the age of twenty, without distinction of sex. Proportional representation, and, until this is introduced, legal redistribution of electoral districts after every census. Two-year legislative periods. Holding of elections on a legal holiday. Compensation for elected representatives. Suspension of every restriction on political rights, except in the case of legal incapacity.
14. Direct legislation by the people through the rights of proposal and rejection. Self-determination and self-government of the people in Reich, state, province, and municipality. Election by the people of magistrates, who are answerable and liable to them. Annual voting of taxes.
15. Education of all to bear arms. Militia in the place of the standing army. Determination by the popular assembly on questions of war and peace. Settlement of all international disputes by arbitration.
16. Abolition of all laws that place women at a disadvantage compared with men in matters of public or private law.
17. Abolition of all laws that limit or suppress the free expression of opinion and restrict or suppress the right of association and assembly. Declaration that religion is a private matter. Abolition of all expenditures from public funds for ecclesiastical and religious purposes. Ecclesiastical and religious communities are to be regarded as private associations that regulate their affairs entirely autonomously.
18. Secularization of schools. Compulsory attendance at the public *Volksschule* [extended elementary school]. Free education, free educational materials, and free meals in the public *Volksschulen*, as well as at higher educational institutions for those boys and girls considered qualified for further education by virtue of their abilities.
19. Free administration of justice and free legal assistance. Administration of the law by judges elected by the people. Appeal in criminal cases. Compensation for individuals unjustly accused, imprisoned, or sentenced. Abolition of capital punishment.
20. Free medical care, including midwifery and medicines. Free burial.
21. Graduated income and property tax for defraying all public expenditures, to the extent that they are to be paid for by taxation. Inheritance tax, graduated according to the size of the inheritance and the degree of kinship. Abolition of all indirect taxes, customs, and other economic measures that sacrifice the interests of the community to those of a privileged few.

For the protection of the working classes, the German Social Democratic Party demands, first of all:

Section III: The Classical Marxist Minimum-Maximum Program

Effective national and international worker protection laws on the following principles:

2. Fixing of a normal working day not to exceed eight hours.
3. Prohibition of gainful employment for children under the age of fourteen.
4. Prohibition of night work, except in those industries that require night work for inherent technical reasons or for reasons of public welfare.
5. An uninterrupted rest period of at least thirty-six hours every week for every worker.
6. Prohibition of the truck system.
1. Supervision of all industrial establishments, investigation and regulation of working conditions in the cities and the countryside by a Reich labor department, district labor bureaus, and chambers of labor. Rigorous industrial hygiene.
2. Legal equality of agricultural laborers and domestic servants with industrial workers; abolition of the laws governing domestics.
3. Safeguarding of the freedom of association.
4. Takeover by the Reich government of the entire system of workers' insurance, with decisive participation by the workers in its administration.

On the Erfurt Program of 1891²⁷¹

by Wilhelm Liebknecht

The speech reprinted below reveals Liebknecht's considerable enthusiasm for the new program of German Social Democracy adopted in the year after the end of the anti-socialist law. This program, which replaced the Gotha program so bitterly criticized by Marx and Engels, was widely hailed as the victory of Marxism within the German labor movement. Despite Liebknecht's (and Frederick Engels') fervor for the new program, it was to remain mainly wishful thinking, as the events of 1914 would later reveal. All the same, Liebknecht's remarks on the Erfurt Program are representative of his political beliefs.

I draw your attention to a sentence in the seventh paragraph: "The struggle of the working class against Capitalist exploitation is necessarily a political struggle. The working class cannot conduct its economic battles nor develop its economic organization without political rights." With that we state the political nature of our party and distance ourselves from those who preach the so-called "propaganda of the deed," thereby actually raising inactivity to the level of a political program and practicing the propaganda of idleness with effusive revolutionary slogans. We must act, work politically, implement all of the tools and levers at our disposal, set every gear in motion, in order to further our work. There is much to do and the more energy we apply, the greater the total amount of energy we put into our work, the faster the work will be done. To expect that the transformation of society, that the social revolution will take place without entering into political struggle is childish foolishness. Anyone who believes it is possible has no idea of the difficulty and magnitude of our struggle for emancipation. In Halle I spoke of the "growth of contemporary society into Socialist society." Those words have often been held against me. With them I simply wanted to describe the organic nature of the development of society, which is no machine but a collectively living being; but at every opportunity and even back then I have strongly emphasized that people are not tools of fate and that they should never wait idly in expectation of some benediction from above, that circumstances indeed determine people but are also determined by them. Just as class struggle is a continual human struggle, the attainment of our goals can only be the fruit of a relentless battle in which everyone fights side by side, putting their entire being into the balance without a second thought, gladly risking their existence, property and life.

The paragraph continues: "The working class cannot effect the transference of the means of production into common ownership without having come into possession of political power." Which means we are fighting for power in the state, for legislative power, currently monopolized by our opponents in their own class interests. "To shape this struggle of the working class into a unified and conscious one, to indicate its necessary goal, that is the task of the Social Democratic Party." Our task is thus not to conjure before the workers the figment of the state of the future, but rather to enlighten workers of the developmental process and motive laws of contemporary society, to show them what is necessary to put an end to exploitation and servitude, to show them how the continued development of bourgeois society itself puts the means at our disposal with which to do away with it. The double nature of our party expresses itself here: its scientific nature, which refuses to conceive of historical development as arbitrary, able to be turned at will toward revolution or reaction, as Bismarck's prescription of "blood and iron politics" would have it, but instead recognizes that there exist firm, unalterable laws of the developmental process; and the practical nature of our party, which manifests itself in that the workers are shown the road to the goal, they are shown that only by attaining political power, only by forcefully hastening the dissolu-

²⁷¹ This text is taken from Protocol of the Proceedings of the Party Congress of the Social Democratic Party of Germany, held in Erfurt from October 14 to 21, 1891.

Section III: The Classical Marxist Minimum-Maximum Program

tion of contemporary society, by diligently organizing ourselves toward the attainment of that power, can we reach our goal.

I turn now to the particular demands. We did not adopt the three-part division of the program as was in the Gotha compromise program. Even at that time it was contested as being illogical and unscientific, and the transitional material inserted between the general principles and the particular demands is now simply unacceptable. Attempts were made to introduce the three-part division into the new program, even leaving out clauses which could no longer be retained, but they were rejected and the commission unanimously supports the program as it now stands.²⁷²

We thus begin by presenting the organic development process of society – illustrating how society is split into two classes, how capitalism functions, and how it creates its own demise. But we don't want to sit back now, contrary to the beliefs of our opponents, standing around fascinated or hypnotized by the fairytale land of the state of the future. The struggle calls to us; summoning all our strength we must fight in every realm, on every potential battlefield, fight to ensure that our influence in the state and society grows constantly. We must accept every means, be it ever so humble – no matter whether it be communal, provincial, or state elections, no matter whether the area of influence is large or small – we have to be active everywhere, and everywhere we must address ourselves to the existing facts and conditions in order to show the masses the necessity of Socialist transformation. Which is why we say we are a fighting party, constantly fighting; at every moment we are conscious of the revolutionary character of our movement. We are obliged to keep this consciousness alive in our comrades and we will fight day by day, we will fight the press, in the popular assemblies – we will fight wherever we can. And we will fight and struggle to carry our vision, the vision of Social Democracy, ever farther afield and we will multiply the strength of our party.

Thus, since we are intelligent, active people who are not going to wait around for the milk and honey of social revolution, which would be tantamount to political abdication, we have put together and propose a series of concrete demands, regardless of immediate legislative success – demands that for the most part can be initiated within the framework of the state, even if all of them cannot be realized within the current framework of society. These demands afford us the possibility of setting gears in motion and hastening the process of transformation.

As in all the previous programs we have put the fundamental demand of general and equal suffrage foremost. All of you know that we do not overestimate this question and I won't repeat what has been said a hundred times – this issue is one of the tactics and will be left aside here.

Because I have to make an effort to be as brief as possible I will only mention those points that deviate from earlier programs or are otherwise noteworthy. We stated with our demand for universal suffrage that we do not recognize any differences in the sexes. In the old program we did recognize equal rights for women, but in a somewhat shameful fashion – only indirectly. We now explicitly demand the right to vote for women, just as we support complete equality of both sexes. It isn't worth the trouble to explain once again that there is no particular "women's question," that the emancipation of women must be part of the general emancipation of working people. Fifteen years ago this issue was still a bone of contention, but now there is no longer the slightest difference of opinion, so I will pass over it.

We further demand proportional representation.²⁷³ The point was not in the old program, but it is so self-evident, our newspapers have discussed and advocated it so often, that I can refrain from further commentary. I will only mention that

²⁷² There were twenty-one members of the Program Commission responsible for the Erfurt Program. They elected three men to the Editorial Commission: Karl Kautsky, Wilhelm Liebknecht, and Georg von Vollmar. Liebknecht was nominated by the Program Commission to present the program to the Party Congress.

²⁷³ In Reichstag elections, the candidate who received over 51 percent of the vote in his electoral district won the seat.

this electoral method is the only one which truly makes representation according to the number of votes possible, that it does away with inequalities in voting districts and the arbitrariness of majorities which thereby win a seat, and that it ensures that the number of representatives of a party is exactly proportional to the number of votes received by the party.

Voting districts are done away with entirely. The entire state constitutes a single voting block and a simple mathematical example shows us that one party receives this many votes, another party that many. In total there are a certain number of representatives to elect, and according to the number of votes received by each party, each one receives a proportionally corresponding number of representatives. This is all so straightforward and clear that any impartial observer can see it. Nor are there any practical problems – only the self-interest of the ruling class stands in the way. Our party would gain a tremendous advantage from this system, since as you all know we are scattered all over Germany. Unlike the Centre Party and others we are not concentrated in certain areas or tightly packed in specific locations. Social Democracy is everywhere in Germany, as it is everywhere all over the world. But we are a young party, and the number of districts in which we already have a majority is relatively small. We lose the better part of our votes under the current electoral system. With proportional representation the numbers of our representatives would double and even triple.

Furthermore, we demand a two-year legislative period, or rather, to put it into plain English, two-year periods of lawmaking. This demand also hardly requires an explanation. We have already presented it as a motion before the Reichstag. During that debate, and in the discussion of it in the newspapers, we used every opportunity to explain that yearly elections, which the English Chartists demanded,²⁷⁴ come in too rapid sequence. Once we have a democratic state it would always be possible to oblige a representative to give up his seat should he fail to do his duty, or even to re-elect the entire body of representatives should they lose the confidence of the public.

That we are also in favor of a parliamentary allowance and holding elections on a legal holiday is self-evident, as is the repeal of all limitations on political rights. As far as we are concerned there is only one case in which someone can lose their right to vote and that is mental incapacity – insanity and so on.

Furthermore we demand direct legislation by the people through a motion and veto right. This means that we do not want the core of political life to be in the parliament. According to democratic principles this core must instead reside with the people themselves, and the people should not be forced to wait for necessary or desired laws to come down from above, from the assembly. No, the people themselves should have the right of initiative. The motion right, i.e. the right of the people to make legislative proposals directly, complements the veto right, which is the right of the people to validate or veto laws by means of a referendum. We have consistently recognized this right on principle and it was already contained in earlier programs.

We all demand the people's right of self-determination and self-government in the Reich, state, province and community.²⁷⁵ In this context the word "state" means individual state, not state in the general sense of the organization of society according to its economic relations. We have stated here that for the first time that we only consider those forms of the state and government to be in harmony with the principle of the sovereignty of the people which are based on the broadest democratic foundation and arise from the people directly. We demand that the people be masters of their own fate, that the well-being of the people be the highest law, and that the will of the people be subordinate to no other. We demand that all institutions and laws which stand in the way of the expression and implementation of the will of the people be done away

²⁷⁴ Lenin described the Chartist movement as follows: "The first politically clear, definitively proletarian-revolutionary movement in the world to truly encompass the masses." The movement was at its most influential in 1837-38, and had its last period of importance in 1847-48.

²⁷⁵ This formulation was meant to paraphrase the demand for a democratic republic which, given the reactionary conditions of the time, could not be openly called for in the program.

Section III: The Classical Marxist Minimum-Maximum Program

with. Anyone can see at a glance that all this is linked with a comprehensive transformation of our current forms and institutions of government. It will mean the absolute democratization of political institutions in Germany.

In accordance with these principles we demand that public officials be elected by the people. This demand is a logical consequence of the people's right to self-determination. But we have also formulated a new demand: that the officials elected by the people be held responsible and accountable. It is no tautology, no mere repetition of the same concept in two words that essentially mean the same thing when we say responsibility and accountability. According to common usage the responsibility of officials means the political responsibility stipulated by constitution and law. But we want something more. We want officials to be personally and legally accountable for everything that they do.

I once raised this notion of accountability in the Reichstag – I took the matter up in reference to a parliamentary debate that had just taken place in France about legislation which granted compensation by the current Republic to the victims of Napoleon's coup and his regime.

Back then I said: hopefully a time will come in Germany too when the victims of the anti-socialist laws are compensated and when the authors of those laws and all those who harmed hundreds of thousands of others in their person and property by means of them will be made personally accountable. I don't want the taxpayers to be responsible for the compensation, as was the case in France, but that the guilty be prosecuted. A few reactionaries interpreted the expression "personal responsibility" to be a call for vigilante justice. Well, I meant justice, but not vigilante justice. The personal accountability of officials is a necessary postulate of the sovereignty of the people. An official is not a higher being – he must simply carry the will of the people or, like the judge, fulfill his office in accordance with this will. He is responsible for all of his actions and cannot be beyond civil and common law prosecution.

Furthermore we demand: general defense training, a people's militia instead of a standing army. This is an old Social Democratic demand, already raised by Fichte in his "Speech to the German Nation." At the moment some of the people are armed and some are not. But everyone should be a soldier, like in Switzerland, and in order to establish such a system it is necessary that from adolescence on everyone be trained in weapons, marching, gymnastics, marksmanship, etc. In Switzerland every schoolteacher in every village knows military exercises, indeed he is at least a noncommissioned officer in the communal army, sometimes even higher. From very early on he teaches his students gymnastics, military exercises and how to shoot a crossbow, and at a certain age the boys are given a gun. In short, the youth in Switzerland are trained in all of the exercises necessary for military service. We want a similar system, and I believe that soldiers trained in this fashion – as long as the training is pursued rationally – such soldiers will constitute a far more competent body than our current soldiers, whose physical training is quite deplorable, given the sad condition most of them live in before entering the army and the deficiencies of our school system.

Furthermore we demand that declarations of war and peace be made by the representatives of the people. From several quarters there were those who wanted to say: directly by the people. A word on this point. The current version is a step backwards, they say. No, there is no sense in which it is a step backwards and from the point of view of reason and practicality it is a definite advancement. Let us say a war suddenly breaks out – how would it be possible for the entire population to vote on it? And these days wars are generally sudden. Let's leave slogans behind and articulate our demands in a way that makes sense.

Furthermore: mediation of all international conflicts through arbitration. The Brussels Congress established beyond a doubt that we are no utopians as far as "eternal peace" is concerned.²⁷⁶ We stated in the now-famous resolutions that the conditions which give rise to militarism and the constant threat of war are rooted in current economic relations, in the

²⁷⁶ The International Workers Congress of 1891 in Brussels accepted a resolution introduced by Liebknecht and Vaillant which stated the class nature of the threat of war and called for opposition to war-mongering and alliances with the ruling class during war time.

Capitalist system. We are not like the bourgeois dreamers who ignore the causes and simply want to do away with the manifestations. We nonetheless make the demand that an international court of arbitration be established, before which conflicts among nations are to be brought. This demand will go unrealized for the time being, just as many of our demands will not be accomplished by the current state, but we must speak to this issue which profoundly affects the entire civilized world and we must demonstrate that as a party we support every serious attempt to eliminate the threat of war without, however, falling into hollow bourgeois peace utopianism.

Furthermore we demand the abolition of all civil and common laws which subordinate women to men. Just before I took the floor a specialist suggested to me that instead of saying "...which subordinate women to men," we say "...which disadvantage women with regards to men." I too consider this to be an improvement, reply of an editorial nature, and I request your permission to be allowed to change the text accordingly. Before we included this demand there was some debate as to whether it would be redundant, having stated the absolute equality of all people "regardless of sex," to articulate the same idea again in a specific point. But we must consider that a resolution to this effect was adopted in Brussels with the express wish that it be approved by the Social Democratic Party programs in the various countries, and we fulfilled that wish.

We had the greatest difficulty formulating the two following paragraphs of the program. There were those who wanted to simplify matters for us by suggesting that we again adopt the old Democratic Demands made in the Eisenach Program: separation of Church and education and separation of Church and state. They were good enough for their time but they fall far short of saying everything that we want to say and at this point have to say. The old formulation recognizes the Church as an institution alongside the state, which we don't want to do. We want to go much further: in our eyes the Church will simply be a private organization and community in the free communal entity which we strive for, subject to the same laws as all other communities. Such is the idea of absolute equality which we have expressed here. Which is to say "ecclesiastical and religious communities are to be treated as private organizations." And so that the Catholics can't say that we are trying to interfere with them, we continue: "communities which tend to their own affairs in complete independence." In connection with this passage on the church we demand "secular schools," i.e. that the church, that religion has absolutely nothing to do with the schools. We are obliged on principle to make this demand and the issue is so clear that it needs no explanation. But it was necessary to anticipate and prevent any misunderstandings that a formulation of that sort in our program might give rise to. Which is why such a meticulous version was necessary...

We are about to give ourselves a new program. The old one did us admirable service. We will forever look on it with great respect, as will those who follow us. Whatever was wanting has been complemented and improved by the growing education and intelligence of the comrades. They have filled an inadequate form with the necessary content. And even the most appealing program is useless if there is no genuine, living spirit as part of it. Which is why I ask you not to be waylaid by insignificant particulars. Remember that no program is absolutely complete. This one, which in our unanimous opinion is the best one at the moment, will doubtless already have its critics who want to introduce improvements in this or that phrase, this or that sentence. As was said in 1875: we don't want to make a Pope for ourselves out of the program. The program need only serve one purpose: to clearly and comprehensively represent the goals of our party, and indicate the developmental process of bourgeois society and the inevitability with which it destroys itself and itself brings about the moment when Capitalist production must be replaced by Socialist methods of production in the interests of the human community.

It is our sacred duty to accelerate this developmental process with all our might and to apply all our strength to bring this moment about as soon as possible. See to it that this new program created today leads the party from victory to victory, like the old one, from victory to victory until the ultimate victory! Infuse the new program with true spirit! And fight in the true spirit under this new banner! Carry it forward with enthusiasm and bravery, bearing in mind the elevated duties that

Section III: The Classical Marxist Minimum-Maximum Program

are born for us of size and growth of the party, fight fearlessly and without halt, as you did under the old banner, as as you fought under the old battle-torn standard. Dedicate your entire energy, your whole personality to the realization of this program, and see to it that the time between now and the day contemporary bourgeois society falls is abbreviated as much as possible-because the fall of this society does eventually depend on the amount of energy set against it. The more energy we put into our agitation, our campaigns, the more committedly we cast ourselves into the balance, the faster will we attain our goal and the sooner will we raise the banner of Social Democracy over the fortress of contemporary society.

Programme of the Social-Democratic Workers' Party

Adopted at the Second Congress of the Party

The development of exchange has established such close ties between all the peoples of the civilised world that the great liberation movement of the proletariat has had to become, and has in fact long since become, international in character.

Regarding themselves as forming one of the detachments of the world-wide army of the proletariat, the Russian Social-Democrats pursue the same ultimate aim as that towards which the Social-Democrats of all other countries are striving.

This ultimate aim is determined by the nature of present-day bourgeois society and the way it is developing.

The principal characteristic of this society is commodity production on the basis of capitalist production-relations, in which the most considerable and important part of the means of production and exchange of commodities belongs to a numerically small class of persons, while the overwhelming majority of the population consists of proletarians and semi-proletarians, who are obliged by their economic situation either continuously or periodically to sell their labour-power, that is, to become wage-workers for the capitalists and to create, by their labour, profit for the higher classes of society.

The sphere in which capitalist production-relations prevail is spreading ever wider and wider, in proportion as the constant improvement in technique, increasing the economic weight of large-scale enterprises, results in the squeezing out of small, independent producers, transforming some of these into proletarians, narrowing the role of the remainder in social and economic life, and in places subjecting them to more or less complete, more or less obvious and more or less severe dependence upon capital.

This same technical progress also enables the entrepreneurs to make use to an ever greater extent of female and child labour in the process of producing and circulating commodities. And since, on the other hand, it leads to a relative contraction in the entrepreneurs' demand for living human labour, the demand for labour power inevitably lags behind the supply, as a result of which the dependence of wage-labour upon capital increases and the degree to which it is exploited becomes greater.

This state of affairs in the bourgeois countries, and the mutual rivalry between these countries on the world market, which grows continually more intense, make it even more difficult to find outlets for the goods which are produced in constantly increasing quantities. Over-production, manifested in more or less acute industrial crises, which are followed by more or less prolonged periods of industrial stagnation, constitute an inevitable consequence of the development of the productive forces in bourgeois society. Crises and periods of industrial stagnation in their turn ruin the small producers still further, increase even more the dependence of wage-labour upon capital, and lead more rapidly to a relative (and sometimes also an absolute) worsening of the position of the working class.

Thus, improvement in technique, which means increased productivity of labour and growth in social wealth, results, in bourgeois society, in greater social inequality, a widening of the gap between the haves and the have-nots, and an increase in the precariousness of existence, in unemployment, and in many kinds of deprivation for ever-wider sections of the working masses.

But as all these contradictions, which are inherent in bourgeois society, grow and develop, so also grows the discontent of the working people and the exploited masses with the prevailing order of things, the numbers and cohesion of the proletariat increase, and the struggle between the proletariat and their exploiters intensifies. At the same time, the improvement in technique, concentrating the means of production and exchange and socialising the process of labour in capitalist enterprises, is creating at ever greater speed the material conditions for replacing capitalist production relations with socialist ones – that is, for the social revolution which is the ultimate aim of all the activity of the international Social-Democratic movement, as the conscious expression of the class movement of the proletariat.

Section III: The Classical Marxist Minimum-Maximum Program

By substituting social for private ownership of the means of production and exchange, and introducing planned organisation of the process of social production, in order to ensure the well-being and all-round development of all members of society, the social revolution of the proletariat will abolish the division of society into classes, and thereby free all oppressed mankind, since it will put an end to every form of exploitation of one part of society by another.

A necessary condition for this social revolution is the dictatorship of the proletariat, that is, conquest by the proletariat of such political power as will enable it to suppress any resistance by the exploiters.

Setting itself the task of rendering the proletariat able to fulfil its great historical mission, the international Social-Democratic movement organises the proletariat into an independent political party, opposed to all the bourgeois parties, guides all the manifestations of its class struggle, exposes before it the irreconcilable contradiction of interests between exploiters and exploited, and explains to it the historical significance of, and the necessary pre-conditions for, the impending social revolution. At the same time it reveals to all the rest of the working and exploited masses the hopelessness of their position in capitalist society and the necessity of social revolution for the sake of their own liberation from the yoke of capital. The party of the working class, the Social-Democratic Party, summons to its ranks all sections of the working and exploited population, in so far as they go over to the point of view of the proletariat.

On the way to achieving their common ultimate aim, which is conditioned by the dominance of the capitalist mode of production throughout the civilised world, the Social-Democrats of the different countries are obliged to undertake different immediate tasks, both because this mode of production has not developed everywhere to the same degree and because its development in the different countries is coming to fruition under a variety of socio-political circumstances.

In Russia, where capitalism has already become the dominant mode of production, there are still very many survivals from the old precapitalist order, which was based on the enslavement of the working masses by the landlords, the state or the sovereign. Hindering economic progress

to a very considerable extent, these survivals inhibit an all-round development of the class struggle of the proletariat, and contribute to the maintenance and consolidation of the most barbarous forms of exploitation of the many millions of peasants by the state and the property-owning classes, and to keeping the entire people in ignorance and deprived of rights.

The most important of all these survivals and the mightiest bulwark of all this barbarism is the Tsarist autocracy. By its very nature it is inimical to all social progress and cannot but be the most malevolent enemy of all the proletariat's strivings for freedom.

Therefore, the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party takes as its most immediate political task the overthrow of the Tsarist autocracy and its replacement by a democratic republic, the constitution of which would ensure:

5. Sovereignty of the people – that is, concentration of supreme state power wholly in the hands of a legislative assembly consisting of representatives of the people and forming a single chamber.
6. Universal, equal and direct suffrage, in elections both to the legislative assembly and to all local organs of self-government, for all citizens and citizenesses who have attained the age of 20; secret ballot at elections; the right of every voter to be elected to any representative body; biennial parliaments; payment of the people's representatives.
7. Extensive local self-government; regional self-government for all localities which are distinguished by special conditions in respect of mode of life and make-up of the population.
8. Inviolability of person and domicile.
9. Unrestricted freedom of conscience, speech, publication and assembly, freedom to strike and freedom of association.
10. Freedom to travel and to engage in any occupation.

11. Abolition of social estates, and complete equality of rights for all citizens, regardless of sex, religion, race and nationality.
12. Right of the population to receive education in their native language, to be ensured by provision of the schools needed for this purpose, at the expense of the state and the organs of self-government; the right of every citizen to express himself at meetings in his own language; use of the native language on an equal basis with the state language in all local, public and state institutions.
13. Right of self-determination for all nations included within the bounds of the state.
14. Right of any person to prosecute any official before a jury, through the usual channels.
15. Judges to be elected by the people.
16. Replacement of the standing army by universal arming of the people.
17. Separation of the church from the state and of the school from the church.
18. Free and compulsory general and vocational education for all children, of both sexes, up to the age of 16; poor children to be supplied with meals, clothing and textbooks at state expense.

As a fundamental condition for the democratisation of our state finances, the RSDLP calls for abolition of all indirect taxes and establishment of a progressive tax on income and inheritance.

In the interests of safeguarding the working class from physical and moral degradation, and also in order to develop its capacity for the struggle for freedom, the Party calls for:

- Limitation of the working day to eight hours in every 24, for all wage-workers.
- 2. Legal provision of a weekly rest period, to last continuously for not less than 42 hours, for wage-workers of both sexes, in all branches of the economy.
- 3. A complete ban on overtime work.
- 4. Prohibition of night work (between 9 pm and 6 am) in all branches of the economy, with the exception of those in which it is absolutely necessary owing to technical factors which are endorsed by the workers' organisations.
- 5. Employers to be forbidden to utilise the labour of children of school age (up to 16), and limitation of the working day for adolescents (16-18) to six hours.
- 6. Prohibition of female labour in all branches in which it is harmful to the female organism; women to be given leave from work for four weeks before childbirth and six weeks after it, with payment of wages at the usual rate throughout this period.
- 7. Construction in connection with all factories and other enterprises where women work of creches for infants and young children; release from work of women who are feeding their babies, at intervals of not more than three hours, for periods of not less than half an hour.
- 8. State insurance of workers against old age and against complete or partial loss of capacity to work, financed from a special fund to be raised by a special tax on the capitalists.
- 9. Prohibition of payment of wages in kind; payment of wages on a weekly basis and in cash to be laid down in all agreements for the hiring of workers, without exception; wages to be paid out during working hours.
- 10. Employers to be forbidden to make deductions from wages for any reason and regardless of the purpose (fines, defective work, etc.)
- 11. Appointment of an adequate number of factory inspectors in all branches of the economy, and extension of the scope of supervision by factory inspectors to all enterprises employing wage labour, including government enterprises (the work of domestic servants also to be subject to this supervision); appointment of women inspectors for

Section III: The Classical Marxist Minimum-Maximum Program

those branches in which female labour is employed; participation by elected representatives of the workers, paid by the state, in checking on the enforcement of factory legislation, and also in establishing wage-rates and in the accepting or rejecting of material and of work done.

12. Supervision by the organs of local self-government, with participation by elected representatives of the workers, of the sanitary condition of the dwellings assigned to workers by their employers, together with the internal arrangements of these buildings and the terms on which they are let – with a view to safeguarding the wageworkers from interference by the employers in their lives and activities as private persons and citizens.
13. Establishment of properly organised health inspection in all enterprises employing hired labour, the entire medico-sanitary organisation to be wholly independent of the employers; free medical aid for workers at the employers' expense, with continuance of pay during illness.
14. Violation by employers of laws for the protection of labour to be made a criminal offence.
15. Establishment in all branches of the economy of industrial tribunals, composed of an equal number of representatives of the workers and of the employers.
16. The organs of local self-government to be made responsible for setting up offices (labour exchanges) to arrange for the employment of workers, both local and newly-arrived, in all branches of production, with participation in the running of these offices by representatives of the workers' organisations.

In order to eliminate the survivals of serfdom which weigh as a heavy burden directly upon the peasants, and in the interests of free development of the class struggle in the countryside, the Party demands, first and foremost:

1. Cancellation of redemption and quit-rent payments, and also of every form of obligation now imposed upon the peasantry as a taxpaying estate.
2. Repeal of all laws which restrict the peasants' freedom to dispose of their land.
3. Return to the peasants of the sums of money extorted from them as redemption and quit-rent payments; confiscation, for this purpose, of monastery and church property and also of appanage and crown lands and those belonging to members of the imperial family; imposition of a special tax on the estates of members of the landowning nobility who have benefited from redemption loans: the money raised in this way to be paid into a public fund for the cultural and welfare needs of the rural communities.
4. Establishment of peasants' committees: (a) for restoration to the rural communities (by expropriation or, in cases where the land has changed ownership, through purchase by the state at the expense of the large estates of the nobility) of the lands which were cut off and withheld from the peasants when serfdom was abolished and which now serve the landlords as a means of keeping the peasants in bondage; (b) for handing over to ownership by the peasants in Caucasia those lands which they have been working as temporary bondsmen, khizani and so on; (c) for doing away with the survivals of serfdom relations which are still intact in the Urals, in the Altai, in the Western Territory and in other parts of the country.
5. Granting to the courts of the right to reduce excessively high rents and to declare null and void all transactions involving servitude.

In striving to achieve its immediate aims, the RSDLP supports every oppositional and revolutionary movement directed against the social and political order prevailing in Russia, while at the same time resolutely rejecting all reform proposals which are connected with any sort of extension or strengthening of tutelage by the police and officialdom over the labouring classes.

For its part, the RSDLP is firmly convinced that complete, consistent and lasting realisation of the political and social changes mentioned is attainable only through overthrow of the autocracy and the convocation of a constituent assembly, freely elected by the entire people.

The Socialist Party Platform of 1912

Indianapolis, Indiana, May 12, 1912

The Socialist party declares that the capitalist system has outgrown its historical function, and has become utterly incapable of meeting the problems now confronting society. We denounce this outgrown system as incompetent and corrupt and the source of unspeakable misery and suffering to the whole working class.

Under this system the industrial equipment of the nation has passed into the absolute control of a plutocracy which exacts an annual tribute of hundreds of millions of dollars from the producers. Unafraid of any organized resistance, it stretches out its greedy hands over the still undeveloped resources of the nation – the land, the mines, the forests and the water powers of every State of the Union.

In spite of the multiplication of laborsaving machines and improved methods in industry which cheapen the cost of production, the share of the producers grows ever less, and the prices of all the necessities of life steadily increase. The boasted prosperity of this nation is for the owning class alone. To the rest it means only greater hardship and misery. The high cost of living is felt in every home. Millions of wage-workers have seen the purchasing power of their wages decrease until life has become a desperate battle for mere existence.

Multitudes of unemployed walk the streets of our cities or trudge from State to State awaiting the will of the masters to move the wheels of industry. The farmers in every state are plundered by the increasing prices exacted for tools and machinery and by extortionate rents, freight rates and storage charges.

Capitalist concentration is mercilessly crushing the class of small business men and driving its members into the ranks of propertyless wage-workers. The overwhelming majority of the people of America are being forced under a yoke of bondage by this soulless industrial despotism.

It is this capitalist system that is responsible for the increasing burden of armaments, the poverty, slums, child labor, most of the insanity, crime and prostitution, and much of the disease that afflicts mankind.

Under this system the working class is exposed to poisonous conditions, to frightful and needless perils to life and limb, is walled around with court decisions, injunctions and unjust laws, and is preyed upon incessantly for the benefit of the controlling oligarchy of wealth. Under it also, the children of the working class are doomed to ignorance, drudging toil and darkened lives.

In the face of these evils, so manifest that all thoughtful observers are appalled at them, the legislative representatives of the Republican and Democratic parties remain the faithful servants of the oppressors. Measures designed to secure to the wage-earners of this Nation as humane and just treatment as is already enjoyed by the wage-earners of all other civilized nations have been smothered in committee without debate, the laws ostensibly designed to bring relief to the farmers and general consumers are juggled and transformed into instruments for the exaction of further tribute. The growing unrest under oppression has driven these two old parties to the enactment of a variety of regulative measures, none of which has limited in any appreciable degree the power of the plutocracy, and some of which have been perverted into means of increasing that power. Anti-trust laws, railroad restrictions and regulations, with the prosecutions, indictments and investigations based upon such legislation, have proved to be utterly futile and ridiculous.

Nor has this plutocracy been seriously restrained or even threatened by any Republican or Democratic executive. It has continued to grow in power and insolence alike under the administration of Cleveland, McKinley, Roosevelt and Taft.

We declare, therefore, that the longer sufferance of these conditions is impossible, and we purpose to end them all. We declare them to be the product of the present system in which industry is carried on for private greed, instead of for the welfare of society. We declare, furthermore, that for these evils there will be and can be no remedy and no substantial relief

except through Socialism under which industry will be carried on for the common good and every worker receive the full social value of the wealth he creates.

Society is divided into warring groups and classes, based upon material interests. Fundamentally, this struggle is a conflict between the two main classes, one of which, the capitalist class, owns the means of production, and the other, the working class, must use these means of production, on terms dictated by the owners.

The capitalist class, though few in numbers, absolutely controls the government, legislative, executive and judicial. This class owns the machinery of gathering and disseminating news through its organized press. It subsidizes seats of learning—the colleges and schools—and even religious and moral agencies. It has also the added prestige which established customs give to any order of society, right or wrong.

The working class, which includes all those who are forced to work for a living whether by hand or brain, in shop, mine or on the soil, vastly outnumbers the capitalist class. Lacking effective organization and class solidarity, this class is unable to enforce its will. Given such a class solidarity and effective organization, the workers will have the power to make all laws and control all industry in their own interest. All political parties are the expression of economic class interests. All other parties than the Socialist party represent one or another group of the ruling capitalist class. Their political conflicts reflect merely superficial rivalries between competing capitalist groups. However they result, these conflicts have no issue of real value to the workers. Whether the Democrats or Republicans win politically, it is the capitalist class that is victorious economically.

The Socialist party is the political expression of the economic interests of the workers. Its defeats have been their defeats and its victories their victories. It is a party founded on the science and laws of social development. It proposes that, since all social necessities today are socially produced, the means of their production and distribution shall be socially owned and democratically controlled.

In the face of the economic and political aggressions of the capitalist class the only reliance left the workers is that of their economic organizations and their political power. By the intelligent and class conscious use of these, they may resist successfully the capitalist class, break the fetters of wage slavery, and fit themselves for the future society, which is to displace the capitalist system. The Socialist party appreciates the full significance of class organization and urges the wage-earners, the working farmers and all other useful workers to organize for economic and political action, and we pledge ourselves to support the toilers of the fields as well as those in the shops, factories and mines of the nation in their struggles for economic justice.

In the defeat or victory of the working class party in this new struggle for freedom lies the defeat or triumph of the common people of all economic groups, as well as the failure or triumph of popular government. Thus the Socialist party is the party of the present day revolution which makes the transition from economic individualism to socialism, from wage slavery to free co-operation, from capitalist oligarchy to industrial democracy.

Working Program

As measures calculated to strengthen the working class in its fight for the realization of its ultimate aim, the co-operative commonwealth, and to increase its power against capitalist oppression, we advocate and pledge ourselves and our elected officers to the following program:

Collective Ownership

Section III: The Classical Marxist Minimum-Maximum Program

6. The collective ownership and democratic management of railroads, wire and wireless telegraphs and telephones, express service, steamboat lines, and all other social means of transportation and communication and of all large scale industries.
7. The immediate acquirement by the municipalities, the states or the federal government of all grain elevators, stock yards, storage warehouses, and other distributing agencies, in order to reduce the present extortionate cost of living.
8. The extension of the public domain to include mines, quarries, oil wells, forests and water power.
9. The further conservation and development of natural resources for the use and benefit of all the people...
10. The collective ownership of land wherever practicable, and in cases where such ownership is impracticable, the appropriation by taxation of the annual rental value of all the land held for speculation and exploitation.
11. The collective ownership and democratic management of the banking and currency system.

Unemployment

The immediate government relief of the unemployed by the extension of all useful public works. All persons employed on such works to be engaged directly by the government under a work day of not more than eight hours and at not less than the prevailing union wages. The government also to establish employment bureaus; to lend money to states and municipalities without interest for the purpose of carrying on public works, and to take such other measures within its power as will lessen the widespread misery of the workers caused by the misrule of the capitalist class.

Industrial Demands

The conservation of human resources, particularly of the lives and well-being of the workers and their families:

2. By shortening the work day in keeping with the increased productiveness of machinery.
3. By securing for every worker a rest period of not less than a day and a half in each week.
4. By securing a more effective inspection of workshops, factories and mines.
5. By forbidding the employment of children under sixteen years of age.
6. By the co-operative organization of the industries in the federal penitentiaries for the benefit of the convicts and their dependents.
7. By forbidding the interstate transportation of the products of child labor, of convict labor and of all uninspected factories and mines.
8. By abolishing the profit system in government work and substituting either the direct hire of labor or the awarding of contracts to co-operative groups of workers.
9. By establishing minimum wage scales.
10. By abolishing official charity and substituting a non-contributory system of old age pensions, a general system of insurance by the State of all its members against unemployment and invalidism and a system of compulsory insurance by employers of their workers, without cost to the latter, against industrial diseases, accidents and death.

Political Demands

1. The absolute freedom of press, speech and assemblage.

2. The adoption of a graduated income tax and the extension of inheritance taxes, graduated in proportion to the value of the estate and to nearness of kin-the proceeds of these taxes to be employed in the socialization of industry.
3. The abolition of the monopoly ownership of patents and the substitution of collective ownership, with direct rewards to inventors by premiums or royalties.
4. Unrestricted and equal suffrage for men and women.
5. The adoption of the initiative, referendum and recall and of proportional representation, nationally as well as locally.
6. The abolition of the Senate and of the veto power of the President.
7. The election of the President and Vice-President by direct vote of the people.
8. The abolition of the power usurped by the Supreme Court of the United States to pass upon the constitutionality of the legislation enacted by Congress. National laws to be repealed only by act of Congress or by a referendum vote of the whole people.
9. Abolition of the present restrictions upon the amendment of the Constitution, so that instrument may be made amendable by a majority of the voters in a majority of the States.
10. The granting of the right of suffrage in the District of Columbia with representation in Congress and a democratic form of municipal government for purely local affairs.
11. The extension of democratic government to all United States territory.
12. The enactment of further measures for the conservation of health. The creation of an independent bureau of health, with such restrictions as will secure full liberty to all schools of practice.
13. The enactment of further measures for general education and particularly for vocational education in useful pursuits. The Bureau of Education to be made a department.
14. The separation of the present Bureau of Labor from the Department of Commerce and Labor and its elevation to the rank of a department.
15. Abolition of federal districts courts and the United States circuit court of appeals. State courts to have jurisdiction in all cases arising between citizens of several states and foreign corporations. The election of all judges for short terms.
16. The immediate curbing of the power of the courts to issue injunctions.
17. The free administration of the law.
 1. The calling of a convention for the revision of the constitution of the U.S.

Such measures of relief as we may be able to force from capitalism are but a preparation of the workers to seize the whole powers of government, in order that they may thereby lay hold of the whole system of socialized industry and thus come to their rightful inheritance.

Supplemental Readings

Section III: The Classical Marxist Minimum-Maximum Program

Principles of Communism - Friedrich Engels (short)

Engels' draft for the Manifesto of the Communist Party is a classic introductory work to Marxism.

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/11/prin-com.htm>

Marx and Engels: The Unsung Heroes of the Democratic Breakthrough - August Nimtz (medium)

Nimtz argues that the 19th-century workers' movement, led by the theorists-activists Marx and Engels, propelled a wider struggle for democracy across Europe.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/40404697>

Political Ideas of Marx and Engels: Marxism and Totalitarian Democracy 1818-1850 - Richard N. Hunt (long)

Hunt's work is a classic work of Marxology that emphasizes democracy and republicanism against the totalitarian myth.

<https://www.pdfdrive.com/the-political-ideas-of-marx-and-engels-volume-1-marxism-and-totalitarian-democracy-18181850-e178090977.html>

Hal Draper's 5-part book series on Marxism (long)

Draper's epic series spans the lives of its two protagonists. The five books can be found on archive.org.

Section IV

Party of a New Type?

Section IV: Party of a New Type?

Summary

The Bolsheviks came to power in October 1917 and found themselves in an unprecedented situation. For the first time, a Marxist party had taken state power. Quickly, the Bolsheviks were forced to adapt to adverse circumstances, often through ad-hoc measures and by the seat of their pants. The party that emerged from the revolution and became the face of Communism worldwide was a product of war, disaster, and improvisation: it *was* a “party of a new type.” A new strategic orientation and unforeseeable events had necessitated structural changes to the party.

In what sense was the post-1917 party model “new”? Most importantly, it moved away from the largely democratic model of the Social Democratic parties of the Second International. The Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), for example, had a well-developed left, right, and center that contained the revisionist Edward Bernstein and his most famous interlocutor, Rosa Luxemburg (see Gary Steenson, *Not One Man Not One Penny*). Membership was based on dues, not toeing the party line. Branches had a degree of autonomy. The minority had the right to win hearts and minds and vie for a majority in the various leadership bodies. The Russian Social Democratic Party (RSDLP) aspired to be like the SPD. However, the majority faction, the Bolsheviks, correctly understood that internal democracy, though desirable, was impossible given Tsarist repression and the “fine art of not getting arrested” it necessitated (see Lars Lih, *Lenin Rediscovered*). Lenin was correct that those who called for a democratic party in Russia were either disingenuous or knew nothing about true democracy.

Besides the gradual eradication of internal democracy (or the rise of “bureaucratic centralism”), Mike Macnair identifies two additional elements in most Communist parties post-1920: vanguardism and activism. Both elements existed before 1917 but suffered a subsequent degeneration after being codified and exported. Vanguardism — once the promotion of a distinct political program in opposition to the ideas of the ruling class (there’s nothing wrong with being at the vanguard of the struggle for democracy; if you have a good idea, say it) — became the theory of an all-knowing party in opposition to the passive masses (the party can do no wrong), and all-knowing party leadership in opposition to the rank-and-file grunts (the leadership can do no wrong). Once the common sense acceptance of an internal division of labor and a serious commitment to party work, activism became a strict division between party “thinkers” and “doers” — between the leaders and the led.

Over the 20th century, it benefited the increasingly entrenched Bolshevik bureaucracy and the international opponents of Bolshevism to say that democracy had never been the goal, that the Bolshevik party had always existed in its post-1917 form, and that everything was going according to Lenin’s blueprints that he supposedly codified in *What Is To Be Done?* History was changed to say what the bureaucracy needed it to say. Lars Lih notes that the compromising minutes of the 1912 Prague conference — the Bolsheviks tolerated factions in the RSDLP (!) — were kept secret until the 1980s (See: *A Faction is Not a Party*). For the anti-Communists abroad, it was only common sense to portray the contemporary Bolsheviks just like Lenin, Marx, the Paris Communards, and the French revolutionaries: bloodthirsty tyrants who had always despised the (so-called) democracy found in the West. In reality, Lenin was a passionate democrat for most of his life.

The myth of a “party of a new type” existing since 1903 severs Lenin and the Bolsheviks from their roots in Social Democracy, from the history of the Second International, and (most importantly) from the strategy of winning a democratic republic in countries lacking universal and equal suffrage (as most clearly seen in the political demands of the RSDLP’s 1903 program and the Socialist Party of America’s 1912 platform). The myth also fails to distinguish between “the early Lenin of the democratic stage of the revolution and the doctrine of Leninism created after the Bolshevik seizure of power”

(Gil Shaeffer: *You Can't Use Weatherman to See Which Way the Wind Blew*). Decisions made during the Russian Civil War did not represent the entirety of Lenin's political thought. But those in power like stasis, and "Leninism" treats Lenin's thinking as unchanging.

The core of a democratic party, like the core of a democratic state, is universal and equal voting rights. Consider DSA's biennial convention, during which chapters are allocated delegates based on their total membership size. Representation is proportional to population (unlike the U.S. Senate, for example). Each delegate has a vote, and no delegate's vote is worth more than anyone else's. No minoritarian checks exist: the outgoing NPC, for example, can't veto any decisions. DSA also allows caucuses: members can form groups based on a shared political vision, disseminate their ideas, and criticize others with the goal of winning a majority. Our best bet is to raise the banner of internal organizational democracy and hold on for dear life. We should hold the leadership accountable, maintain a vibrant and democratic press, and let the ideas contend.

It's worth taking time to appreciate the importance of Hal Draper's article and the way ideas flow between generations of scholars and activists. Draper wrote *The Myth of Lenin's 'Concept of the Party'* (subtitled *What They Did to What Is To Be Done?*) in the 1960s. He debunks many myths, including the fallacy that Lenin had a static "party model." As always, context is vital. The RSDLP and its Bolshevik faction were a product of their environment. Draper worked contemporaneously with Richard N. Hunt, whose 1974 book, *The Political Ideas of Marx and Engels*, is essential for understanding the democratic-republican roots of Marx and Engels (as discussed in Week 8). Draper and Hunt were contemporaries of Neil Harding, who wrote *Lenin's Political Thought* in 1977 (discussed in Week 2). Draper, Hunt, and Harding did their part to debunk many of the myths of undemocratic Marxism. Thanks to them, we know that "dictatorship of the proletariat" meant a state based on universal and equal suffrage (see Hal Draper, *The 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat' in Marx and Engels*) and that only the circumstances of civil war led Lenin to support a one-party state. Finally, in 2005, Lars T Lih, who had read Draper and Harding, published *Lenin Rediscovered: What Is To Be Done? In Context*.

Study Questions

*Independent Study questions are italicized

1. Macnair writes that "so-called 'Leninist' sectarians believe that splitting organisationally from the right and repeated purges will make a pure revolutionary organization. The political collapse of such sectarians into the most abject opportunism has been a repeated failure of the history of Trotskyism and Maoism." Why has this strategy led to this repeated political collapse?
2. How are more contemporary cycles of opportunist "popular frontism" and sectarian isolation related to the various periods of Comintern history?
3. How does the early Comintern policy of the "united workers' front" differ from later conceptions of both the popular front and of purity through splitting?
4. What does Macnair mean by unity in diversity?
5. According to Lih, how does Lenin distinguish between a fraction (the Bolsheviks) and a party (the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party)? In other words, why is a fraction not a party? How might these distinctions relate to MUG's work as a fraction in the DSA?
6. What was the global context within which Lenin wrote *What Is To Be Done*?
7. Why is democracy important within a socialist political party?

Revolutionary Strategy, Chapter 5: Communist Strategy and the Party Form by Mike Macnair

In chapter four we saw that ‘defeatism’ was intimately linked to Lenin’s struggle, from 1914 on, to force a split in the Second International. Lenin argued for a clear split not only with the “social-chauvinists” of the right and centre who had actually supported their own belligerent governments, but also with the “social-pacifists” of the centre.

As we have seen, Lenin’s split policy was not accepted by the majority of his co-thinkers – let alone the wider anti-war left in the workers’ movement – until after October 1917. It reached its decisive moment in the 1920 adoption by the Comintern of the ‘Twenty-one conditions’, which were designed to force the split with the centre.

It would be tedious to list the processes of split since then which have left us with – at least! – 57 varieties of left group in Britain, leave aside the international variations.

Sectarian?

The Eurocommunist Fernando Claudin in his *From Comintern to Cominform* (1975) argued that the split in the Second International was “a model of sectarianism and bureaucratic method”, to which the modern splintered working class movement can be traced back. Claudin’s argument has been widely adopted. Many liberal and social democratic critics of communism and some leftists would place the source further back – at the 1903 split between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks; they rely on Luxemburg’s and Trotsky’s contemporary critiques of Lenin. The anarchists would take it a stage further: the 1871 split in the First International, they would say, showed Marx’s sectarianism and ‘authoritarian methods’ at work.

The seductive quality of these arguments consists in two facts. First, 1871, 1903 and the split consummated in 1921 have commonly been used as ‘arguments’ by bureaucratic and sectarian splitters. Second, in all three cases the arguments are fundamentally false but contain a partial truth.

In 1871 a split which was really about political strategy was confusingly presented as a split about Bakunin’s secret dictatorial conspiracy; but Bakunin’s secret dictatorial conspiracy was real. Bakunin’s hypocrisy (and his very confused ideas) obscure the fact that he and his followers identified a real problem about the forms of authority in the workers’ movement.

Luxemburg’s and Trotsky’s critiques of Lenin would have been perfectly legitimate if the 1903 split in the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party had been about implementing a top-down, conspiratorial party model, but (as Lenin pointed out in his 1904 response to Luxemburg) it was not. However, against the interpretation placed on 1903 in Zinoviev’s History of the Bolshevik Party and, as a result, by James P Cannon and by the later ‘orthodox Trotskyists’ and the Maoists, Luxemburg’s and Trotsky’s critiques had considerable validity.

The split in the Second International was justified, but the reasoning given for it at the time was at least partly unsound, and this unsound reasoning has indeed promoted the division of the left into micro-groups.

Splitting as a Strategy

Lenin’s original argument for a split with the social-chauvinist leaders was quite simply that they had betrayed the decisions of the International and the interests of the working class and were scabs. The explanation he gave was that “This collapse has been mainly caused by the actual prevalence in it of petty bourgeois opportunism, the bourgeois nature and

the danger of which have long been indicated by the finest representatives of the revolutionary proletariat of all countries.” Further, “The so-called centre of the German and other social democratic parties has in actual fact faint-heartedly capitulated to the opportunists. It must be the task of the future International resolutely and irrevocably to rid itself of this bourgeois trend in socialism.”

The Lenin-Zinoviev 1915 pamphlet *Socialism and war* goes on to argue for the split on a class basis – class unity and class independence requires separation from the right:

In the past epoch, before the war, although opportunism was often regarded as a ‘deviationist’, ‘extremist’ part of the Social Democratic Party, it was nevertheless regarded as a legitimate part. The war has shown that this cannot be so in future. Opportunism has ‘matured’, is now playing to the full its role as emissary of the bourgeoisie in the working class movement. Unity with the opportunists has become sheer hypocrisy, an example of which we see in the German Social Democratic Party. On all important occasions (for example, the voting on August 4), the opportunists come forward with an ultimatum, which they carry out with the aid of their numerous connections with the bourgeoisie, of their majority on the executives of the trade unions, etc. Unity with the opportunists actually means today subordinating the working class to ‘its’ national bourgeoisie, alliance with it for the purpose of oppressing other nations and of fighting for great-power privileges; it means splitting the revolutionary proletariat in all countries.

Hard as the struggle may be, in individual cases, against the opportunists who predominate in many organisations, peculiar as the process of purging the workers’ parties of opportunists may be in individual countries, this process is inevitable and fruitful. Reformist socialism is dying; regenerated socialism ‘will be revolutionary, uncompromising and insurrectionary’, to use the apt expression of the French socialist, Paul Golay.

In *Socialism and war*, and more fully in *Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism*, the class argument is extended to connect opportunism to imperialism and the ability to ‘buy off’ a section of the working class: “Opportunism and social-chauvinism have the same economic basis: the interests of a tiny stratum of privileged workers and of the petty bourgeoisie who are defending their privileged position, their ‘right’ to crumbs of the profits ‘their’ national bourgeoisie obtain from robbing other nations, from the advantages of their position as the ruling nation, etc.”

This argument seeks a strategic split in two senses. On the one hand, the strategy of the regenerated movement is to be ‘revolutionary’ and not ‘reformist’. On the other, it is a strategic break from the Second International’s strategy of unity, discussed in chapter one. It is, indeed, the exact opposite. By splitting from the right, the left, which represents the working class, is to purge the workers’ parties of opportunists, to purify itself and ‘regenerate’ socialism as ‘revolutionary’. Splitting becomes in itself a strategy to purify the movement.

False...

These arguments are fundamentally false but contain true elements.

To begin at the theoretical level, the theory of the imperialist labour aristocracy is false. In the first place, workers’ level of class consciousness does not map inversely onto their relative material advantages. To take a single British example out of many possible ones, in the late 19th century skilled miners and railway workers were on the right wing of the movement; by the early 20th they were on its left. The theory of the imperialist labour aristocracy is also completely impotent to explain reformism and the labour bureaucracy in the colonial and semi-colonial countries, which has been an all too obvious problem since the 1930s. The theory therefore wholly lacks predictive power.

Bukharin in *Imperialism and world economy* has a better understanding: that is, that the relative advantages of a nation-state in the world hierarchy will allow the state to gain the loyalty of at least a large section of its working class. But this understanding can be extended to the case of colonies and semi-colonies. Left nationalism, which is the main equivalent in the colonial world of “social-chauvinism”, seeks to improve the position of the poor (including the working class) by improving the relative standing of its nation-state in the world hierarchy; and there can be relative advantages in this hier-

Section IV: Party of a New Type?

archy not only, for example, between Britain and Argentina, but also between Britain and France, or between Brazil and Argentina.

Once this point is grasped, it is clear that the strategy of split will *not* purify the workers' movement, and that the idea that the workers' movement can be purified from 'reformism'/'social-chauvinism' by separation of the 'revolutionaries'/'internationalists' is illusory. Working class support for one's own capitalist nation-state is produced by dynamics inherent in the capitalist nation-state system and world market, and there is no grouping within the working class which is presumptively free of it.

The Bolsheviks, in fact, themselves demonstrated in 1917 the falsity of the policy of purifying the movement through splits. Firstly, when Lenin returned to Russia, the All-Russia Central Committee, including Kamenev and Stalin, was engaged in discussing with the Mensheviks unity on the basis of critical support for the Provisional government. Secondly, in October, two central Bolshevik leaders, Zinoviev and Kamenev, broke ranks to denounce the planned insurrection in the bourgeois press. The Bolsheviks' separation from the Mensheviks had proved to be no guarantee against reformism.

The need for 'purging' the movement of opportunists and "accidental elements" was to be a central demand of the 'Twenty-one conditions'. The periodic purge was also to be one of the central weapons the Bolshevik leadership promoted against corruption and bureaucratic degeneration once the party had taken power. In this character it was – to put it mildly – wholly ineffective. Individual bureaucrats and corrupt elements might be purged, but the overall effect of the purges was to increase the power of the party bureaucracy as such over the rank and file, and therefore reduce and, indeed, rapidly eliminate the ability of the proletariat as a class to fight for its class interests through the Communist Party.

So-called 'Leninist' sectarians believe that splitting organisationally from the right and repeated purges will make a pure revolutionary organisation. The political collapse of such sectarians into the most abject opportunism has been a repeated feature of the history of Trotskyism and Maoism. The process is going on before our eyes in the British SWP.

...and Partly True

Lenin's and Zinoviev's arguments for a split in *Socialism and war* nonetheless contain a side comment which goes to the heart of the matter, quoted above: "On all important occasions (for example, the voting on August 4), the opportunists come forward with an ultimatum, which they carry out with the aid of their numerous connections with the bourgeoisie, of their majority on the executives of the trade unions, etc."

The loyalty of the right wing of the movement to the capitalist state is rewarded with state – and capitalist – intervention on the side of the right in the debates and decision-making of the workers' movement. In World War I this took the form of the open use of state censorship against critics of the war. More usually, it takes more subtle forms: financial support, media attention and disinformation operations of the intelligence apparatus, provocations, etc against the left (the smear campaign against George Galloway is a recent example, albeit one to which Galloway's political errors made him particularly vulnerable).

As a result, the right is characterised by persistent use of ultimatums, splits and party, union, etc, bureaucratic censorship against the left. In the German SPD this had begun well before the war, with the misuse of Engels' 1895 preface to *The Civil War in France*, and the suppression of the first edition of Kautsky's *The Road to Power*. In more recent times, the British Social Democratic Party's 1981 split from Labour was only the most extreme example of a routine practice of ultimatums, sabotage, etc, of the Labour and trade union right.

The right represents itself as the democratic representative of more backward elements of the working class – ordinary working class monarchists, for example – so that it claims that, even when it is in a minority in the movement, it is nonetheless entitled to a majority in its leadership or to control of what the movement says. The same argument can be found

in Neil Kinnock's claims to represent the voiceless masses against the left in the 1980s Labour Party and John Rees's similar claims against the CPGB at the Respect founding conference. They are the continuation of the practice of the right wing in the German SPD.

The right is linked to the state and willing to use ultimatums, censorship and splits to prevent the party standing in open opposition to that state. It insists that the only possible unity is if it has a veto on what is said and done. The unity of the workers' movement on the *right's terms* is necessarily subordination of the interests of the working class to those of the state.

Marxists, who wish to oppose the present state rather than to manage it loyally, can then only be in partial unity with the loyalist wing of the workers' movement. We can bloc with them on particular issues. We can and will take membership in parties and organisations they control – and violate their constitutional rules and discipline – in order to fight their politics. But we have to organise ourselves independently of them. That means that we need our own press, finances, leadership committees, conferences, branches and other organisations.

It does not matter whether these are formally within parties which the right controls, formally outside them, or part inside and part outside. This is tactics. The problem is not to purify the movement, which is illusory, but to fight the politics of class collaborationism.

In the concrete conditions of 1914-21, fighting class collaborationism did indeed mean an organisational split with most of the centre as well as with the right. After the split, the centre promptly proved the point. Parts of the centre regrouped in what the communists satirically called the 'Two and a Half International'; by 1923 this had reunified with the Second International. It proved to be unable to fight the right in the International, and, indeed, collapsed into its politics. Fetishising unity at all costs had proved – as Marx and Engels warned in 1875 – to negate the ability to fight for working class political independence.

A Party of a New Type

The course of events in 1917-21 overlaid upon the original ground for a split (purifying the class movement) a new ground: the idea of a party of a new type that is, a party in the image of the Bolsheviks. This idea was codified in the 1920 Second Congress 'Theses on the role of the Communist Party in the proletarian revolution' and in the 1921 Third Congress theses, 'The organisational structure of the communist parties, the methods and content of their work'.

There are three critical elements in the new organisational concept. The first is that the party is to be a party of the 'vanguard': the advanced minority of the working class. It is not to lay claim to being directly the party of the mass of the working class (unlike, for example, the British Labour Party). The second, related, point is that it is to be an *activist* party, a party which organises the political work of its members. The 1921 theses contain, in this respect, some valuable pragmatic advice about the practical means of organising and building a party.

The third is that it is to be 'strictly centralised'. There is to be no question of broad autonomy of branches, fractions, etc; everything is to be under the control of the central committee. Indeed, the 1921 theses incorporate (inexplicably) the ban on factions recently adopted by the Russian Communist Party (thesis 6: "incompatible with the principles of democratic centralism adopted by the Communist International are antagonisms or power struggles within the party"). They give individual delegates of the central committee the right to veto local decisions (thesis 48: "The representatives and delegates of the central leadership are entitled to attend all meetings and sessions with a consultative voice *and the right of veto*").

There is no doubt that these were intended to be strategic choices. They are grounded on the one hand by the positive balance sheet of the Russian Bolshevik Party, which by 1920-21 was clearly winning the civil war, On the other hand by the defeats suffered by the left in the German revolution of 1918-19, by the Hungarian revolution of 1919, and by the

Section IV: Party of a New Type?

Italian revolutionary movement of autumn 1920, which the Comintern leadership attributed to the lack of a ‘party of a Bolshevik type’.

The ‘new party concept’ is intensely contradictory. On the one hand, it is a genuine advance in the theorisation of actual membership-based political parties. Membership-based political parties, as opposed to loose coalition political trends, were an innovation of the later 19th century, and when Marx and Engels said that “the communists do not form a separate party opposed to the other parties of the working class” (*Communist manifesto*) and made similar statements about “parties” it was this sort of broad unorganised trend that they meant. The Second International had built membership-based parties, but had not theorised what they were. In this aspect ‘anti-Leninism’ is characterised by simple political unrealism and ends in practice either in total inability to organise, or in reproducing the worst aspects of so-called ‘Leninism’.

On the other hand, it is also a theorisation of what the Bolsheviks had done to their party in 1918-21, both in militarising it and in setting it up as a minority dictatorship, a state authority against the working class. In this aspect the ‘new party concept’ or, as it came to be called after Lenin’s death, ‘Leninism’, was a theory of the dictatorship of the bureaucracy, and one which was to animate endless bureaucratic sects.

This contradiction can be seen present in each of the three strands of the new party concept: the vanguard party, the party of activists and strict centralism.

The Vanguard Party

That a party is *only part* of the society is logically necessary. That the organised membership of a political party, however large, is a minority, is a simple fact about political parties in capitalist society .even very large ones like the Labour Party, etc. That in the case of a workers’ party this minority is in some sense the ‘vanguard’ is an idea which cannot be abandoned without abandoning the idea that the party should promote its distinct political programme. If we are not ‘more advanced’ in the sense of having a better understanding of the strategic line of march than non-members, then our organising is a waste of time and money and is a fraud; and this is as true of the Labour Party, etc as it is of left groups.

If the job of a party is to represent the voiceless masses rather than to promote a distinct set of political ideas, it collapses into an organ of the state without political ideas: the character of the major capitalist parties in the two-party systems of much of the modern political world. The result is that the unorganised masses are denied the genuine political choices which they *could* make when they vote, etc. This result is inherently anti-democratic.

There is a danger however that this ‘vanguard party’ reasoning can be taken to rule out the possibility that the party is wrong and non-party elements right. In this case the claim that the party is the advanced party becomes in principle untestable. Moreover, it logically follows that the leadership is the ‘advanced part’ of the party and as such is in principle right against the ‘backward elements’ of the ranks. Since the possibility that the ‘backward elements’ are right is ruled out, the claim that the leaders are ‘more advanced’ is untestable, and is a matter of pure faith.

The necessary consequence is that ‘more advanced leading cadre’ are, in effect, justified by faith alone, as with the Calvinist Elect. Like the dodgy end of the Calvinist ‘elect’, nothing is forbidden to them: among the Trotskyist organisations the ‘vanguard role’ has been used to justify violence in the workers’ movement (Cannon, the Lambertists, the Healyites, the Loraiites, the SWP), taking money from questionable sources (the Lambertistes, the Healyites), and sexual exploitation of female members (the Healyites, the Spartacists). These are merely pale shadows of the personal corruption and violence of the Stalinist bureaucracies.

The Party of Activists

The idea of the party of activists is in itself no more than a recognition that political activity is work – and that, like other forms of work, it benefits from (a) commitment and (b) an organised division of labour. It also has a ‘civic republican’ aspect to it. That is, it is counterposed to the liberal and market political-science view of parties, which sees party leaderships as firms offering political brands to the atomised voter-consumer or member-consumer. In contrast, in the ‘party of activists’, the party member is to be an active citizen of his or her party, through active involvement in a branch, fraction or other party body which does its own collective work as part of the party, and the passive consumer-member is not to have a vote.

Though the Comintern texts address directly only the shortcomings of the social democracy, in this aspect they have grasped a fundamental feature of the capitalist political order in parliamentary regimes: ie, that what is given with one hand through universal suffrage is taken away with another through the constitution of the party system. (It is also taken away by monarchism/presidentialism, judicial review, militarised police, mercenary armies, etc; but these are long stops relative to the *immediate* role of the capitalist party system in disenfranchising the masses).

The other, negative, side of the ‘party of activists’ idea is given by its combination with the ‘actuality of the revolution’: the idea that the trouble with the Second International was its ‘passive propagandism’, and that the tasks of the workers’ movement have gone beyond propaganda, etc, to agitation intended to lead to the immediate struggle for power. Taken together with the idea of a developed division of labour, this idea leads all too easily into the creation of a division of labour between the ‘grunts’ at the base, who are to run round like blue-arsed flies from one agitational initiative to the next, and the thinkers in the leadership. Self-education of the militants at the base and long-term propaganda work for ideas that are not currently agitational is damned as ‘propagandism’.

The fetishism of the ‘actuality of the revolution’ and short-term agitation as opposed to ‘propagandism’ can also have a negative effect on the necessarily patient, and long-term, organising work of communist involvement in building trade unions, cooperatives, and so on. Strikes and similar mass struggles may produce a burst of activity of the organisation as a whole; but outside these times, communist militants in trade unions and so on are ‘left to get on with it’. The usual result is that they become *merely* trade unionists (etc) who happen to hold party cards.

The paradoxical effect is to reinstate the liberal-market bourgeois party form. The members, though active, are active in doing what the leaders tell them, and cease to be really active citizens of their party. The leaders become a firm selling a brand: Socialist Workers Party, Workers Power, Alliance for Workers’ Liberty. Dissent – especially dissent about fundamentals – becomes the enemy of ‘activism’ and the ‘activists’ themselves resent the dissenters who are ‘stopping them getting on with the job’. In this framework, serious disagreement inevitably leads to a split.

Centralism

Centralism has two senses. The first is the absence of legal constitutional rights of the state’s or organisation’s components (cantons, provinces, branches, etc) to sovereignty in ‘their patch’. I stress legal constitutional rights, first because in their absence the centre may still not practically be able to enforce its will in the localities – see, for example, the SWP’s difficulty in turning its local branches round Respect.

Second, because in the absence of legal constitutional rights of the components we do not have federalism. England before the rise of mass suffrage was deeply *politically* committed to the autonomy of local government, but that did not make this country federal. Having federalism thus implies having a constitutional court to decide whether the centre has invaded the components’ rights. Federalism is, in other words, a form of dictatorship of the lawyers. That is why the US capitalist class at the time of the creation of the US constitution preferred federalism to democratic republicanism. In this sense, the Comintern’s centralism was right.

Section IV: Party of a New Type?

Federalism even in the ‘dictatorship of the lawyers’ sense may, of course, be a step forward in relation to what actually exists. Thus, for example, Marx and Engels argued that a federation of the British isles would be preferable to the existing UK unionism.

The second sense of centralism is the sense Engels points to in his critique of the Erfurt programme. He denounces the French form of the state as “the empire established in 1799 without the emperor”: the existence of a centralised, hierarchical, bureaucratic apparatus in which local officials are appointed from and responsible to the centre, rather than locally elected. It was this Bonapartist sort of centralism which the Bolsheviks created in their party in 1918-21 and exported in the 1921 theses.

The Bolsheviks in 1921 *represented* this centralism as the historic character of their faction-party since 1903. This representation was ‘codified’ in Zinoviev’s 1924 *History of the Bolshevik Party*, but it was an unambiguous falsification of their history. Trotsky wrote in 1931 that “Whoever is acquainted with the history of the Bolshevik Party knows what a broad autonomy the local organisations always enjoyed: they issued their own papers, in which they openly and sharply, whenever they found it necessary, criticised the actions of the central committee. Had the central committee, in the case of principled differences, attempted to disperse the local organisations... before the party had had an opportunity to express itself -such a central committee would have made itself impossible.” This view has been confirmed by detailed modern historical research into Bolshevik practice down to 1918.

It is reasonably clear why the Bolsheviks did it. They *thought* it was a necessity of civil war. That was also why they exported it: the parties of the Comintern needed to be parties fit for civil war. In fact, the idea that civil war implies Bonapartist centralism can readily be falsified by the experiences of the English civil war, the French revolutionary war before 1799, and the American revolution and civil war.

In reality, it was required in Russia by the combination of the failure of the German workers’ movement to come to the aid of the Russian revolution, and the Bolshevik adoption of the Narodniks’ distributivist land programme. This left the Bolsheviks effectively isolated in a peasant-dominated country. The only way to resist the Whites was to base themselves on the peasants, which they duly did.

Representing the peasants forced them to create the sort of state that peasant revolutionary movements normally tend to create, which is an absolutist one. The re-creation of new Chinese dynasties after peasant revolts; the peasants’ support for late feudal absolutism in 17th century Sweden, France, etc; and French Bonapartism itself, are all examples. The Bolsheviks built up a Bonapartist state round the party: and to do so, they had to change the party into “the empire without the emperor”.

It is unsurprising to find that the fate of parties of this type is to be unable to be a political instrument of the working class. In peasant-dominated countries, they can take power, but create only a road back to capitalism by a long and bloody detour: Russia itself, Yugoslavia, China, Albania, Vietnam... In fully capitalist countries, they can have one of three fates.

2. They can evolve back into Kautskyan parties – the clearest cases are the French and Italian Communist Parties. Such parties officially prohibit factions, but have them de facto, and are officially Bonapartist-centralist, but in practice allow a lot of leeway to the branches and fractions. They can actually be useful for the workers’ movement and the development of class consciousness even if they have coalitionist politics which they cannot carry into practice (all of them between the 1950s and the 1970s) and even if they are small (like the old CPGB).
3. They can turn into small bureaucratic-centralist sects (most of the Trotskyist and Maoist groups and some ‘official communist’ ones).
4. Or they can collapse altogether.

Adopting and exporting Bonapartist centralism was just plain wrong. When it was completed by the 1921 ban on factions, it left no legal means by which the working class could get its party back: as became apparent in the fate of the oppositions of the 1920s. It tended to emphasise the negative rather than the positive sides of the ‘vanguard party’ and the ‘party of activists’.

What Sort of Party?

At present the mass workers’ parties wherever they exist are so dominated by the class-collaborationist, coalitionist right as to be little more than left-capitalist parties. The larger small parties of the left (the surviving ‘official’ CPs, Rifondazione Comunista, Die Linke) are also dominated by the coalitionist policy. To their left is a wilderness of bureaucratic-centralist sects.

The working class urgently needs new political parties, and a new International, which stand for the working class pursuing its independent interests. *What sort of party?* It is impossible to get out of where we are now without being willing to read the texts and the lessons of the early Comintern, but to do so *critically*. To accept the Comintern texts at face value produces bureaucratic-centralism and splittism. To take them at face value and reject them out of hand produces either complete inability to act (the anarchists, movementists, ‘left’ and ‘council’ communists, etc) or collapse back into the policy of unity with the right on the right’s terms (the Labour left, etc).

The ‘party of a new type’ was *both* a real advance on the party theory of the Second International and simultaneously part of the process of bureaucratisation of the Russian CP and hence of the parties of the Comintern. It is necessary to disentangle these elements and fight for a democratic centralism which is not a synonym for bureaucratic centralism.

The split in the Second International was not a sectarian error on the part of the communists. It was required by the unwillingness of the coalitionist right to act democratically. Marxists have to organise in a way which is *not dependent on* unity with the right. We have to accept that the split in the Second International will not be reversed (unless Marxists altogether abandon our politics and accept the corrupt world of Blairism, etc).

But splitting does *not* purge the movement of opportunism. It is a defensive necessity, not a means of offence. The way to fight opportunism is not to seek purity by separation or fear contamination with the touch of pitch: that road leads only to organisational sectarianism, coupled with political collapse *into* opportunism.

Rather we also have to fight for forms of partial unity with the right, so as both to achieve the maximum class unity *around particular goals* that can be achieved and to bring our politics into confrontation with the right’s politics. That was for the Comintern, and remains today, the task of the policy of the united class front.

Revolutionary Strategy, Chapter 6: Unity in diversity

In the previous chapter we were concerned with the strategic split between communists and socialists. In this chapter we have to address the problem of unity that the split posed.

With the creation of the Comintern the *national* split which the 1914-18 war had caused in the broad, united socialist movement was replaced by an *organisational-ideological* split which affected the workers' parties in most countries. But with this split the problem of working class political unity in action did not go away, because it is deeply rooted in the nature of the movement. The policy or 'tactic' of the united class front was the Comintern's effort to tackle this problem.

Down to 1920 the Comintern's leaders were struggling for a clear and unambiguous split in the workers' movement. This split was necessary in order to escape the domination of the movement by the right and the fudges of the centre, which supported the domination of the right. But as soon as the split came about the working class's objective need for unity reasserted itself. The Comintern was now forced to try to find a way of addressing that need for unity without again subordinating the movement to the right.

British Labour

The starting point of the united front policy, before it was even expressed as such, was the Comintern's advice to the British communists on the Labour Party. The groups which formed the CPGB were divided on the question, some favouring and some opposing affiliation to Labour. The 1920 2nd Congress of the Comintern debated the question and resolved that the Communist Party – then in process of formation – should affiliate. The proposal was quite clearly made on the basis that communists would have full freedom of agitation and organisation within the Labour Party.

Lenin argued that "...the Labour Party has let the British Socialist Party into its ranks, permitting it to have its own press organs, in which members of the selfsame Labour Party can freely and openly declare that the party leaders are social-traitors... This shows that a party affiliated to the Labour Party is able not only to severely criticise but openly and specifically to mention the old leaders by name, and call them social-traitors. This is a very original situation..."

"In a private talk, comrade Pankhurst said to me: 'If we are real revolutionaries and join the Labour Party, these gentlemen will expel us.' But that would not be bad at all. Our resolution says that we favour affiliation insofar as the Labour Party permits sufficient freedom of criticism. On that point we are absolutely consistent."

As a matter of judgment of the evolution of the Labour Party, these arguments are problematic. From its 1918 conference, the Labour Party was in process of transforming itself from a loose confederation into a party which combined limited affiliations with individual membership based on a political platform. In reality, the CP was not allowed to affiliate and individual communists' membership in the Labour Party was from a very early stage semi-legal.

The argument nonetheless shows that even at a time that the Comintern's leadership was still mainly concerned to complete the split with the centrists, they were willing to fight for participation of communists in a broader unity of the workers' movement – *provided that the communists retained liberty of agitation*.

The United Front Turn

The united front turn was animated by the fact that over the course of 1921 it became clear that the split had not purged the movement, but, on the contrary, the social democrats of the right and centre retained mass support in the working class.

In Italy the January 1921 split of the left from the right and centre of the Partito Socialista Italiano – urged on by the Comintern leadership – left the communists as a small minority.

In March 1921 the German United Communist Party (VKPD) endeavoured to trigger the revolution artificially in the ‘March action’. The attempt was a categorical failure and only emphasised the fact that the right-dominated SPD had majority support in the German working class.

At the Tours Congress in December 1920 the SFIO (French Section of the Workers’ International, the Socialist Party) split. A three-quarters majority accepted the ‘21 conditions’ and adhered to the Comintern as the Parti Communiste Français (PCF). A minority split to reconstitute the SFIO.

But of the SFIO’s 69 parliamentary deputies only 13 joined the PCF, 56 going with the SFIO, and the SFIO also took the large majority of the local councillors. Over 1921 it also became clear that the SFIO had majority support in the trade unions, which expelled a communist-supported minority in December. By late 1921 it was evident that in spite of the numbers at Tours the SFIO actually had the majority in the broader workers’ movement; and the SFIO was engaged in constructing the Cartel des Gauches left electoral bloc with the left bourgeois Radical Party (for the May 1922 local and 1924 general elections). This policy allowed them to present the communists as splitters of the unity of the left.

In this context the executive committee of the Comintern in December 1921 adopted the ‘Theses on the united front’. They begin (theses 1-2) with the reassertion of the ‘actuality of the revolution’ in the form of a foreshortened perspective of economic crisis and war.

They then assert (theses 3-4) that, while a section of the most advanced workers had been won to place confidence in the communists, the advance of the class struggle had brought more backward layers into activity, and these were the source of the instinctive demand for unity.

This analysis makes the problem correspond to the situation in Russia in February 1917: the Bolsheviks had obtained a majority of the existing organised workers, but the outbreak of revolution brought onto the stage broad masses for whom Menshevik ideas were more attractive. The same dynamic was visible in Portugal in 1974-75: the Communist Party had been the majority in the repressed workers’ movement under the Salazar-Caetano dictatorship, but the advance of the mass movement allowed rapid and dramatic growth of the Socialist Party.

However, as an analysis of the situation in 1921 it was false: neither in Germany nor in Italy had the communists won a majority in the existing organised movement, and 1921 showed that in France the *apparent* majority of the existing organised movement won at Tours was in fact illusory.

The theses then assert that the split was necessary in order that the communists should “win freedom of agitation and propaganda” (thesis 5); that the communists are now fighting for unity of the workers *in action*, which the reformists reject (thesis 6); and that the reformists are using the slogan of unity to draw the workers into support for class collaboration (thesis 7). Hence the conclusion: “The overall interests of the communist movement require that the communist parties and the Communist International as a whole *support the slogan of a united workers’ front* and take the initiative on this question into their own hands” (thesis 8).

Theses 9 – 16 attempt to concretise the idea in a series of individual countries, while thesis 17 calls on other communist parties to do likewise. Thesis 18 asserts a fundamental point:

“The executive committee of the Communist International considers that the chief and categorical condition, the same for all communist parties, is: the absolute autonomy and complete independence of every Communist Party entering into any agreement with the parties of the Second and Two-and-a-Half Internationals, and its freedom to present its own views and its criticisms of those who oppose the communists. While accepting the need for discipline in action, communists must at the same time retain both the right and the opportunity to voice, not only before and after but if necessary during actions, their opinion on the politics of all the organisations of the working class without exception. The waiving of this condition

Section IV: Party of a New Type?

is not permissible in any circumstances. Whilst supporting the slogan of maximum unity of all workers' organisations in every *practical action against the capitalist front*, communists cannot in any circumstances refrain from putting forward their views, which are the only consistent expression of the interests of the working class as a whole."

The remaining theses discuss a series of discrete points (the Bolshevik experience, initiatives of the Comintern as a whole, problems of centrism within the communist parties, that unity in action of the working class must include the anarchists and syndicalists).

The Comintern returned to the question at its 4th Congress in December 1922. Thesis 10 of the 'Theses on Comintern tactics' reaffirmed the executive committee's December 1921 theses, although the compression of the argument makes the text less fully transparent:

"At present the reformists need a split, while the communists are interested in uniting all the forces of the working class against capital. Using the united front tactic means that the communist vanguard is at the forefront of the day-to-day struggle of the broad masses for their most vital interests. For the sake of this struggle communists are even prepared to negotiate with the scab leaders of the social democrats and the Amsterdam International. Any attempt by the Second International to interpret the united front as an organisational fusion of all the 'workers' parties' must of course be categorically repudiated..."

"The existence of independent communist parties and their complete freedom of action in relation to the bourgeoisie and counterrevolutionary social democracy is the most important historical achievement of the proletariat, and one which the communists will in no circumstances renounce. Only the communist parties stand for the overall interests of the whole proletariat.

"In the same way the united front tactic has nothing to do with the so-called 'electoral combinations' of leaders in pursuit of one or another parliamentary aim."

And:

"The main aim of the united front tactic is to unify the working masses through agitation and organisation. The real success of the united front tactic depends on a movement 'from below', from the rank and file of the working masses. Nevertheless, there are circumstances in which communists must not refuse to have talks with the leaders of the hostile workers' parties, providing the masses are always kept fully informed of the course of these talks. During negotiations with these leaders the independence of the Communist Party and its agitation must not be circumscribed."

We can draw from these texts (and others, such as Trotsky's March 1922 report, 'On the united front', specifically addressed to tactics in France) a clear understanding of the Comintern leadership's conception of the united front idea.

1. The question is posed because the right wing still lead broad masses. The united front is not a permanent concept, but a road to a higher form of unity, in which the unity of the class is expressed in the Communist Party and Comintern.
2. The idea is of the *workers'* united front. This has two aspects: (a) It is for the unity of the working class as a whole, in action for elementary common interests -ie, including the anarchists, etc; it is not merely an electoral or parliamentary combination of communists and socialists (ECCI thesis 23). (b) It is counterposed to the 'left unity' that includes liberal parties of the Cartel des Gauches and to the SPD's post-war coalition policy.
3. It is the "chief and categorical condition" that the Communist Party must retain autonomy and independence and "*its freedom to present its own views and its criticisms of those who oppose the communists*" (emphasis added).
4. It is a precondition for the application of this policy that the Communists should have a party (theses 5-6). The EC theses warn of the danger that the united front policy will be used as a basis for a reversion to an unorganised left in a broader fudged unity (theses 21 – 22). Equally, as Trotsky put it, "In cases where the Communist Party still

remains an organisation of a numerically insignificant minority, the question of its conduct on the mass-struggle front does not assume a decisive practical and organisational significance. In such conditions, mass actions remain under the leadership of the old organisations which by reason of their still powerful traditions continue to play the decisive role” (point 3).

Abandonment

This conception was, in fact, very rapidly abandoned. The socialists, including their lefts, proved unwilling to enter into agreements for common action with the communists on these terms. The initial result was a period of zigzags between unity with elements of the left socialists and trade unionists on the basis of *self-censorship* of the communists in order to fudge the political differences between them, and simple denunciation of the ‘lefts’ by the communists and isolation of the communists.

An example of the utter confusion about *how* to apply the united front policy can be found in the case of the relationship between the British communists and the trade union ‘official lefts,’ and that between the Soviet trade unionists and the general council of the TUC, in the run-up to and during the 1926 General Strike. Both the party and the Comintern zig-zagged between promoting illusions in the ‘official lefts’ and simply denouncing them. A range of similar failures at the same period are discussed in Trotsky’s *The Third International after Lenin* (1928).

The late 1920s saw an abrupt shift to the ‘left’ in the Soviet Union (the turn to ‘class struggle in the countryside’ and forced collectivisation) and in the Comintern: in place of the united front policy, the task of the communist parties was now mainly to fight against the socialists. This turn was justified by the fact that the world situation, having passed through a period of post-war revolutionary crisis and a period of stabilisation in the mid-1920s, was now entering into a ‘third period’ of open crisis. Trotsky called the new policy “third period of the Comintern’s errors”, and the expression, “third period”, as a description of dead-end sectarian isolationism has stuck. The new policy continued until, in 1933, it met with the utter disaster of the Nazi coup in Germany.

In response to the Nazi coup, the Comintern shifted again onto the terrain of unity through self-censorship. Dimitrov’s speech to the 1935 7th Congress of the Comintern introducing the new perspective contains a striking passage:

“‘The communists attack us,’ say others. But listen, we have repeatedly declared: We shall not attack anyone, whether persons, organisations or parties, standing for the united front of the working class against the class enemy. But at the same time it is our duty, in the interests of the proletariat and its cause, to criticise those persons, organisations and parties that hinder unity of action by the workers.”

In fact, the Comintern went beyond unity through self-censorship and fudges to the concept of the ‘anti-fascist people’s front’. In doing so, they had decisively abandoned the early Comintern’s concept in which the united *workers* front was opposed to the coalitionism of the German SPD and the French Cartel des Gauches. They had, indeed, begun to situate themselves on the terrain of the coalitionist strategy of the old right wing of the Second International. This meant in turn that they had begun to abandon the whole strategic line of *Marxism as such*: that is, that the only road to socialism is the self-emancipation of the working class as a class.

Why did this happen? In retrospect, Trotsky and the Trotskyists analysed these shifts as driven by the evolution of the policy – in particularly foreign policy – of the Soviet bureaucracy and carried into effect by top-down bureaucratic control in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and Comintern. However, since 1945, we have seen repeated examples of Trotskyist organisations performing the same flip-flops between unity on the basis of self-censorship, followed by a sudden ‘leftist’ shift into ‘third period’ denunciations of the right wing of the workers’ movement as purely bourgeois and sectarian

Section IV: Party of a New Type?

isolation. Sectarian isolation can equally be followed by a sudden shift into fudged unity on the basis of self-censorship: the evolution of the British SWP since 2000 has been a striking example.

The truth is that the dynamic was not solely driven by the Soviet bureaucracy and Stalinism as a *particular* caste-political form, but also by internal contradictions in the early Comintern policy. The key contradiction is between the ‘united front’ struggle for unity on the basis of freedom of criticism and of party/factional organisation in the *class movement as a whole*, and the 1921 rejection of unity on the basis of freedom of criticism and of factions in the *Communist Party as such* (discussed in more length in chapter five). To see why, it is necessary to go a level deeper into the theoretical grounds for supposing that the united class front is necessary.

The Problem of Unity

The working class *objectively* needs united action and united organisations. This flows from its underlying nature as a class. We saw this point already in chapter one. The proletariat is the whole class dependent on the wage fund, not the workers who happen to be currently employed (let alone any particular sector, such as ‘industrial workers’). Lacking property in the major means of production, workers need to organise collective action in order to defend their interests. That ‘unity is strength’ is therefore the elemental and indispensable basis of workers’ organisation.

But this need encounters two contradictions. The first is that both capital and the working class are *international* in character. A central statement in the 1864 ‘Inaugural address’ of the First International is still unqualifiedly true today: “Past experience has shown how disregard of that bond of brotherhood which ought to exist between the workmen of different countries, and incite them to stand firmly by each other in all their struggles for emancipation, will be chastised by the common discomfiture of their incoherent efforts.”

However, there are within the workers’ movement nationalist socialists and trade unionists loyal to the existing individual nation-states. The result is that there is a contradiction between unity of the working class as an international class and unity in any one country between nationalists and internationalists. The point is well made in Lenin and Zinoviev’s *Socialism and war*: “Unity with the opportunists actually means today subordinating the working class to ‘its’ national bourgeoisie, alliance with it for the purpose of oppressing other nations and of fighting for great-power privileges; it means splitting the revolutionary proletariat in all countries.”

Unity in Diversity

The second contradiction is a little more difficult to explain. We can take it at a high level of abstraction or much more concretely. In abstraction, a workers’ organisation – whether trade union, party or whatever – is not an unconscious ‘organic unity’ like family, clan or peasant village. It is a consciously created unity which grows out of and negates/preserves the individualism of modern capitalist society. In this aspect it foreshadows the future freely associated producers of socialism. But to be a consciously created unity it must inherently be a unity in diversity, an agreement to unite for partial common ends, while recognising the diverse individual opinions and wills. It is, indeed, the partial convergence of the individual opinions and wills which forms the basis of the possibility of consciously created unity.

This dialectic of individual and consciously created collective necessarily entails the possibility of collectives within the collective where – as is inevitable – there come to be disagreements within the larger collective.

At the level of the concrete, a workers’ organisation of any size and geographical extent cannot run under capitalism on the basis of a pure distribution of tasks from meeting to meeting among members who do them in their free time. In the

first place, the capitalists simply do not give workers enough free time, except in the form of pauperising and demoralising unemployment. In the second place, though we *seek to* make everyone a worker-leader, worker-manager or worker-intellectual (synonyms; call it what you will), in fact our ability under capitalism to overcome the petty-proprietor intelligentsia's monopoly of education and managerial and administrative skills is limited.

In practice we have to have full-timers, and these are either members of the intelligentsia/managerial middle class (petty proprietors of intellectual property) by background, or, if they originate as workers, become intelligentsia by training as full-timers. Full-time office itself can, moreover, be a type of property in the form of privileged access to information.

Any workers' organisation under capitalism therefore *inherently* entails a class contradiction between the proletarian ranks and the pretty-proprietor officials. The anarchist 'solution' of dispensing with the full-timers is no solution at all: it either means no organisation or an organisation more completely dominated by members of the intelligentsia by background. The problem – which we already encountered in chapter two as an unsolved problem identified by the anarchists – is to find a road to *subordinating the full-timers to the membership*.

There are several potential elements of such a road. But the main point is this: for the working class ranks to subordinate the middle class officials to themselves, it is utterly indispensable that the ranks have the freedom to organise without the say-so of the officials. We have already seen that organisation is indispensable to the working class pursuing its interests; this is just as true within the organisations that the working class itself creates as it is in the larger society.

This leads to the same conclusion as the first and more abstract point. To retain its character as an effective instrument of the proletariat as a class, a workers' organisation *must* have freedom to organise factions within its ranks. Indeed, the struggle of trends, platforms and factions is a normal and essential means by which its differences are collectivised and a unity created out of them. It must be a unity in diversity.

Unity in diversity can be denied to the movement in three ways. Bureaucratic suppression or exclusion of dissenting factions is an obvious one. Equally obvious is ultimatist refusal of unity for limited common action where that is possible, on the basis that there is insufficient agreement on other tasks.

The third and less obvious, but equally common, way is to fudge differences by diplomatic agreement to windy generalities, or to self-censor and thereby pretend that there is more agreement than there actually is. It was this last course of action which Marx and Engels attacked in their critiques of the 1875 Gotha programme.

Any of these courses of action denies the ranks of the workers' movement the possibility of choosing between opposing views, and is therefore antithetical to a real, effective unity of the movement.

Bureaucratic Centralism Versus the United Front

In effect, the policy of the united front was a struggle for unity in action of the whole working class, combined with the open expression of differences. And this is an objective need of the proletariat not merely for the 'second period' (the restabilisation of capitalism in the mid-1920s), but *under all conditions*. But a deep grasp of this question eluded the Comintern: both the history of the split and the 1921 adoption of the ban on factions precluded it.

The history of the split meant that half the justification offered for the split was to 'purge' the workers' movement of opportunism: this justification is obviously opposed to any form of unity, even partial. The logic of the idea that a split would purge the workers' movement of opportunism was expressed in the sectarianism of the 'third period'.

The ban on factions was itself a direct denial of the need for unity in diversity *in the communist parties and Comintern*. The effect of this ban was that the communist parties came to replicate Blanquist groups or the secret Bakuninist dictatorial conspiracy of 1870-71.

Section IV: Party of a New Type?

This character was perfectly visible to left socialists – some of them ex-communists like Paul Levi – from 1921 onwards.

The Comintern leaders had quite properly asserted that the united front was not a *permanent* policy, but a road to the reunification of the workers' movement on a higher level, represented by the communist parties and International.

But the character of the communist parties under the post-1921 regime meant that they could not express the proletariat's class need for unity in diversity. On the contrary, the bureaucratic dictatorship of the socialist right was now paralleled by a more ferocious bureaucratic dictatorship of the Communist Party apparatuses with its head in Moscow.

Once the communist parties had taken this form, the natural inference was that real unity in diversity was actually *impossible*. Unity in the *party* could not be unity in diversity: therefore, neither could broader unity. This left the only choices available as radical separation ('third period') or 'fudging' or diplomatic unity, in which the communists self-censored to conceal the actual differences between themselves and the left socialist or trade unionist leaders.

Taking diplomatic unity with the right wing of the workers' movement seriously meant, necessarily, fudging over the difference between, on the one hand, the right's coalitionist politics and, on the other, the politics of class independence.

When the Comintern leadership fully accepted this, the result was the politics of the people's front.

Trotskyists and the United Front

Trotsky was intimately involved in the creation of the Comintern policy of the united front. A great deal of his political struggle after he lost out in the battle for the leadership of the Russian Communist Party was focussed on it. His writings on Britain and China in the 1920s attacked the Comintern's diplomatic unity policy. Between 1928 and 1933 he battled in print against 'third period' sectarianism. In 1934, he counterposed the workers' united front to the Comintern's people's front policy, and at the same time battled against the diplomatic, fudging unity approach of the 'London bureau' of left socialist parties and of many of his own co-thinkers in the International Left Opposition and its successor organisations.

But Trotsky – in spite of participating in the Russian left's 1920s criticisms of the party regime – never escaped from the contradiction between the united front policy and the 1920 and 1921 theses on the organisational character of the communist parties. He internalised firmly the idea that before 1917 Lenin was right and he was wrong on the party question, and clung to the policies of the first four Congresses of the Comintern as an anchor in the shifting seas of the politics of the grouplets outside the mainstream of the socialist and communist parties.

The Trotskyists started with micro-groups. When they got bigger, they tended to 'Bolshevise' their parties, creating an overt or covert dictatorship of their petty bureaucracies. To such organisations a real commitment to unity in diversity of the workers' movement was as inconceivable as it was to the Stalinists. Unity had to be diplomatic: the alternative was sectarian self-isolation.

But the history of Trotsky's struggle for the united front policy meant that even in sectarian self-isolation the Trotskyists tended both (a) to attach themselves to sections of the mass movement, while self-censoring and hiding their own banner (as in Labour Party entry and similar tactics), and (b) to create 'fronts' which purported to be 'united fronts' of the left, but were in fact bureaucratically controlled by particular Trotskyist organisations: the Healyites' 'All Trade Union Alliance', the International Socialists-SWP's 'Rank and File Movements', the Lambertistes' 'Parti des Travailleurs' ('Workers' Party') and so on and on...

The Mandelites actually constructed a theory which justifies diplomatic unity: Bensaid/Jebrac's *dialectique d'unité et débordement* (dialectic of unity and overflowing, or outflanking). This theory was plagiarised by both John Ross and Tony Cliff and thereby found its way into the common sense of the British far left.

In this theory, the united front is a tactic and one applicable by a small group, rather than a policy for the whole of the working class. (Diplomatic) unity with the reformists, or a section of them, makes it possible to set the masses in motion in a particular struggle. The Trotskyists then demonstrate to these masses that they are better fighters for *this particular struggle*, and/or that they will not draw back from carrying *this particular struggle* to the end. As a result, the mobilised masses then turn to the Trotskyists.

The theory justifies diplomatic unity because the masses break with the reformists “in action, not in ideas”: with the implication that they do so in relation to their particular struggles. Unity with the reformists is essential to set the masses in motion; and on the particular struggles it is unnecessary for the Trotskyists to offer sharp criticism of the reformists, which might prevent unity: the mass struggle will find the reformists out.

Numerous Trotskyist groups endeavour to practise this ‘theory of the united front’ which has very little in common with the Comintern’s policy. The SWP, for example, has used it to justify its policies in the Anti-Nazi League, the Socialist Alliance, the anti-globalisation movement and Respect.

The underlying problem is that it is a variant of the sub-Bakuninist mass strike strategy discussed in chapter two. Once the masses, or even quite small layers of newly radicalising militants, actually begin to enter the political stage, they demand of the left not ‘good fighters’ on the particular struggle, but an *alternative political authority*. At once, this poses the question of a party in (at least) the Kautskyian sense. This requires addressing the full range of questions affecting the society as a whole.

Followers of the Bensaid/Jebrac version of the ‘united front’ are inherently obsessed with ‘action’ as the road to overcoming the reformists, and therefore debar themselves from offering such answers. They also *hold back* militants who wish to go beyond the narrow aims of the particular struggle. The result is that, far from turning to the Trotskyists, these militants turn to parties which are prepared to offer broader policies.

The version of the ‘united front’ defended by ‘New Left Trotskyists’ has another and equally disastrous character. The Comintern policy of the united front is about unity of the working class movement as a whole. It is not about the sort of blocs of grouplets and prominent individual leftists which ‘New Left Trotskyists’ call ‘united fronts’. Such blocs and agreements may, of course, be useful tactics. But dignifying them with the name of ‘the united front’ provides an excuse for sectarianism to present itself as ‘non-sectarian’. It also *abandons to the reformist right the idea of unity of the working class movement as a whole*.

The split between communists, loyal to the working class as an international class, and coalitionist socialists, loyal to the nation-state, will never be ‘healed’ as long as communists insist on organising to fight for their ideas. The policy of the united workers’ front is therefore an essential element of strategy in the fight for workers’ power.

But this policy can only make sense as part of a larger struggle for unity in diversity. And this struggle is a struggle against – among other things – the Trotskyists’ concept of the united front.

A Faction is Not a Party

by Lars T. Lih

Weekly Worker and May 2, 2012

Did the Bolsheviks seek to create a 'party of a new type' in 1912? Lars T Lih looks at the historical record

In recent online debate, the question of Lenin's thoughts on the relation between Bolshevism and the party as a whole has come up frequently. I would like to shed some light on this question by examining his views at three different points: 1912, 1917 and 1920. In this first installment I look at material from 1912.

Lenin's views on this topic in the years before World War I can be summed up succinctly: Bolshevism was a faction (*fraktsia*), a part of a larger whole: namely, the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP). Bolshevism was a party within the party: just as the RSDLP stood for a specific platform within the society at large, Bolshevism stood for a specific set of tactical views within the larger Social Democratic whole. Like a political party vis-à-vis society, the Bolshevik faction had particular views about how to run the party: it propagated those views and tried to ensure that the central party institutions were inspired by them. But even if Bolshevism had control of the central committee, it did not become the party. One could still be a member of the party, but not a Bolshevik – in fact, this was seen as the normal situation. *Fraktsia ne est' partiia*: a faction is not a party.

But, one may ask, if these were the views of Lenin and other Bolsheviks, what about the Prague conference of January 1912, when the Bolsheviks attained a large majority on the central committee? Aren't we assured by many writers today that this conference represented the creation of a new Bolshevik Party, where the former *fraktsia* became the whole *partiia*? Nevertheless, if we look at sources from the period, one thing becomes overwhelmingly clear: Lenin and the Bolsheviks as a whole did not set out to create a Bolshevik Party, did not think they had created a Bolshevik Party, and denied strenuously that they had organised the conference for this purpose. Not only was this outcome not a goal: it hardly even made sense to them.

Recently Paul Le Blanc has written a long and instructive essay on the Prague conference which concludes that "for all practical purposes, the party that emerged from the Prague All-Russian RSDLP conference of 1912 was a Bolshevik party".²⁷⁷ The key words here are "for all practical purposes". Paul points to a number of reasons for equating Bolshevism and the party: the new central committee was composed overwhelmingly of Bolsheviks; the Bolshevik effort to forge a coalition with "party Mensheviks" never amounted to much; the other factions did not acknowledge the legitimacy of the central institutions voted in by the Prague conference and they tried (not very successfully) to set up competing institutions; there is direct organisational continuity between the 1912 central committee and the Communist Party of 1918 that added 'Bolshevik' to its official name.

All this is true, but in no way clashes with my earlier statement about the outlook and aims of Lenin and the Bolsheviks in 1912. Paul's argument to the contrary is partly a matter of sources. He says he is relying on "primary sources", by which he means material coming from direct participants in party life before the war. But he relies overwhelmingly on sources written *after the event* and particularly after the Russian Revolution of 1917. Using memoirs and other after-the-event sources is always tricky, but there are a number of reasons why they are particularly unreliable in the case of the Prague conference. By the 1920s, there were indeed two parties, leading to a tendency to retroject current views back to the earlier

²⁷⁷ P Le Blanc, 'The birth of the Bolshevik Party in 1912': <http://links.org.au/node/2832>.

situation. Furthermore, and most importantly, by the 1920s the whole idea of having factions in the party was delegitimised.

Another reason why later sources are unreliable is that the internal party situation in 1912 was insanely complicated. A historian friend of mine told me that he “couldn’t get his head ahead around 1912” – and that was my own attitude before I got so fascinated by the topic that I took a couple of months off simply to absorb the details necessary to read documents from the period. Many later sources spend only a sentence or a paragraph on inner-party conflicts in 1910-14 (the most useful memoirs are those that have the space to describe party life during this period in detail). We should be aware that any source that reduces the conflict to ‘Bolsheviks vs Mensheviks’ is radically over-simplifying. (I too will be forced to vastly simplify the situation in order to bring out the main point.)

Paul Le Blanc does use one source that comes directly from the pre-war period: Lenin’s own writings. I think that if you take all of Paul’s references directly to Lenin’s writings, a rather different picture emerges than the one set forth in his own main conclusions. For example, he accurately notes that in 1912 Lenin did not yet contest the legitimacy of having an opportunist wing in a social democratic party – which leaves us with the strange picture of Lenin creating a Bolshevik Party in which opportunism was allowed.

Nevertheless, I believe that Paul does not sufficiently allow for the possibility that the Bolshevik *outlook* in 1912 cannot be directly deduced from what turned out to be, “for all practical purposes”, the actual outcome. In my own essay, I will bring out some themes from the writings of Lenin and others that Paul has not brought out or not sufficiently emphasised. In doing so, I will make heavy use of the Lenin material made available in Paul’s own excellent Lenin anthology *Revolution, democracy, socialism* (London 2008).

One other point about sources before beginning. As mentioned above, the Soviet Communist Party radically delegitimised factions within the party. The regime was therefore embarrassed by the way Lenin and others talked about factions during this period. To lessen the embarrassment, at least in translation, they simply refused to translate *fraktsiiia* as ‘faction’, but relied on euphemisms such as ‘group’ or ‘section’. I have found instances of this practice in translations from Lenin, Stalin and Krupskaya. In the discussion below, I have corrected these falsified translations.

Fraktsiiia ne est’ Partiia

One document touching on our theme is worth quoting at length, since Lenin sets out his views unambiguously on the difference between the party and a faction. The scene is a meeting of the Bolshevik faction in 1909. Lenin is arguing that a faction – defined as a group with “a specific tactical physiognomy” – can exclude members on criteria that would be improper for the party (the text is taken from *Revolution, democracy, socialism* pp 202-03, retranslated when necessary):

In our party Bolshevism is represented by the Bolshevik faction. But a faction is not a party. A party can contain a whole gamut of opinions and shades of opinion, the extremes of which may be sharply contradictory. In the German party, side by side with the pronouncedly revolutionary wing of Kautsky, we see the ultra-revisionist wing of Bernstein. That is not the case with a faction. A faction in a party is a group of like-minded persons formed for the purpose primarily of influencing the party in a definite direction, for the purpose of securing acceptance for their principles in the party in the purest possible form. For this, real unanimity of opinion is necessary. The different standards we set for the unity of a party and the unity of a faction must be grasped by everyone who wants to know how the question of the internal discord in the Bolshevik faction really stands.

Lenin then advances his idea that ‘liquidationism’ and Menshevism should not be equated, since “a minority of Mensheviks” is also anti-liquidationist. He assures his Bolshevik audience that he is not going soft on Menshevism:

There is no question of sinking our tactical differences with the Mensheviks. We are fighting and shall continue to fight most strenuously against Menshevik deviations from the line of revolutionary social democracy. Need-

Section IV: Party of a New Type?

less to say, there is no question of the Bolshevik faction dissolving its identity in the party. The Bolsheviks have done a good deal toward making partyist positions dominant, but much remains to be done in the same direction. The Bolshevik faction as a definite ideological trend in the party must exist as before.

Lenin ends by praising the Bolsheviks for being the faction most dedicated to “preserving and consolidating” the party: that is, repelling challenges to its basic programme and institutions. Precisely because of this role, “in this hour of adversity it would be truly a crime on our part not to extend our hand to partyists in other factions who are coming out in defence of Marxism and partyism against liquidationism”.

Lenin could not be clearer: a faction is a different sort of entity than the party, with very distinct criteria for membership. The current danger to the party does not arise out of the tactical views that define the Menshevik faction. The fight against these tactical views must continue, but in a very different spirit than the fight against liquidationism. The Bolsheviks should seek to lead the party, but certainly not become the party.

If Lenin consciously set out in 1912 to create a Bolshevik Party, then he must have radically altered his views on these subjects between 1909 and 1912. Did he? In her memoirs, Nadezhda Krupskaya offers her opinion on this topic:

The experience of the Capri school had shown how often the factionalism of the workers was relative and idiosyncratic. The thing was to have a united party centre, around which all the social democratic worker masses could rally. The struggle in 1910 was a struggle waged for the very existence of the party, for exercising influence on the workers through the medium of the party. Vladimir Ilych never doubted that within the party the Bolsheviks would be in the majority, that in the end the party would follow the Bolshevik path, but this would have to be a party and not a faction. Ilych took the same line in 1911, when a party school was being organised near Paris to which Vperyod-ists and partyist-Mensheviks as well as Bolsheviks were admitted. The same line was pursued at the Prague party conference in 1912. Not a faction, but a party carrying out a Bolshevik line.

Paul Le Blanc gives some of the passage (in the misleading Soviet-era translation) and comments: “By ‘not a group’ Krupskaya seems to mean not simply a factional fragment, but rather the entire RSDLP.” Paul’s comment is correct as it stands, but it should not be taken to mean that Krupskaya wanted the Bolshevik faction to become “the entire RSDLP”. Just the opposite: she envisions the Bolsheviks fighting for their views, *not* by declaring themselves the party, but rather by convincing the majority of the party.

Consider the following sentence from the passage just quoted: “The struggle in 1910 was a struggle waged for the very existence of the party, for exercising influence on the workers through the medium of the party.” The struggle discussed here by Krupskaya was not over *which* views, Bolshevik or Menshevik, should be propagated by the party. That was a different, more normal, less existential struggle. Rather it was about a perceived threat to the very institutional existence of an underground party and its mission of propagating the basic social democratic programme shared by both Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. Just for this reason the Bolsheviks could appeal to right-minded Mensheviks to join them in their struggle.

When put alongside Lenin’s pronouncements from 1909, we find that Krupskaya is stating with extraordinary clarity that Lenin did not change his views between 1909 and 1912 and that he continued to see a *fundamental difference in kind* between a faction and the party.

Two Parties

In the memoirs of the Georgian Menshevik, Gregory Uratadze, we find the following accurate description of party affairs in this period:

A fiercer struggle blazed up around ‘liquidationism’ than around Bolshevism and Menshevism. The party lexicon was enriched by new terms: ‘liquidator’, ‘anti-liquidator’, ‘partyist’ [someone who wanted to preserve the

*underground], ‘Leninist partyists’, ‘Bolshevik partyists’, ‘Menshevik partyists’, ‘liquidator undergrounders’, ‘Trotskyist-partyist’, ‘Trotskyist liquidators’, ‘Plekhanov liquidators’, and so on. And all this in one party!*²⁷⁸

The terms ‘liquidationism’ and ‘liquidator’ were important enough to generate corresponding terms for their opponents: *partiinost* and *partiets*, which can be translated as ‘partyism’ and ‘partyist’. The partyists claimed that they were defending the very existence of the party from attack. This is the reason why the liquidationist-partyist divide was so passionate and why, as Uratadze shows, it cut across the usual factional lines.

The Bolshevik attack on liquidationism can be summed up by saying that this tendency posed an existential threat to the party and that therefore other factional differences should not interfere with a coordinated fight against it. The case against liquidationism had two major headings:

5. By repudiating the need for an illegal underground, the liquidators put into jeopardy the very existence of a social democratic party that preached socialism and anti-tsarist revolution – views that could not be expressed legally in Stolypin’s Russia (Stolypin was the prime minister in Russia during much of this period).
6. The liquidators were also guilty of sabotaging efforts to revive central leadership bodies and they had done their best to prevent the resuscitation of the central committee or the calling of an all-party conference.

We do not need to pronounce a verdict on the justice of these accusations. The point is that the Bolsheviks claimed that, unlike normal factional struggles to control party policies, the liquidators posed a threat to the very existence of the party (in Krupskaya’s words) as a “medium” for “exercising influence over the workers.”

The case against liquidationism is set forth in the rather extensive (over 200 pages) *Two parties*, written by Lev Kamenev in 1911: that is, at the very time the Prague conference was being organised. As Kamenev relates, his book was written in close consultation with Lenin. It can therefore be called a manifesto in which the Bolsheviks explained what they were trying to accomplish with the Prague conference.

In 1924, when the book was republished (just when the anti-Trotsky polemics it contained would do most good, from Kamenev’s point of view), he wrote in the preface of the reprint: “The title of the whole work – Two parties – points to the fact that, despite the formal unity of the party, we looked on the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks not as two factions of one and the same party, but as two hostile parties fighting each other.”²⁷⁹

This is a good example of retrospective tidying-up. In the preface to the first edition of 1911, Kamenev wrote something rather different:

*As firm proponents of the most merciless ideological struggle against groups and grouplets that are nourished by the counterrevolutionary atmosphere, we are also equally firm proponents of the unity under the banner of the party of all revolutionary Marxists – irrespective of faction and tendency and in spite of these or those differences on concrete questions of current politics . . . The RSDLP must apply its energy and all its strength toward helping and serving in a comprehensive way, irrespective of faction and tendency, all worker circles, groups and associations, legally or illegally working toward the resurrection and strengthening of proletarian organisation in Russia [my emphasis].*²⁸⁰

The contrast is striking. In 1924, Kamenev says that he argued for regarding Mensheviks as a separate and hostile party. When we read what he actually wrote in 1911, we find he appeals to all social democrats “without distinction of

²⁷⁸ G Uratadze *Reminiscences of a Georgian Social Democrat* Stanford 1968, p218 (my translation).

²⁷⁹ L Kamenev *Dve partii* Paris 1911 (my translation).

²⁸⁰ L Kamenev *Dve partii* Leningrad 1924.

Section IV: Party of a New Type?

faction” to join the fight against liquidationism. In fact, Kamenev insists that ever since 1909 the idea of reaching out to the partyist-Mensheviks has “determined the whole internal party course of the Bolsheviks”.²⁸¹

Kamenev is saying as insistently as he can: you don’t have to be a Bolshevik to support our drive to exclude the liquidators. Our motive is *not* to impose specifically Bolshevik views on the party, but rather to save the party for all of us.

²⁸¹ Ibid p103.

The slogan “two parties” was therefore not a call to create a new party – and certainly not to create a new party designed to propagate specifically Bolshevik views. In fact, this slogan represented an attempt to defend the old party against people who (Kamenev claimed) were trying to build a new party. Kamenev is saying to the liquidators: go ahead and create your new party – no doubt there are people who will support it – but don’t do it in a way that wrecks the RSDLP.

Perhaps the objection will be made that the “partyist Mensheviks” were actually a very small minority and that “for all practical purposes” the Bolshevik wager on a coalition with them failed. This objection is factually based (at least if we restrict ourselves to émigré politics), but nevertheless it does not challenge my description of *what the Bolsheviks thought they were doing*. They thought they were creating a cross-factional bloc against a specific existential threat to the very functioning of the party. In 1910, for example, Lenin says in a letter that he thinks that Menshevik workers in Russia itself were overwhelmingly partyist. In 1915, even after many disappointments with Plekhanov (the one party leader associated with Menshevik partyism), he still wrote that “the best Mensheviks” were revolted by liquidationism.

Lenin really believed in the possibility of such a cross-factional bloc. Hostile observers at the time and later thought all that this talk of ‘party Menshevism’ was a ruse and an excuse to obtain an all-Bolshevik party. Underneath it all, they say, he equated liquidationism with Menshevism as such. It seems to me that anyone who says that Lenin was consciously creating a Bolshevik Party is committed to a similar view about Lenin’s duplicity.

Party of a New Type

A split in a party can be justified on two very different grounds. One is: your views are unacceptable; you must go. The other is: only my views are acceptable, only my group can stay. The first view excludes a specific group. The second view excludes all except a specific group.

Which type of justification was used at the Prague conference? Clearly, the first one. Besides all the arguments I have just reviewed, we can point to the resolutions of the conference, in which only a very specific group of writers grouped around a couple of newspapers were pronounced “outside of the party”.

This type of exclusion was not incompatible with the practice of ‘parties of an old type’, if by that we mean the social democratic parties of western Europe during the Second International. These parties had been set up to propagate a certain message, and they were willing to cast off groups that denied the essentials of this message .most famously, in the case of the anarchists in the 1890s. In his defence of the Prague conference, Lenin brought up this episode, along with other actions of discipline and exclusion undertaken by western social democratic parties.

Lenin further insisted that he was not trying to exclude the opportunists in general – in other words, he was not trying to purge the Menshevik faction as a whole. Any such description of what he was trying to do, he told European socialists, was a vile slander. He insisted that no European party would have tolerated the sabotage and indiscipline attributable to the liquidationists for a second. Like the song says: “If you’d have been there, if you’d have seen it, you would have done the same.”

There is a long-standing interpretation of what happened at the Prague conference: namely, that it inaugurated a ‘party of a new type’, one that contrasted strongly with the social democratic parties of the old type by a new emphasis on *homogeneity*. The logic of exclusion is now said to be the second type, according to which one faction becomes the entire party. The logic that Lenin earlier restricted to the *faction* – unanimity of outlook by “like-minded individuals” – was now (so it is claimed) extended to the party as a whole. From now on, only those who agreed with Bolshevism were welcome in the party.

This interpretation was enshrined in the famous *Short course* of party history created by Stalin’s government in the late 30s. Obviously, it was congenial to a regime that had delegitimised factions within the party. Unfortunately, it was

Section IV: Party of a New Type?

also at odds with historical documents – so much so that the records of the Prague conference were not even published until the late 1980s. This same logic of a ‘party of a new type’ is also central to the interpretation of the work of Carter Elwood, the main academic investigator of the Prague conference.

In his Lenin anthology, Paul Le Blanc writes:

The RSDLP was hopelessly divided by factions of liquidator and non-liquidator Mensheviks, Leninist and anti-Leninist Bolsheviks, and others – including a faction against factionalism led by Trotsky! Lenin and those around him conclude that effective revolutionary work could not be accomplished by such an entity, and in 1912 they reorganised themselves as the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, distinctive from all other entities bearing that name . . . (p198).

Le Blanc explicitly rejects the ‘party of a new type’ interpretation. Nevertheless, his words might be read (incorrectly, I believe) as implying that Lenin regarded a multi-factional party as *per se* ineffective, so that he made sure that only one faction remained in his new “reorganised” party. Le Blanc fails to make clear enough that Lenin’s case was rather that party work was made ineffective, not by the profusion of factions, but by the doings of one particular group: namely, the liquidators.

Lenin recognised that there were many people in the party who were opposed to the liquidators, but who disagreed with the necessity of excluding them – or perhaps simply disagreed with his method of excluding them. These people had to make a choice, but Lenin was nevertheless perfectly happy to have them in the party and he cannot be said to have excluded them in any meaningful way.

In my opinion, the argument over whether or not the Bolshevik Party was created in 1912 is less important than strongly rejecting any ‘party of a new type’ interpretation and any assertion that Lenin was now applying the logic appropriate to factions to the party as a whole. The historical record overwhelmingly shows that, as of 1912, Lenin believed that “A fraction is not a party.”

Usurpation or Continuity?

In a section of his anthology that he entitles ‘Final break with the Mensheviks’, Le Blanc gives us Lenin’s report to the western European socialists about the recent Prague conference. In this report, Lenin has this to say about the process of organising the conference: “In all, 20 organisations established close ties with the organising commission convening this conference: that is to say, practically all the organisations, both Menshevik and Bolshevik, active in Russia at the present time” (p204).

A funny way of organising a final break with the Mensheviks, one might think: making a good-faith effort to represent all Russian underground organisations regardless of faction. The paradox goes further, since Lenin insisted on continuity between the leadership institutions elected at Prague and the older party. He claimed that the central committee elected at Prague was the authoritative representative of that party and the faithful executor of earlier party decisions (especially party conferences in 1908 and 1910, in which Mensheviks participated and agreed to the relevant resolutions).

If the purpose of the Prague conference was to set up a Bolshevik Party, then Lenin was making a strikingly arrogant claim to possession of the mutual patrimony of both Mensheviks and Bolsheviks. And indeed a common hostile label for him within the party was ‘usurper’. If his aim really was to set up a distinct Bolshevik entity, this label seems appropriate.

In Paul D'Amato's contribution to the recent discussion, he acknowledges that the way Lenin described his activities to European socialists was duplicitous, if in fact Lenin was doing what D'Amato claims he was doing.²⁸² D'Amato evidently justifies this duplicity as all in a good cause. In any event, I think he has a better insight into the problem than Paul Le Blanc, who does not seem to recognise any contradiction between his description of Lenin's activities (setting up a 'distinct Bolshevik entity') and Lenin's own description in the report to the Second International.

Whether or not the Bolsheviks actually did make a good-faith effort to organise a true 'all-party conference' is a vexed question. In my own survey of documents from the period, I was impressed by the Bolsheviks' consistent and energetic insistence that they were not organising a factional conference. Some non-Bolshevik opinion also partially supported their claim to represent at least the underground organisations of Russia proper.

I will add the strictly personal opinion I have expressed elsewhere: if indeed Lenin wanted to create a Bolshevik Party, he set about it in a way that was deceptive, disloyal, destructive and not to be imitated.

After Prague

Looking at social democratic activity between January 1912 (the date of the Prague conference) and 1914, I do not find much evidence that people were thinking in terms of two separate parties. Rather, people continued to think of the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks as two factions of a single party, factions with separate organisations and devoted (as they always had been) to destructive internecine warfare, but who still thought of themselves as parts of an ill-defined but meaningful whole. In other words, the post-1912 situation did not seem qualitatively new.

A couple of examples, just to show what I mean. A month or so after Prague, the newspaper set up by the conference, Pravda, published its first issue, which contained an editorial – written, as it happens, by Iosif Stalin – which made a bid for party unity irrespective of faction. In the fight between Pravda and its rival Luch over the choice of social democratic candidates for the upcoming legislative elections, both sides based their pitch on the idea of party unity. Pravda called for party discipline, and Luch called for a common front.

During 1912-14, Lenin often defended the legitimacy of the Pravdists (NB: not the Bolsheviks as such) by saying that they represented a large majority of social democratic workers in Russia. That is to say, despite the exclusion of certain 'liquidator' groups at the Prague conference, Lenin still automatically thought in terms of an opportunist minority among the workers as a legitimate part of social democracy, even though misguided.

In his history of the party, written in the 1920s, Zinoviev makes what I consider to be misleading comments about Prague as "the moment of complete rupture with the Mensheviks" (for example, he also says, quite incorrectly, that there were no Mensheviks present at the conference). It is therefore quite revealing that immediately after making the comment just quoted, he goes on to say: "the final break from the Mensheviks came not in 1912, but in 1917 ... Up till that minute everyone thought that after the fall of tsarism social democracy would manage to unite itself and that the Bolsheviks would merge with the Mensheviks."²⁸³

I have reported my impressions, but certainly this is a topic that could use more research.

²⁸² See P D'Amato, 'The mangling of Tony Cliff': <http://links.org.au/node/2726>; and my comment in 'Falling out over a Cliff' Weekly Worker February 16.

²⁸³ G Zinoviev History of the Bolshevik Party: a popular outline London 1973 (original Russian edition 1923), p12. The citation can also be found at www.marxists.org/archive/zinoviev/works/history/ch01.htm. Zinoviev's discussion in his history lectures of different possible birth dates for the Bolshevik Party is highly relevant to the present discussion of 1912.

Section IV: Party of a New Type?

To conclude: Paul Le Blanc makes a good case that after Prague, the RSDLP was “to all practical purposes” a Bolshevik Party. But this conclusion tells us nothing about how Lenin and the Bolsheviks viewed the relation between faction and party. The historical record is hardly ambiguous on this point: they believed (or acted as if they believed) that a faction and the party were different kinds of things – the Bolsheviks were a faction and not a party, and the Prague conference was in truth what it claimed to be: namely, an all-party conference. They rejected as a slander the idea that they were purging the party of opportunism. They did not think in terms of a ‘party of a new type’, but instead justified what they were doing by norms common to the Second International as a whole.

We are free to accept or reject these views, but not free, I think, to claim that the Bolsheviks did not hold them.

The Myth of Lenin's "Concept of The Party" or What They Did to *What Is To Be Done?*

by Hal Draper (1990)

The myth for today is an axiom of what we may call Leninology – a branch of Kremlinology that has rapidly grown in the hands of the various university Russian Institutes, doctoral programs, political journalists, et al. According to this axiom, Lenin's 1902 book *What Is To Be Done?* (for short, WITBD) represents the essential content of his “operational code” or “concept of the party”; all of Bolshevism and eventually Stalinism lies in ambush in its pages; it is the canonical work of “Leninism” on party organization, which in turn bears the original sin of totalitarianism. It establishes the “Leninist type of party” as an authoritarian structure controlled from the top by “professional revolutionaries” of upper-class provenance lording it over a proletarian rank and file.

My focus here will be on WITBD itself, and on Lenin's views and practices in the period between WITBD and the Russian Revolution. Issues ramifying farther into the inevitable multitude of questions will not be treated in the same detail.

The Leninological axiom under discussion is commonly reinforced from two directions. As was pointed out by the prominent Leninologist Utechin, WITBD is given a similar exalted position in the party schools of the Stalinist regime. In fact, Utechin's way of demonstrating the basic importance of WITBD is to quote the Kremlin's official History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on this point. The work, says Utechin (much like other Leninologists), “became a guide-book for his followers in matters of organization, strategy and tactics and ... has been adhered to by Communists ever since. Lenin himself consistently applied these views... In WITBD ... his argument has a general validity and has in fact been generally applied by Communists...” In short, both the Western Leninologists and the Stalinists agree that Lenin's book was a totalitarian bible: which is not surprising but does not settle the matter.

“Lenin himself consistently applied these views”: we will see how far from the truth this lies. My subject is not my own interpretation of WITBD, but a survey of Lenin's own opinions, recorded many times, on the question raised, viz., the place of WITBD in his thought. According to the myth, endlessly repeated from book to book, Lenin's “concept of the party” –

7. saw the party as consisting mainly of “intellectuals,” on the basis of a theory according to which workers cannot themselves develop to socialist consciousness; rather, the socialist idea is always and inevitably imported into the movement by bourgeois intellectuals;
8. posited that the party is simply a band of “professional revolutionaries” as distinct from a broad working-class party;
9. repudiated any element of spontaneity or spontaneous movement, in favor of engineered revolution only;
10. required that the party be organized not democratically but as a bureaucratic or semi-military hierarchy.

In point of fact, we will see that these allegations are contrary to Lenin's views as many times repeated and explained by him, beginning with WITBD itself. We will indeed begin with WITBD, where we will find something different from the myth. But even more important, it must be understood that WITBD was not Lenin's last word – it was closer to being his first word. It is only the Leninologists who write as if WITBD were the sum-total of Lenin's writings on the issue.

We will find, for example, that Lenin protested more than once that his initial formulations in WITBD were being distorted and misinterpreted by opponents, after which he went on to clarify and modify. If we want to know Lenin's

"concept of the party" we must look at the formulations he came to, after there had been discussions and attacks. There is not a single prominent Leninologist who has even mentioned this material in his exposition of WITBD's original sin.

1. Socialist Consciousness and Intellectuals

Let us start with the myth which claims that, according to Lenin's views in 1902 and forever, the workers cannot come to socialist ideas of themselves, that only bourgeois intellectuals are the carriers of socialist ideas.

We will be eager to see what WITBD actually said on this point; but there is an introductory point to be made beforehand.

1. It is a curious fact that no one has ever found this alleged theory anywhere else in Lenin's voluminous writings, not before and not after WITBD. It never appeared in Lenin again. No Leninologist has ever quoted such a theory from any other place in Lenin.

This should give pause at least. In ordinary research, a scholar would tend to conclude that, even if Lenin perhaps held this theory in 1902, he soon abandoned it. The scholar would at least report this interesting fact, and even perhaps try to explain it. The Leninologists do not behave in this fashion. On the contrary, they endlessly repeat that the virtually nonexistent theory (nonexistent after WITBD) is the crux of Leninism forever and onward – though they never quote anything other than WITBD. (The explanation for the curious fact itself will emerge from the points that follow.)

1. Did Lenin put this theory forward even in WITBD? Not exactly.

The fact is that Lenin had just read this theory in the most prestigious theoretical organ of Marxism of the whole international socialist movement, the *Neue Zeit*. It had been put forward in an important article by the leading Marxist authority of the International, Karl Kautsky. And this was why and how it got into WITBD. In WITBD Lenin first paraphrased Kautsky. Then he quoted a long passage from Kautsky's article, almost a page long. Here is Kautsky, whom Lenin then looked up to as the master (some said the "pope") of socialist theory:

"Of course, socialism, as a doctrine, has its roots in modern economic relationships... But socialism and the class struggle arise side by side and not one out of the other; each arises under different conditions. Modern socialist consciousness can arise only on the basis of profound scientific knowledge. Indeed, modern economic science is as much a condition for socialist production as, say, modern technology, and the proletariat can create neither the one nor the other, no matter how much it may desire to do so; both arise out of the modern social process. The vehicle of science is not the proletariat, but the *bourgeois intelligentsia* [emphasis by Kautsky]: it was in the minds of individual members of this stratum that modern socialism originated, and it was they who communicated it to the more intellectually developed proletarians... Thus, socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without and not something that arose within it spontaneously."

There it is – the whole theory laid out, the devilish crux of "Leninism"; and it turns out to be the product of Kautsky's pen! When Lenin paraphrased it a few pages before, he began, "We have said that..." – that is, he tied it up immediately as the accepted view of the movement (or so he seemed to think). His summary was by no means as brash as Kautsky's formulation. But we will return to Lenin's formulation.

Why did Kautsky emphasize this view of socialist history at this time? The reason is perfectly clear: the new reformist wing of the movement, the Bernsteinian Revisionists, were arguing that all one needed was the ongoing movement of the workers, not theory; that the spontaneous class activity of the trade-union movement and other class movements was enough. “The movement is everything, the goal is nothing” was Bernstein’s dictum, thereby seeking to shelve theoretical considerations in favor of shortsighted concentration on the day-to-day problems. Reform was the concern of today (the movement); revolution had to do with tomorrow (theory).

Kautsky’s generalization about the role of the “bourgeois intelligentsia” in importing socialist ideas into the raw class movement was one way, in his eyes, of undercutting the Revisionist approach. And this, of course, gave it equal appeal for other opponents of the new right wing, like Lenin.

It is no part of my subject to explain why Kautsky was misguided in this line of argument, and why his theory was based on a historical half-truth. But it is curious, at any rate, that no one has sought to prove that by launching this theory (which he never repudiated, as far as I know) Kautsky was laying the basis for the demon of totalitarianism.

1. So it turns out that the crucial “Leninist” theory was really Kautsky’s, as is clear enough to anyone who really reads WITBD instead of relying only on the Leninological summaries. Did Lenin, in WITBD, adopt Kautsky’s theory?

Again, not exactly. Certainly he tried to get maximum mileage out of it against the right wing; this was the point of his quoting it. If it did something for Kautsky’s polemic, he no doubt figured that it would do something for his. Certainly this young man Lenin was not (yet) so brash as to attack his “pope” or correct him overtly. But there was obviously a feeling of discomfort. While showing some modesty and attempting to avoid the appearance of a head-on criticism, the fact is that Lenin inserted two longish footnotes rejecting (or if you wish, amending) precisely what was worst about the Kautsky theory on the role of the proletariat.

The first footnote was appended right after the Kautsky passage quoted above. It was specifically formulated to undermine and weaken the theoretical content of Kautsky’s position. It began: “This does not mean, of course, that the workers have no part in creating such an ideology.” But this was exactly what Kautsky did mean and say. In the guise of offering a caution, Lenin was proposing a modified view. “They [the workers] take part, however,” Lenin’s footnote continued, “not as workers, but as socialist theoreticians, as Proudhons and Weitlings; in other words, they take part only when they are able...” In short, Lenin was reminding the reader that Kautsky’s sweeping statements were not even 100% true historically; he pointed to exceptions. But he went on to a more important point: once you get beyond the original initiation of socialist ideas, what is the role of intellectuals and workers? (More on this in the next point.) Lenin’s second footnote was not directly tied to the Kautsky article, but discussed the “spontaneity” of the socialist idea. “It is often said,” Lenin began, “that the working class spontaneously gravitates towards socialism. This is perfectly true in the sense that socialist theory reveals the causes of the misery of the working class ... and for that reason the workers are able to assimilate it so easily,” but he reminded that this process itself was not subordinated to mere spontaneity. “The working class spontaneously gravitates towards socialism; nevertheless ... bourgeois ideology spontaneously imposes itself upon the working class to a still greater degree.”

This second footnote was obviously written to modify and recast the Kautsky theory, without coming out and saying that the Master was wrong. There are several things that happen "spontaneously," and what will win out is not decided only by spontaneity! – so went the modification. It cannot be overemphasized that if one wants to analyze Lenin's developing views about "spontaneity" one cannot stick at this by-play in WITBD, but rather one must go on to examine precisely what the developing views were going to be. All that was clear at this point was that Lenin was justifiably dissatisfied with the formulation of Kautsky's theory, however conveniently anti-Bernstein it might have been. We will see more about his dissatisfaction.

1. Even Kautsky's theory, as quoted in WITBD, was not as crass as the Leninologists make it out to be (while calling it Lenin's theory, to be sure). The Leninologists run two different questions together: (a) What was, historically, the initial role of intellectuals in the beginnings of the socialist movement, and (b) what is – and above all, what should be – the role of bourgeois intellectuals in a working-class party today.

Kautsky was not so ignorant or dull-witted as to believe (as so many Leninologists apparently do) that if it can be shown that intellectuals historically played a certain initiatory role, they must and should continue to play the same role now and forever. It does not follow; as the working class matured, it tended to throw off leading strings. The Leninologists do not argue this point because they do not see it is there.

As a matter of fact, in the International of 1902 no one really had any doubts about the historical facts concerning the beginnings of the movement. But what followed from those facts? Marx for one (or Marx and Engels for two) concluded, from the same facts and subsequent experiences, that the movement had to be sternly warned against the influence of bourgeois intellectuals inside the party. "Precisely in Germany these are the most dangerous people," they averred. The historical facts were so many reasons to take the dangers seriously, to combat intellectuals' predominance as a social stratum in the movement.

1. No one in the international movement was more forceful or frequent than Lenin in decrying and combating the spread of intellectuals' influence in the movement. This is easy to demonstrate, but I will not take the space to do so here. In any case a mere couple of well-chosen specimens would not be enough. Just to cull the most virulent passages alone would fill a book. As against this indubitable fact, let us ask a question: can anyone cite any passage in which Lenin ever advocated increased influence, or predominant influence, by intellectuals in the party?

There is no such passage, in point of fact. None is cited by the Leninologists. Their whole case on this point is hung on a deduction (of theirs) from a theory in WITBD which is essentially Kautsky's, it turns out. We know indeed that the typical social-democratic reformist party is very much dominated on top by intellectuals derived from the bourgeoisie. We do not typically see the leaders of these parties denouncing this state of affairs. On the other hand, Lenin's collected works are chock-full of denunciations of increased influence by intellectuals. Obviously, this does not settle the matter, but still less is it reasonable to rest virtually the whole case against Lenin, on this point, on what is not in Lenin's 1902 book.

In the Russian movement, the Marxist left's denunciations of intellectuals in the movement started with the founding congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party itself (the congress to which WITBD was directed). In fact, the Bolshevik-Menshevik split over the notorious membership rule (who could be a party member) was directly connected with the Mensheviks' anxiety to make it easier for nonparty intellectuals to be accounted as members, while Lenin fought to make it harder. (This is hardly disputed.) The Leninological myth that, according

to Lenin's "concept of the party," the organization is to consist only or mainly or largely of bourgeois intellectuals – this is contrary to fact.

1. Lastly, since it is a question of a "party concept" alleged to be peculiar to Lenin and Leninism, we should find that it is not true of the other Russian socialist parties – the Mensheviks and the Socialist-Revolutionaries. But just the reverse is true. The case is most clear-cut with regard to the S-Rs, for while this party aspired to represent the peasants' interests and mentality, it was very far from being a party of peasants. Notoriously it was a party composed overwhelmingly of bourgeois intelligentsia. (You need only read the main scholarly work on the S-Rs, by O.H. Radkey.) The proportion of bourgeois intellectuals in the Mensheviks or supporting the Mensheviks was greater than in the case of the Bolsheviks, not less.

1. "Professional Revolutionaries" and Spontaneity

Let us take the second claim, that the Leninist "concept of the party" demanded that the party should consist of so-called professional revolutionaries only. This view was "deduced" from WITBD by opponents. As soon as the deduction and the claim appeared, Lenin denied (scores of times) that he wanted a party made up of professional revolutionaries only. The Leninologists endlessly repeat the "deduction," and do not mention that Lenin consistently and firmly repudiated it.

One of the difficulties (not Lenin's) is that there are several questions confused under this head, as usual. In the first place, the most important background fact was the condition of illegality suffered in Russia by any revolutionary party. It was not a question of some general or suprahistorical "concept of the party" offering a formula for any country at any time. WITBD asked what was to be done in this autocratic czarism in this year of 1902. Whatever views on this question are discerned in WITBD, it is false to ascribe them to a generalized program of organization good for any time or place.

In WITBD Lenin was discussing the need for a core of "professional revolutionaries" in the party for the sake of effective functioning – to make sure that the history of the party was not simply one shipment of revolutionaries after another to Siberia. A good part of the Leninological myth rests on a confused definition of "professional revolutionary." The Leninologists seem to assume that to Lenin a "professional revolutionary" meant a full-time party worker or functionary, devoting all his time to party activity. This is absurd from Lenin's viewpoint; it would indeed exclude workers, as the Leninologists deduce.

It can easily be shown, from Lenin's copious discussions of the professional revolutionary for years after WITBD, that to Lenin the term meant this: *a party activist who devoted most (preferably all) of his spare time to revolutionary work.* The professional revolutionary considers his revolutionary activity to be the center of his life (or of his life-style, if you will). He must work to earn a living, of course, but this is not his life's center. Such is the professional revolutionary type.

I have come to believe that part of the confusion stems from the important difference in the meaning of *professional* between English and most Continental languages. In French (and I think the German, etc. usage stems directly from the French) the word *professionnel* refers simply to occupation. Whereas in English only lawyers, doctors and other recognized "professions" can be said to have "professional" activity, in French this can be said of anyone in any occupation; the reference is simply to occupational activity. Under the aegis of the English language, a "professional" revolutionary must be as full-time as a doctor or lawyer. (Of course this does not account for non-English Leninologists, and is only one factor in the confusion.)

It follows from Lenin's view that even the "core" of professional revolutionaries were not necessarily expected to be full-time party activists, which usually means functionaries. (The number of functionaries in a revolutionary group is a question with its own history, but this history is not presently ours.) The point of defining a professional revolutionary as

a full-timer, a functionary, is to fake the conclusion, or "deduction": only non-workers can make up the party elite, hence only intellectuals. This conclusion is an invention of the Leninologists, based on nothing in Lenin.

From Lenin's standpoint, professional-revolutionary workers were important to the movement for two reasons. One is obvious: the greater amount of time and activity that they could devote to the work of the movement. A professional revolutionary regarded even the hours he spent on the job as opportunities for socialist and trade-union propaganda and organization. The second aspect of the professional revolutionary type, much emphasized by Lenin, was that such a worker could be trained in revolutionary work, in a more meaningful way; that is, given conscious education and courses in self-development on how to operate as a revolutionary. The professional revolutionary worker was, or could become, a trained revolutionary worker.

Lenin had no trouble understanding and acknowledging that only a "core" of the party could consist of such elements. All he argued was that the more such the party had, the more effective its work. This is a far cry from the Leninological myth.

As for the myths about the alleged "theory of spontaneity" versus "conscious organization": much of this is the result simply of failing to understand what the issues were. No one in the movement, certainly not Lenin, had any doubts about the important and positive role played by "spontaneity" – spontaneous revolts, struggles, etc. (In many cases, when we say a certain revolt was "spontaneous," all we mean is: *we do not know* how it was organized or by whom.)

What Lenin argued against in WITBD and elsewhere was the glorification of spontaneity for its own sake; for what this glorification meant in actuality was a decrying of conscious organizational activity or party work or leadership. This latter attitude made sense only for anarchists, but it was also likely to be assumed by extreme reformists as a cover for opposing independent working-class organization. For the Russian "Economists" (who advocated "economic" action only) the line was that no revolutionary party was necessary and the Russian party should be liquidated; and in this context the glorification of "spontaneity" was simply a way of counterposing something to the organized political struggle by the working class.

The claim that Lenin was *hostile* to "spontaneous" struggles verges on nonsense. Whenever a Leninologist purports to quote Lenin on this subject, what he really quotes are Lenin's arguments against relying only on spontaneity to usher in socialism by some millennial date.

Lenin advocated that the spontaneous action of the people must be integrated with the element of political leadership by trained socialist workers, and part of such training was precisely the capacity to take advantage of spontaneous struggles when they turned up. The overwhelming majority of the International would heartily agree. There was nothing specially "Leninist" about this, except Lenin's usual clarity on the point, as compared with the often hazy thinking of reformists.

1. Lenin's Party Concepts

We still have to take up Lenin's later comments on WITBD. But something of a historical introduction is necessary here.

The reader of Lenin's WITBD must understand that if it embodied some specially Leninist "concept of the party" *Lenin himself was entirely unaware of it at the time*. He thought he was putting forward a view of party and movement that was the same as that of the best parties of the International, particularly the German party under the leadership of August Bebel – only allowing for the big difference that the Russian movement faced the special problems of illegality under an autocracy.

The naive Leninologist seems to assume that when Lenin referred to "centralization" or "centralism," he was necessarily talking about some supercentralized organizational form. But in fact the Russians (and others) who used this language

Section IV: Party of a New Type?

often meant the same thing that the Germans had once meant when “Germany” was a geographical expression fragmented into thirty-odd states and statelets. Where there was no center at all, the demand for “centralism” was a call to establish a center. In 1902 there was no all-Russian party in existence at all.

A First Congress had taken place in 1898, but had led to nothing. The Russian movement consisted of isolated circles, discrete regional conglomerations, unconnected factory groups, etc. There was no center; in fact there was no “party” except as a future label. The Second Congress scheduled for 1903 was hopefully going to establish an organized all-Russian party for the first time. *This was the situation toward which Lenin directed his little book in 1902.*

The point of holding a congress was to establish a center at last. No “central” organization whatever existed as yet. Everyone who looked to the congress was in favor of “centralizing” the work of the now-decentralized circles operating inside Russia. This was what “centralization” meant under the circumstances. But it was ambiguous then as now.

The German party had also gone through a period of illegality, from 1878 to 1890; and during this period its practices had not been ideally democratic at all. One of the main features was the domination of practical party work in Germany, insofar as it was possible, not by the elected National Executive in exile, but by the Reichstag Fraction of deputies, who remained legal. But this Fraction had never been elected by the party; the deputies had been elected by local voters. Marx and Engels looked askance at what they considered to be the “dictatorship” of the Reichstag deputies over the party; but the arrangement was generally accepted for its practical usefulness.

As the Russian situation developed from 1902 to 1914, it turned out – in hindsight – that there *was* something distinctive about Lenin’s “concept of the party,” even though he was not specifically aware of it. There are two points to be made under this head, the second being more important.

(1) Sectism or Mass Party

Throughout the history of the socialist movement, there has been a tendency for socialist currents that considered themselves to have distinctive ideas to organize as a sect. The alternative is to operate as a current in a *class movement*.

One must distinguish clearly between these two organizational forms. The class movement is based on, and cemented by, its role in the class struggle; the sect is based on, and cemented by, its special ideas or program. The history of the socialist movement began mostly with sects (continuing the tradition of religious movements). It was only the continued development of the working class which gave rise to mass parties that sought to represent and reflect the whole class-in-movement.

The outstanding example of the class movement, as counterposed to the sect, was given by the First International, which broke down sect lines (it did not even start with socialism in its program). In the form that Marx brought about, it sought to organize the entire working-class movement in all its forms. This much of its character was continued by the Second International, except that trade unions were not affiliated. In France the fragmentation of the socialist movement into sects continued until 1905, when a united Socialist Party was formed. In Germany the Lassalleian sect had been absorbed fairly quickly, in 1875. Sects still continued to operate in many countries, like the Social Democratic Federation in Britain, which claimed to represent “revolutionary” socialism.

In 1902 when Lenin wrote WITBD, there was a big difference between Germany and Russia (which indeed WITBD discussed): in Germany the revolutionary wing (or what Lenin and others considered such) was in control of the party, whereas in Russia the right wing had the dominant influence. Lenin’s response to this situation was not to organize the revolutionary wing as a left-wing sect outside the general movement. *In fact, if we consider the whole period before 1914, Lenin never organized, or sought to organize, a “Leninist” sect.* (The theory of “revolutionary” sectification arose out of

the degeneration of the Comintern to become a "principle of Leninism"; before 1917 it had been kept alive on the fringes of the Second International and in the anarchist movement.)

The course which the young Lenin took was then the normal one in the International: he sought to organize the revolutionary current as a political center of some sort inside the mass party (or what was going to be the mass party if the Second Congress was successful). Most political centers in the socialist movement, leaving aside sects, were currents established around periodical organs; this was the case in the German party, for example. When Lenin went into exile from Russia, he did not establish a "Leninist" sect; he went to the *Iskra* editorial board, which was not a membership group. Even after the Bolshevik-Menshevik split, and for the next several years (at least until shortly before World War I), the term "Bolsheviks" and "Mensheviks" meant a political center inside the mass party, the RSDLP, not a membership sect.

(1) Split and Unity

This involved the second distinctive feature of Lenin's party concept. One can distinguish three approaches to this question, as follows.

1. There were those who believed in split at any cost, that is, the revolutionary wing in a reformist party must split away at the most opportune moment, and organize its own sect. This is the characteristic theory of sectism.
1. There were those, and they were legion, who believed in unity at any cost. The unity of the mass social-democratic party must never be breached; a break was the ultimate disaster. This was the mirror image of the first approach: the fetishism of unity. This approach was the dominant one in the International, including the German party. What it meant in practice was: accommodation with the right wing, even by a majority left wing. If the right wing must be persuaded from splitting at any cost, then the majority left had to make concessions to it, sufficient to keep it in the party. One of the most enlightening examples of this pattern took place in the Russian party soon after the 1903 congress, at which Lenin's wing won majority control with the support of Plekhanov. The Menshevik minority then split. Thereupon Plekhanov, under pressure, swung around and demanded that the majority of the *Iskra* editorial board be handed back to the Mensheviks, for the sake of "unity." In short: if the Mensheviks had won the majority, there is no doubt that Lenin would have stayed in as a minority; but if the left wins, the right wing picks up its marbles and quits; then for the sake of "unity" the left has to hand control back to the right...
1. Lenin's distinctive approach was this: he simply insisted that where the left won majority control of a party, it had the right and the duty to go ahead with its own policy just as the right wing was doing everywhere. The Bolshevik-Menshevik hostilities hardened when Lenin rejected Plekhanov's demand to reverse the outcome of the congress. This distinctive approach was: unity, yes, but not at the cost of foiling the victory of the majority. Unity, yes, but on the same democratic basis as ever: the right wing could work to win out at the next congress if it could, but it would not do to demand political concessions as a reward for not splitting. One of the chapters in Lenin's life most industriously glossed over by the Leninologists is the period that followed the Second Congress and Plekhanov's about-face. One must read Volumes 6 and 7 of Lenin's Collected Works to see how heartsick he was in face of the break, and what continued efforts he put into healing the split with the Mensheviks on the basis of full democratic rights for all. In test after test, it was the Mensheviks who rejected unity on this basis, or on any basis that failed to give them party control in defiance of the Second Congress outcome. In fact, the first test of course had come at the congress itself, since it was the Mensheviks that split away because Lenin had gained a majority in the voting (after extreme right-wing elements had walked out for their own right-wing political reasons). The common claim that it was the Bolsheviks who split is one of the myths of Leninology. All this was tested again

in the period after the upheaval of the 1905 revolution, which opened up Russian political life for a while. Legal organization became possible temporarily, open elections, etc. In this situation, the question of unity of Bolsheviks and Mensheviks was again raised. But we will come back to this in Section 5.

1. Lenin After WITBD

In the first two sections we discussed what is in WITBD and what isn't; but, as mentioned, this is very far from exhausting the question of Lenin's attitude toward WITBD. Part of the Leninological myth is the claim that the "concept of the party" found in WITBD (whatever this is) was Lenin's permanent and abiding view, which he "consistently applied" from then on. We must therefore turn to find out what Lenin thought about WITBD in the ensuing years.

For one thing we will find this: that, from the time WITBD was published until at least the Russian Revolution of 1917, Lenin insisted that this 1902 work of his was not a canonical exposition of a model form of party organization, but simply an organizational plan for the given time and place. It was devised for (a) an underground movement functioning in secrecy under conditions of autocracy, and (b) a movement which had not yet succeeded even in forming a national organizing center in its own country, as had most social-democratic parties in Europe. This 1902 plan was therefore not automatically applicable to other situations – to other places in Europe, or to other periods in Russia, where there was more elbow room for political liberty. This plan was time-bound and place-specific.

In his *Letter to a Comrade on Our Organizational Tasks*, September 1902, that is, a few months after the publication of WITBD, Lenin explained more than once that the forms of organization needed were determined by the interests of secrecy and circumscribed by the existence of the autocracy.

But then, at this time his later opponents, like Martov and Plekhanov, were at one with him in viewing the ideas of WITBD as unexceptionable conclusions from the struggle of a serious revolutionary underground movement. It was only after a falling-out on other grounds that these opponents, and their successors, began to read into WITBD everything they thought was sinister in Lenin's course, including his inexplicable refusal to yield up the congress majority power to the people who had been the congress minority.

Already at the Second Congress itself, before the final split, Lenin had pleaded with critics not to take WITBD passages "wrenched from the context." In doing so, the first point he had made was the one mentioned above, viz., that WITBD was not intended to present "principles" of party organization. The discussion on WITBD, he said optimistically, had clarified all the questions: "It is obvious that here an episode in the struggle against 'Economism' has been confused with a discussion of the principles of a major theoretical question (the formation of an ideology). Moreover, this episode has been presented in an absolutely false light."

He directly confronted the claim about subordinating the working-class movement to bourgeois intellectuals:

It is claimed that Lenin says nothing about any conflicting trends, but categorically affirms that the working-class movement invariably "tends" to succumb to bourgeois ideology. Is that so? Have I not said that the working-class movement is drawn towards the bourgeois outlook with the benevolent assistance of the Schulze-Delitzsches and others like them? And who is meant here by "others like them"? None other than the "Economists" ...

This was a further step in adding qualifications to the bare Kautsky theory, without breaking with Kautsky. He added an even more serious qualification:

Lenin [it is claimed, says Lenin] takes no account whatever of the fact that the workers, too, have a share in the formation of an ideology. Is that so? Have I not said time and again that the shortage of fully class-conscious workers, worker-leaders, and worker-revolutionaries is, in fact, the greatest deficiency in our movement? Have I not said there that the training of such worker-revolutionaries must be our immediate task? Is there no men-

tion there of the importance of developing a trade-union movement and creating a special trade-union literature? ...

And to end this same speech, Lenin made the point which is among the most important to keep in mind about WITBD:

To conclude. We all know that the "Economists" have gone to one extreme. To straighten matters out somebody had to pull in the other direction, and that is what I have done.

This is the main key to what Lenin was doing in WITBD. Throughout his life his constant pattern was to "bend the bow" in an opposite direction in order to push back against some immediate dangerous pressure. His metaphor on these occasions was often to "turn the helm the other way" in order to compensate for the dangerous pressure. Now it happens that personally I do not sympathize with this propensity, though I admit it is natural enough. I think that a bow which is bent in various directions is apt to be bent out of shape. But it is a common enough resort by people of all political complexions, and only asks for understanding. In Lenin's case it is a fact that demands understanding, especially when he specifically explained the pattern in so many words, as he did often enough. And any Leninologist who refuses to understand it is bound to write a great deal of nonsense.

We are still at the Second Congress. On August 15 Lenin's first speech in the Rules discussion was summarized in the minutes in nine lines. Most of it was devoted to saying this:

It should not be imagined that Party organizations must consist solely of professional revolutionaries. We need the most diverse organizations of all types, ranks and shades, beginning with extremely limited and secret [ones] and ending with very broad, free, loose Organisationen [loose organizations].

He could not have been more explicit in correcting any false impression that might have been conveyed by his "bow-bending" in WITBD.

Lenin repeated this clarification in his second speech that day:

*Comrade Trotsky completely misunderstood the main idea of my book *What Is To Be Done?* when he spoke about the party not being a conspiratorial organization (many others too raised this objection). He forgot that in my book I propose a number of various types of organizations, from the most secret and most exclusive to comparatively broad and "loose" organizations.*

If it is charged that this was not clear in WITBD, well – that is the function of discussion: to clarify and modify. Lenin clarified and modified, not merely later but right in the congress discussion.

It may be said that if WITBD was misunderstood by so many, there must have been a reason. This is quite true. There was more than one reason, and the first has been mentioned: Lenin's bow-bending. In addition there was a will to "misunderstand," as there is still today. An objective scholar writing today with the advantage of a longer perspective and fuller documentation should be expected, however, to set forth and weigh Lenin's repeated attempts to clarify and modify (qualify and recast) his views. What is typical about contemporary Leninology is that it ignores Lenin's clarifications in favor of a purely demonological exegesis.

Lenin, we said, was not thinking in terms of a general "concept of party organization." When in a 1904 article in the Neue Zeit Rosa Luxemburg attacked his ideas, as set forth in his brochure One Step Forward, Two Steps Back dealing with the Second Congress, Lenin wrote a reply which rather mildly protested – what? Not that he was right, but that he did not hold the opinions Luxemburg ascribed to him.²⁸⁴

This is what Lenin wrote:

²⁸⁴ Luxemburg's article is commonly reprinted under the bogus title Leninism or Marxism? – a title which is not only a Leninological invention but distortive of Luxemburg's view. Those who are sensitive to questions of inner-party democracy, so popular with Leninologists, should note that although Luxemburg's article was a virulent attack on Lenin, the democratic editors of the Neue Zeit refused to print Lenin's mild reply.

Section IV: Party of a New Type?

Comrade Luxemburg says, for example, that my book is a clear and detailed expression of the point of view of “intransigent centralism.” Comrade Luxemburg thus supposes that I defend one system of organization against another. But actually that is not so. From the first to the last page of my book, I defend the elementary principles of any conceivable system of party organization.

That is, Lenin believed that he was only working out the forms of any party that could conceivably exist under the given conditions in Russia.

Rosa Luxemburg further says that “according to his [Lenin’s] conception, the Central Committee has the right to organize all the local Party committees.” Actually that is not so... Comrade Luxemburg says that in my view “the Central Committee is the only active nucleus of the Party.” Actually that is not so. I have never advocated any such view... Comrade Rosa Luxemburg says ... that the whole controversy is over the degree of centralization. Actually that is not so ... our controversy has principally been over whether the Central Committee and Central Organ should represent the trend of the majority of the Party Congress, or whether they should not. About this “ultra-centralist” and “purely Blanquist” demand the worthy comrade says not a word, she prefers to declaim against mechanical subordination of the part to the whole, against slavish submission, blind obedience, and other such bogeys... Comrade Luxemburg fathers on me the idea that all the conditions already exist in Russia for forming a large and extremely centralized workers’ party. Again an error of fact...

And so on. By the way, anyone who thinks that Rosa Luxemburg was a sainted angel in internal party brawls is naive. In this case, either she was retailing vicious slanders, of the sort she was familiar enough with in the Polish movement, or else someone should demonstrate that Lenin was advocating the views with which she charged him. The latter has not been done.

1. Toward Party Democratization

Let us put demonology aside. It must be noted that, in the period inaugurated by the 1905 upheaval, as the situation in Russia changed and the pressure of the autocracy lightened, Lenin’s “concept of the party” changed drastically, in accord with the new circumstances – just as we would expect if his protestations were taken seriously.

Already in February 1905, in a draft resolution for the Third Party Congress, Lenin wrote: “Under conditions of political freedom, our Party can and will be built entirely on the elective principle. Under the autocracy this is impracticable for the collective thousands that make up the party.” Writing in September 1905, he hailed the German party as “first in respect of organization, integrality and coherence” and pointed to its organizational decisions as “highly instructive to us Russians.”

Not so long ago organizational questions occupied a disproportionate place among current problems of Party life, and to some extent this holds true of the present as well. Since the Third Congress two organizational tendencies in the Party have become fully defined. One is toward consistent centralism and consistent extension of the democratic principle in Party organizations, not for the sake of demagogic or because it sounds good but in order to put this into effect as Social-Democracy’s free field of activity extends in Russia. The other tendency is toward diffusiveness of organization, “vagueness of organization”...

In November 1905 he stressed in an article that the socialist worker “knows there is no other road to socialism save the road through democracy, through political liberty. He therefore strives to achieve democratism completely and consistently in order to attain the ultimate goal – socialism.” The same month he published an important essay, titled *The Reorganization of the Party*. In it he called for a new party congress in order to put the whole organization “on a new basis.”

This article went to the main point directly: “The conditions in which our Party is functioning are changing radically. Freedom of assembly, of association and the press has been captured.” What followed? Lenin answered: “organize in a new way” ... “new methods” ... “a new line.”

We, the representatives of revolutionary Social-Democracy, the supporters of the "Majority" [Bolsheviks], have repeatedly said that complete democratization of the Party was impossible in conditions of secret work, and that in such conditions the "elective principle" was a mere phrase. And experience has confirmed our words... But we Bolsheviks have always recognized that in new conditions, when political liberties were acquired, it would be essential to adopt the elective principle.

It must be kept in mind that the impracticality of open election of local leading committees under conspiratorial conditions was not a Bolshevik peculiarity; the secret police had made it as difficult for Mensheviks or S-Rs.

Our party [wrote Lenin] has stagnated while working underground... The "underground" is breaking up. Forward, then... extend your bases, rally all the worker Social-Democrats round yourselves, incorporate them in the ranks of the Party organizations by hundreds and thousands.

These were "new methods" only in Russia, of course; this was what bourgeois democratic regimes had possible in Western Europe before this. Lenin had always viewed the German Social-Democracy as a model of organization; now the Russian Social-Democrats could emulate it.

The decision of the Central Committee ... is a decisive step towards the full application of the democratic principle in Party organization.

All comrades, he enjoined, must "devise new forms of organization" to take in an influx of workers, new forms that were "definitely much broader" than the old, "less rigid, more 'free,' more 'loose.'" "With complete freedom of association and civil liberties for the people, we should, of course, have to found Social-Democratic unions..." "Each union, organization or group will immediately elect its bureau, or board, or directing committee..." Furthermore, he recommended, it was now possible to bring about party unity, Bolsheviks with Mensheviks, on the basis of a broad democratic vote of the rank and file, since this could not be organized under the new conditions.

All of this sea-change had to be explained to Russian workers who had never faced such conditions before. We must not be afraid, Lenin argued, of "a sudden influx of large numbers of non-Social-Democrats into the Party."

Note this remark made almost in passing: "The working class is instinctively, spontaneously Social-Democratic, and more than ten years of work put in by Social-Democracy has done a great deal to transform this spontaneity into consciousness." *It looks as if Lenin had forgotten even the existence of the Kautsky theory he had copied out and quoted in 1902!*

The initiative of the workers themselves will now display itself on a scale that we, the underground and circle workers of yesterday, did not even dare dream of.

He seized on the new conditions especially to advocate that mass recruitment of workers (possible for the first time) should swamp over the influence of intellectuals in the party work:

At the Third Congress of the Party I suggested that there be about eight workers to every two intellectuals in the Party committees. How obsolete that suggestion seems now! Now we must wish for the new Party organizations to have one Social-Democratic intellectual to several hundred Social-Democratic workers.

The article concluded this way, with a typical Lenin reaction:

"We have 'theorized' for so long (sometimes – why not admit it? – to no use) in the unhealthy atmosphere of political exile, that it will really not be amiss if we now 'bend the bow' slightly, a little, just a little, 'the other way' and put practice a little more in the forefront."

So now the bow bent the other way – "slightly."

The situation would now be quite clear even if Lenin never mentioned WITBD again. But in fact we can now turn to remarks by Lenin in which he reconsidered WITBD specifically, in the light of the new conditions and of these new concepts of party organization (new for Russia).

In November 1907 Lenin published a collection of old articles, called *Twelve Years*. Its aim was to review the thought and action of the movement over that period of time, a historical purpose. His preface to this collection was plainly ad-

Section IV: Party of a New Type?

dressed to the new audience generated by the revolutionary upheaval going on since 1905, an audience to whom the old disputes were now past history. Here he explained why WITBD had been included in the collection. Note in the first place that it required an explanation.

WITBD had been included (explains Lenin) because it “is frequently mentioned by the Mensheviks” and bourgeois-liberal writers; therefore he wanted to “draw the attention of the modern reader” to what was its “essential content.” His explanation began with a statement that might just as well be addressed to contemporary Leninologists:

The basic mistake made by those who now criticize WITBD is to treat the pamphlet apart from its connection with the concrete historical situation of a definite, and now long past, period in the development of our Party.

This applied, he said, to those “who, many years after the pamphlet appeared, wrote about its incorrect or exaggerated ideas on the subject of an organization of professional revolutionaries.” Such criticisms were wrong “to dismiss gains which, in their time, had to be fought for, but which have long ago been consolidated and have served their purpose.”

It is obvious that the reference to “exaggerated ideas” is an admission of a degree of incorrectness, even if the confession simultaneously maintains that the incorrectness was pardonable. But that had already been the sense of the “bending the bow” remarks; it was not really even new.

WITBD had done its 1902 job, and should not be treated any more as if it were a current proposal; it had been bypassed. Lenin did not apologize for it or repudiate it; this was something different. He was pigeonholing it as of historical interest only. Socialists would not repudiate the First International either, but no one would dream of bringing it back to life.

It was a far cry from a permanent “concept of the party.”

6. Last Words on WITBD

Typically Lenin argued that the “exaggeration” in WITBD had been necessary at the time in order to make progress in the direction desired, even if the exaggerations themselves were not tenable.

To maintain today that Iskra exaggerated (in 1901 and 1902!) the idea of an organization of professional revolutionaries is like reproaching the Japanese, after the Russo-Japanese War, for having exaggerated the strength of Russia’s armed forces, for having prior to the war exaggerated the need to prepare for fighting these forces.²⁸⁵ To win victory the Japanese had to marshal all their forces against the probable maximum of Russian forces... [T]oday the idea of an organization of professional revolutionaries has already scored a complete victory. That victory would have been impossible if this idea had not been pushed to the forefront at the time, if we had not “exaggerated” so as to drive it home to people who were trying to prevent it from being realized.

The claim made here that the professional-revolutionary idea had “already scored a complete victory” showed once more how little the usual Leninological version of this idea jibed with Lenin’s. This “victory” included opening the party to an influx of “raw” workers who, hopefully, would swamp not only the party intellectuals but also the old experienced cadre of trained activists (professional revolutionaries). The idea that had shown its power (“scored a complete victory”) was the need for a core of trained activists in the organization. It had nothing to do with the chimera of a party composed only or mainly of full-time functionaries. This chimera was especially grotesque in the light of Lenin’s appeal for mass recruitment.

WITBD, continued Lenin, was merely a summary of the organizational policy of the *Iskra* group of 1901-1902, “no more and no less.” That is, it was the joint policy of those (the *Iskra* group) who later divided into Mensheviks and Bol-

²⁸⁵ It should be remembered that Lenin (along with almost the entire International) favored the victory of Japan in that war with Russia.

sheviks on other grounds. In other words, Lenin was again insisting, in still another way, that at the time he did not regard the ideas of WITBD as unique to himself or his tendency.²⁸⁶

Now, under the new conditions of legality, Lenin boasted as follows:

Despite the split, the Social-Democratic Party earlier than any of the other parties was able to take advantage of the temporary spell of freedom to build a legal organization with an ideal democratic structure, an electoral system, and representation at congresses according to the number of organized members. You will not find this, even today, either in the Socialist-Revolutionary or the Cadet parties...

Here he was talking about the party (the RSDLP) as a whole, not just the Bolshevik wing; there had been a unity congress in May. Who built the party to its present effectiveness as a democratic structure? "It was accomplished by the organization of the professional revolutionaries ... glance at the delegate list of any of the groups at, say, the London congress, in order to be convinced of this..." Note that he referred to the "delegate list," or, as he put it in the same sentence, "the central core that had worked hardest of all to build up the Party and make it what it is." It scarcely makes sense to believe that in Lenin's view the party membership (far wider than the "delegate list" or the core) was to consist of professional revolutionaries only – even if we stick with Lenin's reasonable definition.

The Kautsky theory of 1902 had long disappeared from Lenin's ken by this time; there was no indication that he even remembered its existence. At this point he was busy pointing with pride: the organizational successes of the party were due to the inherent organizational capacities of the working class.

Without this condition an organization of professional revolutionaries would be nothing more than a plaything, an adventure, a mere signboard. WITBD repeatedly emphasizes this, pointing out that the organization it advocates has no meaning apart from its connection with the "genuine revolutionary class that is spontaneously rising to struggle" ... The professional revolutionary has played his part in the history of Russian proletarian socialism. No power on earth can now undo this work...

Throughout these pages, more often than we can reasonably cite, Lenin repeated the theme that the day of WITBD was in the past. "In the historical conditions that prevailed in Russia in 1900-1905, no organization other than *Iskra* could have created the Social-Democratic Labor Party we now have." This preceded the statement that "The professional revolutionary has played his part..." The bitter disputes within the émigré circles characterized "a young and immature workers' movement"; "only the broadening of the Party by enlisting proletarian elements can help to eradicate the "circle spirit." "And the transition to a democratically organized workers' party, proclaimed by the Bolsheviks ... in November 1905, i.e., as soon as the conditions appeared for legal activity – this "transition" was a break from the "old circle ways that had outlived their day."

"Yes, 'that had outlived their day,'" Lenin repeated, "for it is not enough to condemn the old circle spirit; its significance in the special circumstances of the past period must be understood..." – and so on. "The differences among the circles were over the direction the work was to take... The circles played their part and are now, of course, obsolete."

²⁸⁶ Some previous statements should be mentioned too. In August 1903 Lenin had scribbled a few lines for himself, as a note on Martov's Contradictions and Zigzags. The second of four points was that "He [Martov] always defended *Iskra*'s ideas of organization (*What Is To Be Done?*), but secured the incorporation of a Jaurérist [reformist] first clause in the Rules." In January 1904 Lenin published a pamphlet preface in which he challenged the Mensheviks to state their new concepts of organization: they have "announced ... the existence of differences over questions of organization. Unfortunately, the editors are in no hurry to specify just what these differences are, confining themselves for the most part to hinting at things unknown." The man who wrote these words was plainly under the impression that up to this point the Mensheviks had no distinctive line on "concept of organization." In March 1905, in a reply to Plekhanov, Lenin insisted that "Plekhanov's assertion that our relations cooled on account of WITBD is absolutely untrue." These are only a few of the many indications of this fact: at least when he published WITBD, and until controversy developed subsequently, Lenin thought that the book's views were the common property of the *Iskra* group.

Next Lenin commented on Plekhanov's statement that "he differed from me in principle on the question of spontaneity and political consciousness." Once again Lenin insisted that there was no real difference involved at the time. "Plekhanov's criticism," he said, was "based on phrases torn out of context," and, he added, "on particular expressions which I had not quite adroitly or precisely formulated." The particular criticisms by Plekhanov to which Lenin was here referring were to the pamphlet One Step Forward, Two Steps Back, but against them Lenin here appealed to "the general content and the whole spirit of my pamphlet WITBD." All of us had agreed (he went on to say) upon the "formulation of the relation between spontaneity and political consciousness" in the draft Party program put forward by the *Iskra* group. And then Lenin made a statement which capped the whole problem:

Nor at the Second Congress did I have any intention of elevating my own formulations, as given in WITBD, to "programmatic" level, constituting special principles. On the contrary, the expression I used – and it has since been frequently quoted – was that the Economists had gone to one extreme. WITBD, I said, straightens out what had been twisted by the Economists...

The meaning of these words is clear enough: WITBD is a controversial correction of Economist distortions and it would be wrong to regard the pamphlet in any other light.

It would be hard to imagine any more telling refutation of the WITBD myth, unless perhaps Lenin had staged a bonfire of all extant copies of WITBD.

There is no record that Lenin ever went back on the above-quoted statements about WITBD. In fact, there is no record that he was aware of a problem about it.²⁸⁷

Now which is "the Leninist concept of party organization" – Lenin's approach of 1905-1907, just described, or the formulations of 1902 in WITBD? The answer that Lenin's ghost would give, obviously, is: neither – no "concept of the party" taken as a "principle" divorced from time and place. Lenin's ideas on party organization, like those of most others, varied depending on conditions, especially such an immense difference in conditions as that between the underground conditions in an autocracy and the conditions of relative political liberty and open organizational opportunity that characterized Russia in the 1905-1907 period.

At least one Leninologist was able to recognize this elementary idea, and as a result drew the wrathful fires of Lenino-logical authority on his own head. Deviating from the consensus, John Plamenatz wrote this much:

There is nothing specifically undemocratic about the opinions so vigorously expressed in WITBD... He never, when he wrote WITBD, intended that the "party of the proletariat" should drive and bully the workers, or even that it should make their revolution for them, and then govern Russia in their name but without taking the trouble to consult them.

If it were not for what happened after the Bolshevik Revolution, says Plamenatz, "We should not venture to call them [the ideas of WITBD] undemocratic, but merely say of them that they were advice perhaps well enough adapted to the needs of a revolutionary party active in Russia in the first decade of the twentieth century."

Lenin's 1902 proposals for the Russian movement of the day may have been good or bad proposals – this discussion is pre-empted by the Leninological myth. Recognition that WITBD was not antidemocratic in its views still leaves open

²⁸⁷ As far as I know, the only claim that Lenin ever came back to the subject appeared in an article which requires notice because it has occasionally been quoted. This article, published in 1938 by Max Shachtman in the theoretical organ of the American Trotskyist group, ascribed WITBD to the specific Russian conditions of the time and went on to say: That is why Lenin, in answer to a proposal to translate his brochure for the non-Russian parties, told Max Levien in 1921: "That is not desirable; the translation must at least be issued with good commentaries, which would have to be written by a Russian comrade very well acquainted with the history of the Communist Party of Russia, in order to avoid false application." Unfortunately the article gave no source for this quotation; and while it gave a list of sources for the article as a whole, I have not been able to find this episode in any of the works listed.

the belief (which Plamenatz for one holds) that "Leninism" took an antidemocratic turn in "what happened after the Bolshevik Revolution." The point about the Leninological myth is that it makes discussion of these developments impossible: political-historical analysis is replaced by demonology.

Supplemental Readings

Section IV: Party of a New Type?

How Lenin's party became (Bolshevik) - Lars Lih (short)

Part two of a three-part series examining Lenin's view of the party question within the RSDLP.

<https://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/914/how-lenins-party-became-bolshevik/>

The Origins of the United Front Policy - John Riddell (short)

A detailed explanation of the emergence of the United Front in the context of the third international and the potential of revolutionary civil war.

<https://johnriddell.com/2011/05/04/the-origins-of-the-united-front-policy-3/>

Section V

The Strategy of Patience

Section V: The Strategy of Patience

Summary

Lenin wrote *Left Wing Communism* for the delegates of the 2nd Congress of the Communist International (Comintern) in 1920. The initial enthusiasm brought about by the Russian Revolution in October 1917 was at its nadir. The Communist movement needed to adapt to adverse circumstances as revolution was no longer on the immediate agenda. This meant that the various international Communist parties needed to change their tactics. The Comintern, led by Russia, set the agenda. The new 'Leninist' party form, described in Section Four, was the future.

The primary targets of Lenin's critique in his article are the KAPD (Communist Workers Party of Germany, a split from the larger KPD, or Communist Party of Germany, whom Lenin generally refers to here as "the Lefts") and their ideological counterparts in the Netherlands. In Germany in particular, during this early postwar period, several splits and mergers were happening between the KPD and the SPD (Social Democratic Party of Germany), including a left split from the SPD, the USPD (Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany), which entered into discussions on a merger with the KPD (which would ultimately occur in 1920). After the fall of the monarchy, there was fierce debate over how socialists should work in government, if they should work in government, how to organize, how to take power, and more. Out of this chaos emerged, to simplify things, a 'left' or 'ultra-left' tendency, and a 'right' tendency.

Lenin is well known for his snarkiness, but here, it's perhaps even stronger than usual. That's understandable to a degree because from his perspective, the "Lefts" were old news. From his personal experience in Russia, they were just a new coat of paint on the left wing of the Mensheviks, and also, going back to the time of Marx and Engels, the non-Marxist insurrectionary socialists organized around the thought of the French communard Louis Auguste Blanqui.

Indeed, far from being relics of the past, the subjects of Lenin's scorn are to be found everywhere in the contemporary socialist left in the US. Given the level of development of the movement in our time compared to back then, ultra-lefts are probably more common. Some talk about "going directly to the masses." Others appeal to the "grassroots" in opposition to the leadership. When the going gets tough — when existing unions, parties, and other organizations experience difficulties or exhibit reactionary tendencies — these leftists cry that we need a fresh start. In reality, whether they realize it or not, ultra-leftists want us to lower ourselves to a less advanced mindset and level of organization. Ultra-leftism is a form of immaturity and inflexibility of thought, grasping at the future while avoiding walking the long, pothole-ridden road toward it. Lenin says that these leftists insist on drawing distinctions between the leadership and the masses even where they don't exist.

Most of the "Lefts" today are either inexperienced or earnest but confused fellow socialists. However, we should remain aware of the danger of the ideas of the "Lefts" being wielded in bad faith as well, by liberals trying to tame the socialist movement by making it ineffectual, or even by actual agents of the capitalists and the state.

Much of Lenin's article discusses 'compromises' — accepting losses or taking a less-than-ideal path — and when such compromises are needed. Some compromises are "impermissible and treacherous," such as the betrayal of the European social democratic parties who abandoned internationalism and subordinated themselves to the bourgeois parties in support of their particular countries' militaries in WWI.

In these two chapters from his book, *Revolutionary Strategy*, Mike Macnair expands these theses on the 'Lefts' to more historical and present contexts. Macnair also integrates an analysis of the failures of the reformist 'Rights', and argues for a return to the 'Center.'

According to Macnair, the 'Rights' portray themselves as the adults in the room, those who are capable of delivering real results for the working class by operating in coalition with liberal capitalist parties. The 'Lefts,' meanwhile, tend to eschew all forms of compromise and even the terrain of the capitalist state itself in favor of independent mass action of the working class in the form of the general or mass strike.

Both of these are attempting to arrive at the world we want to achieve as socialists. However, they both fail in a similar way by failing to provide practical answers to two vital questions. First, how do the proletariat and the socialist party take power? Furthermore, what forms of decision-making are needed to take power and rule?

The 'Rights', like the British Labour Party, fail to enact the socialist program because their (often still very real) gains made for the working class take the form of economic concessions gained from winning a place in the government coalition. These gains, however, have historically been eroded and overturned by the logic of imperialism and the constant drive for an increased rate of profit. Meanwhile, the place of the 'Rights' in the government coalition tends to require them to trade away the democratic political aspects of the socialist program while also tarring them with the brush of the transgressions and failures of their liberal capitalist coalition partners. In the end, they always fail to secure the rule of the working class. The 'Right's' shortcut to power ultimately proves to be an illusion.

The 'Lefts,' like the KAPD, refuse to enter such governing coalitions and often reject electoral politics altogether. Correctly, they place their hopes in the self-activity of the vast majority, the working class, as Marx did in his arguments with the elitist utopian and insurrectionary socialists of his time. Yet, they are purveyors of a different sort of elitism. Their insistence on placing the purity and intransigence of the workers' movement on such a high pedestal causes them to mistake the forest for the trees. They believe that by adopting the most correct positions and the most extreme slogans, they are assured the achievement of the maximum program. Historically though, such formations have tended to be pretty facades empty of a solid foundation in the broad working class whose self-activity they so value. Their unwillingness to fight for and win immediate demands in limited struggles leaves the average worker with few on-ramps to join their ranks. The only tool in their toolbox is the big hammer of the general or mass strike, which leaves room for little else. When they get a chance to use the hammer, what then? They must either compromise their high principles to pose a new alternative to both the previous status quo and the void left by the strike, or they must ultimately be defeated by the forces of reaction.

Lenin and Macnair don't want us to reject the entire history of these wings of the workers' movement — far from it. They instead call us to adopt the forms of organization and democratic decision-making that will allow the party to remain flexible in its struggle for power. This 'Center' strategy, as practiced by the SPD up until WWI and the RSDLP up through the October Revolution, bases itself on Marx and Engels' faith in the working class majority organizing itself. The working class would work patiently to build itself into a socialist party while using the hobby horses of both 'left' and 'right' not as *ends unto themselves*, but as *means* deployed flexibly in pursuit of becoming not just the raw numerical majority, but the political majority, in whatever context the party finds itself in. The struggle for reforms and the mass strike (or strike wave) are equal partners. The party fights in whatever electoral arena is available, while not becoming part of a ruling coalition with the enemies of the workers. The party also organizes the workers to use militant tactics to win and secure its majority. This is why Lenin praises the old leading lights of the SPD such as Kautsky so much, even when the material and political conditions in Germany and Russia during the late 19th and early 20th centuries were so different. The strategy of the 'Center' answers the questions that the 'Left' and 'Right' ultimately can't.

This strategy of patience is our best chance, but it isn't a perfect roadmap. In an advanced and unique revolutionary situation (such as the one the Bolsheviks encountered after their victory in the Russian Civil War), the old questions pose themselves in new ways, and new ones arise. The effectiveness and nature of the government they founded based on the Soviets are debatable, and Macnair makes the case that the Bolsheviks themselves fell prey to the problems of the 'Left.' The future still holds much to ponder, discover, and decide for today's socialists.

Study Questions

*Independent Study questions are italicized

1. Who was Lenin polemicizing against in *Left-Wing Communism*, and why?
2. How does Lenin contrast the strategy of patient struggle for political hegemony with the "Left" Communist expectation of immediate spontaneous revolution?

Section V: The Strategy of Patience

3. Why should socialists participate in bourgeois parliaments? On what conditions should they participate?
Why would participation be more useful than abstentionism or boycotting elections?
4. Lenin writes that the Bolsheviks found themselves in a unique situation in 1917 Russia, in which it was particularly easy to “start the revolution,” but would still be more challenging than in western Europe to “complete it.” What specific kinds of challenges do we face today as revolutionary socialists in the United States that differ from the situation of 1917 Russia (and other historical periods)? How can the strategy of patience be used to overcome these difficulties?
5. How does Lenin address the question of “compromise?” How does he address the issues facing the Communists in Great Britain?
6. What does Lenin say about historical vs practical obsolescence?
7. *How does Macnair address the strategies of the right, center, and left tendencies in international socialism?*
8. Why does Macnair argue that workers’ councils do not solve the problem of decision-making authority?

Left Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder, Chapter 5: “Left Wing Communism” in Germany, The Leaders, The Party, The Class, The Masses

By Vladimir Lenin

April 27, 1920

The German Communists of whom we must now speak do not call themselves “Lefts” but, if I am not mistaken, the “opposition on principle.” But that they reveal all the symptoms of the “infantile disorder of Leftism” will be seen from what follows.

A pamphlet written from the standpoint of this opposition, and entitled *The Split in the Communist Party of Germany (The Spartacus League)*, published by “the local group in Frankfurt-am-Main,” sets forth the substance of the views of this opposition most saliently, precisely, clearly and briefly. A few quotations will suffice to acquaint the reader with the substance of their views:

The Communist Party is the party of the most determined class struggle.

Politically, the transition period (between capitalism and Socialism) is the period of the proletarian dictatorship.

The question arises: Who should be the vehicle of this dictatorship: the Communist Party or the proletarian class? ... Should we on principle strive for the dictatorship of the Communist Party, or for the dictatorship of the proletarian class? ... (all italics in the original).

Further, the author of the pamphlet accuses the “C.C.” of the Communist Party of Germany of seeking to reach a “coalition with the Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany, of raising ‘the question of recognizing in principle all political means’” of struggle, including parliamentarism, only in order to conceal its real and main efforts to form a coalition with the Independents. And the pamphlet goes on to say:

The opposition has chosen another road. It is of the opinion that the question of the rule of the Communist Party and of the dictatorship of the Party is only a question of tactics. In any case, the rule of the Communist Party is the final form of all party rule. On principle, we must strive for the dictatorship of the proletarian class. And all the measures of the Party, its organization, its methods of struggle, its strategy and tactics should be directed to this end. Accordingly, one must emphatically reject all compromise with other parties, all reversion to parliamentary forms of struggle, which have become historically and politically obsolete, all policy of maneuvering and agreement ... Specifically proletarian methods of revolutionary struggle must be strongly emphasized. New forms of organization must be created upon the widest basis and with the widest scope in order to enlist the broadest proletarian circles and strata, which are to take part in the revolutionary struggle under the leadership of the Communist Party. The rallying point for all revolutionary elements should be the Workers' Union, based on factory organizations. It should embrace all the workers who follow the slogan: “Leave the trade unions!” and will organize the fighting proletariat in the broadest battle ranks. Recognition of the class struggle, the Soviet system and the dictatorship should be sufficient for admittance. All subsequent political training of the fighting masses and their political orientation in the struggle is the task of the Communist Party, which stands outside the Workers' Union.

Consequently, two Communist Parties are now arrayed one against the other:

One is a party of leaders, which strives to organize the revolutionary struggle and to direct it from above, resorting to compromises and parliamentarism in order to create a situation which would enable it to enter a coalition government in whose hands the dictatorship would rest.

The other is a mass party, which expects an upsurge of the revolutionary struggle from below, knowing and applying only one method in the struggle, a method which clearly leads to the goal, and rejecting all parliamentary and opportunist methods; this one method is the unconditional overthrow of the bourgeoisie with the object of then establishing the proletarian class dictatorship for the accomplishment of Socialism.

There, the dictatorship of leaders; here, the dictatorship of the masses! That is our slogan.

Such are the most essential points characterizing the views of the opposition in the German Communist Party.

Any Bolshevik who has consciously participated in, or has closely observed, the development of Bolshevism since 1903 will at once say after reading these arguments, “What old and familiar rubbish! What ‘Left’ childishness!”

But let us examine these arguments a little more closely.

The mere presentation of the question – “dictatorship of the Party or dictatorship of the class, dictatorship (Party) of the leaders, or dictatorship (Party) of the masses?” – testifies to the most incredible and hopeless confusion of mind. These people are straining to invent something quite out of the ordinary, and, in their effort to be clever, make themselves ridiculous. Everyone knows that the masses are divided into classes; that the masses can be contrasted to classes only by contrasting the vast majority in general, regardless of division according to status in the social system of production, to categories holding a definite status in the social system of production; that usually, and in the majority of cases, at least in modern civilized countries, classes are led by political parties; that political parties, as a general rule, are directed by more or less stable groups composed of the most authoritative, influential and experienced members, who are elected to the most responsible positions and are called leaders. All this is elementary. All this is simple and clear. Why replace this by some rigmarole, by some new Volapük?²⁸⁸ On the one hand, these people apparently got confused when they found themselves in difficult straits, when the Party’s abrupt change-over from legality to illegality disturbed the customary, normal and simple relations between leaders, parties and classes. In Germany, as in other European countries, people had become too accustomed to legality, to the free and proper election of “leaders” at regular party congresses, to the convenient method of testing the class composition of parties through parliamentary elections, mass meetings, the press, the sentiments of the trade unions and other organizations, etc.

When, instead of this customary procedure, it became necessary, due to the stormy development of the revolution and the development of the civil war, to pass quickly from legality to illegality, to combine the two, and to adopt the “inconvenient” and “undemocratic” methods of singling out, or forming, or preserving “groups of leaders” – people lost their heads and began to think up some supernatural nonsense. Probably, the Dutch Tribunists²⁸⁹ who had the misfortune to be born in a small country where traditions and conditions of legality were particularly privileged and particularly stable, and who had never witnessed the change-over from legality to illegality, became confused, lost their heads, and helped to create these absurd inventions.

On the other hand, we see a simply thoughtless and incoherent use of the now “fashionable” terms “masses” and “leaders.” These people have heard and committed to memory a great many attacks on “leaders,” in which they are contrasted to “the masses”: but they were unable to think matters out and gain a clear understanding of what it was all about.

The divergence between “leaders” and “masses” was brought out with particular clarity and sharpness in all countries at the end of and after the imperialist war. The principal reason for this phenomenon was explained many times by Marx and Engels between the years 1852 and 1892 by the example of England. That country’s monopoly position led to the separation from the “masses” of a semi-petit bourgeois, opportunist “labor aristocracy.” The leaders of this labor aristocracy constantly deserted to the bourgeoisie, and were directly or indirectly in its pay. Marx earned the honor of incurring the

²⁸⁸ *Volapük*—an artificial language, devised by a south German, Johann Martin Schleyer in 1879. It did not gain popularity.

²⁸⁹ Dutch “Tribunists”—the name given by Lenin to members of the Communist Party of Holland. The Tribunists originally made up the Left wing of the Social-Democratic Labor Party of Holland, taking their name from the newspaper *De Tribune*, founded in 1907. Expelled from the Social-Democratic Labor Party in 1909, they organized their own independent party, the Social-Democratic Party of Holland. The Tribunists represented the Left wing of the working-class movement in Holland but were never a consistently revolutionary party. In 1918 they took part in the formation of the Communist Party of Holland.

hatred of these scoundrels by openly branding them as traitors. Modern (twentieth century) imperialism created a privileged, monopoly position for a few advanced countries, and this gave rise everywhere in the Second International to a certain type of traitor, opportunist, social-chauvinist leaders, who champion the interests of their own craft, their own section of the labor aristocracy. This divorced the opportunist parties from the “masses,” that is, from the broadest strata of the working people, from their majority, from the lowest-paid workers. The victory of the revolutionary proletariat is impossible unless this evil is combated, unless the opportunist, social-traitor leaders are exposed, discredited and expelled. And that is the policy on which the Third International embarked.

To go so far in this connection as to contrast, *in general*, dictatorship of the masses to dictatorship of the leaders is ridiculously absurd and stupid. What is particularly curious is that actually, in place of the old leaders, who hold the common human views on ordinary matters, *new leaders* are put forth (under cover of the slogan: “Down with the leaders!”) who talk unnatural stuff and nonsense. Such are Lauffenberg, Wolfheim, Horner,²⁹⁰ Karl Schröder, Friedrich Wendel and Karl Erler²⁹¹ in Germany. Erler’s attempts to render the question “more profound” and to proclaim that political parties are generally unnecessary and “bourgeois,” represent such Herculean pillars of absurdity that one can only shrug one’s shoulders. It goes to confirm the truth that a little mistake can always be turned into a monstrous one if it is persisted in, if profound justifications are sought for it, and if it is carried to its “logical conclusion.”

Repudiation of the party principle and of party discipline – such is the opposition’s net result. And this is tantamount to completely disarming the proletariat in the interest of the bourgeoisie. It is tantamount to that petit-bourgeois diffuseness, instability, incapacity for sustained effort, unity and organized action, which, if indulged in, must inevitably destroy every proletarian revolutionary movement. From the standpoint of Communism, the repudiation of the party principle means trying to leap from the eve of the collapse of capitalism (in Germany), not to the lower, or the intermediate, but to the higher phase of Communism. We in Russia (in the third year since the overthrow of the bourgeoisie) are going through the first steps in the transition from capitalism to Socialism, or the lower stage of Communism. Classes have remained, and will remain everywhere for years after the conquest of power by the proletariat. Perhaps in England, where there is no peasantry (but where there are small owners!), this period may be shorter. The abolition of classes means not only driving out the landlords and capitalists – that we accomplished with comparative ease – it also means abolishing the small commodity producers, and they cannot be driven out, or crushed; we must live in harmony with them; they can (and must) be remolded and re-educated only by very prolonged, slow, cautious organizational work. They encircle the proletariat on every side with a petit-bourgeois atmosphere, which permeates and corrupts the proletariat and causes constant relapses among the proletariat into petit-bourgeois spinelessness, disunity, individualism, and alternate moods of exaltation and dejection. The strictest centralization and discipline are required within the political party of the proletariat in order to counteract this, in order that the organizational role of the proletariat (and that is its principal role) may be exercised correctly, successfully, victoriously. The dictatorship of the proletariat is a persistent struggle – bloody and bloodless, violent and peaceful, military and economic, educational and administrative – against the forces and traditions of the old society.

²⁹⁰ Horner, the pseudonym of Anton Pannekoek.

²⁹¹ Karl Erler, “The Dissolution of the Party,” *Kommunistische Arbeiterzeitung*, Hamburg, February 7, 1920, No. 32: “The working class can not destroy the bourgeois state without destroying bourgeois democracy, and it cannot destroy bourgeois democracy without destroying parties.” The more muddleheaded of the syndicalists and anarchists of the Latin countries may derive “satisfaction” from the fact that solid Germans, who evidently consider themselves Marxists (K. Erler and K. Horner show very solidly by their articles in the above-mentioned paper that they consider themselves solid Marxists, but talk incredible nonsense in a most ridiculous manner and reveal their failure to understand the ABC of Marxism), go to the length of making utterly inept statements. The mere acceptance of Marxism does not save one from mistakes. We Russians know this particularly well, because in our country Marxism has been very often the “fashion.”

The force of habit of millions and tens of millions is a most terrible force. Without an iron party tempered in the struggle, without a party enjoying the confidence of all that is honest in the given class, without a party capable of watching and influencing the mood of the masses, it is impossible to conduct such a struggle successfully. It is a thousand times easier to vanquish the centralized big bourgeoisie than to “vanquish” the millions and millions of small owners; yet they, by their ordinary, everyday, imperceptible, elusive, demoralizing activity, achieve the very results which the bourgeoisie need and which tend to restore the bourgeoisie. Whoever weakens ever so little the iron discipline of the party of the proletariat (especially during the time of its dictatorship), actually aids the bourgeoisie against the proletariat.

Side by side with the question of leaders/party/class/masses, we must discuss the question of the “reactionary” trade unions. But first I shall take the liberty of making a few concluding remarks based on the experience of our Party. There have always been attacks on the “dictatorship of leaders” in our Party. The first time I heard such attacks, I recall, was in 1895, when, officially, no party yet existed, but when a central group began to be formed in St. Petersburg which was to undertake the leadership of the district groups. At the Ninth Congress of our Party (April 1920) there was a small opposition which also spoke against the “dictatorship of leaders,” against the “oligarchy,” and so on. There is therefore nothing surprising, nothing new, nothing terrible in the “infantile disorder” of “Left-wing Communism” among the Germans. The illness does not involve any danger, and after it the constitution becomes even stronger. On the other hand, in our case, the rapid alternation of legal and illegal work, which made it particularly necessary to “conceal,” to cloak in particular secrecy precisely the general staff, precisely the leaders, sometimes gave rise to extremely dangerous phenomena. The worst was that in 1912 the agent-provocateur Malinovsky got on the Bolshevik Central Committee. He betrayed scores and scores of the best and most loyal comrades, caused them to be sent to penal servitude and hastened the death of many of them. That he did not cause still greater harm was due to the fact that we had a proper relationship between legal and illegal work. As a member of the Central Committee of the Party and a deputy to the Duma, Malinovsky was forced, in order to gain our confidence, to aid us in establishing legal daily papers, which even under tsardom were able to wage a struggle against the opportunism of the Mensheviks and to propagate the fundamentals of Bolshevism in a suitably disguised form. While Malinovsky with one hand sent scores and scores of the best Bolsheviks to penal servitude and to death, he was obliged with the other to assist in the education of scores and scores of thousands of new Bolsheviks through the medium of the legal press. Those German (as well as British, American, French and Italian) comrades who are confronted with the task of learning how to conduct revolutionary work inside the reactionary trade unions, would do well to give serious thought to this fact.^{292, 293}

In many countries, including the most advanced, the bourgeoisie is undoubtedly now sending agents-provocateurs into the Communist parties and will continue to do so. One method of combating this peril is by skillfully combining illegal and legal work

²⁹² Malinovsky was a prisoner-of-war in Germany. When he returned to Russia under the rule of the Bolsheviks, he was instantly put on trial and shot by our workers. The Mensheviks attacked us most bitterly for our mistake—the fact that an agent-provocateur had become a member of the Central Committee of our Party. But when, under Kerensky, we demanded the arrest and trial of Rodzyanko, the Speaker of the Duma, because he had known even before the war that Malinovsky was an agent-provocateur and had not informed the Trudoviks and the workers in the Duma, neither the Mensheviks nor the Socialist-Revolutionaries in the Kerensky government supported our demand, and Rodzyanko remained at large and went off unhindered to join Denikin.

²⁹³ *Trudovik*—a group of petty-bourgeois democrats formed in April 1906 of peasant members of the first State Duma. The Trudovik group existed in all four Dumas. During the world imperialist war of 1914-18 the Trudoviks took a chauvinist stand, and following the bourgeois-democratic revolution of February 1917, expressed the interests of the kulaks and sided with the counter-revolution.

6. Should Revolutionaries Work in Reactionary Trade Unions?

The German “Lefts” consider that as far as they are concerned the reply to this question is an unqualified negative. In their opinion, declamations and angry ejaculations (such as uttered by K. Horner in a particularly “solid” and particularly stupid manner) against “reactionary” and “counter-revolutionary” trade unions are sufficient “proof” that, it is unnecessary and even impermissible for revolutionaries and Communists to work in yellow, social-chauvinist, compromising, counter-revolutionary trade unions of the Legien type.

But however strongly the German “Lefts” may be convinced of the revolutionism of such tactics, these tactics are in fact fundamentally wrong, and amount to no more than empty phrase-mongering.

To make this clear, I shall begin with our own experience – in keeping with the general plan of the present pamphlet, the object of which is to apply to Western Europe whatever is of general application, general validity and generally binding force in the history and the present tactics of Bolshevism.

The correlation between leaders/Party/class/masses, as well as the relation of the dictatorship of the proletariat and its party to the trade unions, now present themselves concretely in Russia in the following form: the dictatorship is exercised by the proletariat, organized in the Soviets; the proletariat is led by the Communist Party (Bolsheviks), which, according to the data of the last Party Congress (April 1920), has a membership of 611,000. The membership fluctuated greatly both before and after the October Revolution, and was formerly considerably less, even in 1918 and 1919.²⁹⁴ We are afraid of an excessive growth of the Party, because careerists and charlatans, who deserve only to be shot, inevitably strive to attach themselves to the ruling party. The last time we opened wide the doors of the Party – for workers and peasants only – was during the days (the winter of 1919) when Yudenich was within a few versts²⁹⁵ of Petrograd and Denikin was in Orel (about 350 versts from Moscow), that is, when the Soviet Republic was in desperate, mortal danger, and when adventurers, careerists, charlatans and unreliable persons generally could not possibly count on making a profitable career (and had more reason to expect the gallows and torture) by joining the Communists. The Party, which holds annual congresses (the last on the basis of one delegate for each 1,000 members), is directed by a Central Committee of nineteen elected at the congress, and the current work in Moscow has to be carried on by still smaller bodies, viz., the so-called “Orgburo” (Organization Bureau) and “Politburo” (Political Bureau), which are elected at plenary meetings of the Central Committee, five members of the Central Committee to each bureau. This, it would appear, is a full-fledged “oligarchy.” Not a single important political or organizational question is decided by any state institution in our republic without the guiding instructions of the Central Committee of the Party.

In its work, the Party relies directly on the trade unions, which, at present, according to the data of the last congress (April 1920), have over 4,000,000 members, and which are formally *non-party*. Actually, all the directing bodies of the vast majority of the *trade unions*, and primarily, of course, of the all-Russian general trade union center or bureau (the All Russian Central Council of Trade Unions), consist of Communists and carry out all the directives of the Party. Thus, on the whole, we have a formally non-Communist, flexible and relatively wide and very powerful proletarian apparatus, by means of which the Party is closely linked up with the *class* and with the *masses*, and by means of which, under the leadership of the Party, the *dictatorship of the class* is exercised. Without close contact with the trade unions, without their

²⁹⁴ The Party membership changed as follows in the period after the February Revolution of 1917 and up to the close of 1919: 80,000 at the time of the Seventh (April) All-Russian Conference of the R.S.D.L.P. (B.) in 1917, about 240,000 at the time of the Sixth R.S.D.L.P. (B.) Congress in July-August 1917; no less than 270,000 at the time of the Seventh R.C.P. (B.) Congress in March 1918, and 313,766 at the time of the Eighth R.C.P. (B.) Congress in March 1919.

²⁹⁵ Verst—an obsolete Russian unit of distance equal to 1,067 kilometers.

hearty support and self-sacrificing work, not only in economic, *but also in military* affairs, it would, of course, have been impossible for us to govern the country and to maintain the dictatorship for two-and-a-half months, let alone two-and-a-half years. Naturally, in practice, this close contact calls for very complicated and diversified work in the form of propaganda, agitation, timely and frequent conferences, not only with the leading trade union workers, but with influential trade union workers generally; it calls for a determined struggle against the Mensheviks, who still have a certain, though very small, number of adherents, whom they teach all possible counter-revolutionary tricks, from ideologically defending democracy (*bourgeois*) and preaching “independence” of the trade unions (independent of the proletarian state power!) to sabotaging proletarian discipline, etc., etc.

We consider that contact with the “masses” through trade unions is not enough. In the course of the revolution practical activities have given rise to *non-party workers’ and peasants’ conferences*, and we strive by every means to support, develop and extend this institution in order to be able to follow the sentiments of the masses, to come closer to them, to respond to their requirements, to promote the best among them to state posts, etc. Under a recent decree on the transformation of the People’s Commissariat of State Control into the “Workers’ and Peasants’ Inspection,” non-party conferences of this kind are given the right to elect members of the State Control for various kinds of investigations, etc.

Then, of course, all the work of the Party is carried on through the Soviets, which embrace the working masses irrespective of occupation. The district congresses of Soviets are *democratic* institutions the like of which even the best of the democratic republics of the bourgeois world has never known; and through these congresses (whose proceedings the Party endeavors to follow with the closest attention), as well as by continually appointing class-conscious workers to various posts in the rural districts, the role of the proletariat as leader of the peasantry is exercised, the dictatorship of the urban proletariat is realized, a systematic struggle against the rich, bourgeois, exploiting and profiteering peasantry is waged, etc.

Such is the general mechanism of the proletarian state power viewed “from above,” from the standpoint of the practical realization of the dictatorship. It can be hoped that the reader will understand why the Russian Bolshevik who is acquainted with this mechanism and who for twenty-five years has watched it growing out of small, illegal, underground circles, cannot help regarding all this talk about “from above” or “from below,” about the dictatorship of leaders or the dictatorship of the masses, etc., as ridiculous and childish nonsense, something like discussing whether a man’s left leg or right arm is more useful to him.

And we cannot but regard as equally ridiculous and childish nonsense the pompous, very learned, and frightfully revolutionary disquisitions of the German Lefts to the effect that Communists cannot and should not work in reactionary trade unions, that it is permissible to turn down such work, that it is necessary to leave the trade unions and to create an absolutely brand-new, immaculate “Workers’ Union” invented by very nice (and, probably, for the most part very youthful) Communists, etc., etc.

Capitalism inevitably leaves Socialism the legacy, on the one hand, of old trade and craft distinctions among the workers, distinctions evolved in the course of centuries; and, on the other hand, trade unions which only very slowly, in the course of years and years, can and will develop into broader, industrial unions with less of the craft union about them (embracing whole industries, and not only crafts, trades and occupations), and later proceed, through these industrial unions, to eliminate the division of labor among people, to educate, school and train people with an *all-round development and an all-round training*, people who *know how to do everything*. Communism is advancing and must advance towards this goal, and *will reach it*, but only after very many years. To attempt in practice today to anticipate this future result of a fully developed, fully stabilized and formed, fully expanded and mature Communism would be like trying to teach higher mathematics to a four-year-old child.

We can (and must) begin to build Socialism, not with imaginary human material, nor with human material specially prepared by us, but with the human material bequeathed to us by capitalism. True, that is very “difficult,” but no other approach to this task is serious enough to warrant discussion.

The trade unions were a tremendous progressive step for the working class in the early days of capitalist development, inasmuch as they represented a transition from the disunity and helplessness of the workers to the *rudiments* of class organization. When the highest form of proletarian class organization began to arise, viz., the *revolutionary party of the proletariat* (which will not deserve the name until it learns to bind the leaders with the class and the masses into one single indissoluble whole), the trade unions inevitably began to reveal *certain* reactionary features, a certain craft narrowness, a certain tendency to be nonpolitical, a certain inertness, etc. But the development of the proletariat did not, and could not, proceed anywhere in the world otherwise than through reciprocal action between them and the party of the working class. The conquest of political power by the proletariat is a gigantic forward step for the proletariat as a class, and the Party must more than ever and in a new way, not only in the old way, educate and guide the trade unions, at the same time bearing in mind that they are and will long remain an indispensable “school of Communism” and a preparatory school that trains the proletarians to exercise their dictatorship, an indispensable organization of the workers for the gradual transfer of the management of the whole economic life of the country to the working *class* (and not to the separate trades), and later to all the working people.

A *certain* amount of “reactionariness” in the trade unions, in the sense mentioned, is *inevitable* under the dictatorship of the proletariat. Failure to understand this signifies complete failure to understand the fundamental conditions of the *transition* from capitalism to Socialism. To fear *this* “reactionariness,” to, try to avoid it, to leap over it, would be the greatest folly, for it would be fearing that function of the proletarian vanguard which consists in training, educating, enlightening and drawing into the new life the most backward strata and masses of the working class and the peasantry. On the other hand, to postpone the achievement of the dictatorship of the proletariat until a time comes when not a single worker is left with a narrow craft outlook, or with craft and craft-union prejudices, would be a greater mistake. The art of politics (and the Communist’s correct understanding of his tasks) lies in correctly gauging the conditions and the moment when the vanguard of the proletariat can successfully seize power, when it is able, during and after the seizure of power, to obtain adequate support from adequately broad strata of the working class and of the non-proletarian working masses, and when it is able thereafter to maintain, consolidate and extend its rule by educating, training and attracting ever broader masses of the working people.

Further. In countries more advanced than Russia, a certain reactionariness in the trade unions has been and was bound to be manifested to a much stronger degree than in our country. Our Mensheviks found support in the trade unions (and to some extent still find in a very few unions), precisely because of the craft narrowness, craft egotism and opportunism.

The Mensheviks of the West have acquired a much firmer “footing” in the trade unions; there the craft-union, narrow-minded, selfish, casehardened, covetous, petit-bourgeois “labor aristocracy,” imperialist-minded, imperialist bribed and imperialist-corrupted, emerged as a much stronger stratum than in our country. That is uncontested. The struggle against the Gomperses, against Messrs. Jouhaux, Henderson, Merrheim, Legien and Co. in Western Europe is much more difficult than the struggle against our Mensheviks, who represent an absolutely homogeneous social and political type. This struggle must be waged ruthlessly, and it must unfailingly be brought – as we brought it – to a point when all the incorrigible leaders opportunism and social-chauvinism are completely discredited and driven out of the trade unions. Political power cannot be captured (and the attempt to capture it should not be made) until the struggle has reached a certain stage.

This “certain stage” will be different in different countries and in different circumstances; it can be correctly gauged only by thoughtful, experienced and knowledgeable political leaders of the proletariat in each particular country (In Russia, one among other criteria of the success of this struggle was the elections to the Constituent Assembly in November 1917,

a few days after the proletarian revolution of October 25, 1917. In these elections the Mensheviks were utterly defeated; they obtained 700,000 votes – 1,400,000 if the vote of Transcaucasia be added – as against 9,000,000 votes polled by the Bolsheviks. See my article, “The Elections to the Constituent Assembly and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat,”²⁹⁶ in the Communist International, No. 7-8).

But we wage the struggle against the “labor aristocracy” in the name of the masses of the workers and in order to win them to our side; we wage the struggle against the opportunist and social-chauvinist leaders in order to win the working class to our side. To forget this most elementary and most self-evident truth would be stupid. And it is precisely this stupidity the German “Left” Communists are guilty of when, *because* of the reactionary and counter-revolutionary character of the trade union *top leadership*, they jump to the conclusion that … we must leave the trade unions!! that we must refuse to work in them!! that we must create new and *artificial* forms of labor organization!! This is such an unpardonable blunder that it is equal to the greatest service the Communists could render the bourgeoisie. For our Mensheviks, like all the opportunist, social-chauvinist, Kautskyite trade union leaders, are nothing but “agents of the bourgeoisie in the working-class movement” (as we have always said the Mensheviks were), or “labor lieutenants of the capitalist class,” to use the splendid and profoundly true expression of the followers of Daniel De Leon in America. To refuse to work in the reactionary trade unions means leaving the insufficiently developed or backward masses of workers under the influence of the reactionary leaders, the agents of the bourgeoisie, the labor aristocrats, or the “workers who have become completely bourgeois” (cf. Engels’ letter to Marx in 1858 about the British workers²⁹⁷).

It is precisely this absurd “theory” that Communists must not work in reactionary trade unions that brings out with the greatest clarity how frivolous is the attitude of the “Left” Communists towards the question of influencing “the masses,” and to what abuses they go in their vociferations about “the masses.” If you want to help “the masses” and to win the sympathy and support of “the masses,” you must not fear difficulties, you must not fear the pinpricks, chicanery, insults and persecution on the part of the “leaders” (who, being opportunists and social-chauvinists, are in most cases directly or indirectly connected with the bourgeoisie and the police), but must imperatively work wherever the masses are to be found. You must be capable of every sacrifice, of overcoming the greatest obstacles in order to carry on agitation and propaganda systematically, perseveringly, persistently and patiently, precisely in those institutions, societies and associations – even the most ultra-reactionary – in which proletarian or semi-proletarian masses are to be found. And the trade unions and workers’ cooperatives (the latter sometimes, at least) are precisely organizations where the masses are to be found. According to figures quoted in the Swedish paper Folkets Dagblad Politiken on March 10, 1920, trade union membership in Great Britain increased from 5,500,000 at the end of 1917 to 6,600,000 at the end of 1918, an increase of 19 percent. Towards the close of 1919 the membership was estimated at 7,500,000. I have not at hand the corresponding figures for France and Germany, but absolutely incontestable and generally known facts testify to a rapid growth of trade union membership in these countries too.

These facts make crystal clear what is confirmed by thousands of other symptoms, namely, that class consciousness and the desire for organization are growing precisely among the proletarian masses, among the “rank and file,” among the backward elements. Millions of workers in Great Britain, France and Germany are for the first time passing from a complete lack of organization to the elementary, lowest, most simple, and (for those still thoroughly imbued with bourgeois-democratic prejudices) most easily comprehensible form of organization, namely, the trade unions, yet the revolutionary, but imprudent, Left Communists stand by, shouting “the masses, the masses!” – and refuse to work within the trade unions!!

²⁹⁶ V. I. Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. XXX.

²⁹⁷ See Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1965, pp. 102-103.

refuse on the pretext that they are “reactionary!!” and invent a brand-new, immaculate little “Workers’ Union,” which is guiltless of bourgeois-democratic prejudices and innocent of craft or narrow craft-union sins, which, they claim, will be (will be!) a broad organization, and the only (only!) condition of membership of which will be “recognition of the Soviet system and the dictatorship” (see passage quoted above)!!

Greater foolishness and greater damage to the revolution than that caused by the “Left” revolutionaries cannot be imagined! Why, if we in Russia today, after two and a half years of unprecedented victories over the bourgeoisie of Russia and the Entente, were to make “recognition of the dictatorship” a condition of trade union membership, we should be committing a folly, we should be damaging our influence over the masses, we should be helping the Mensheviks. For the whole task of the Communists is to be able to *convince* the backward elements, to work *among* them, and not to *fence themselves off* from them by artificial and childishly “Left” slogans.

There need be no doubt that Messrs. Gompers, Henderson, Jouhaux, and Legien are very grateful to “Left” revolutionaries who, like the German opposition “on principle” (heaven preserve us from such “principles!”), or like some of the revolutionaries in the American Industrial Workers of the World,²⁹⁸ advocate leaving the reactionary trade unions and refusal to work in them. There need be no doubt that those gentlemen, the “leaders” of opportunism, will resort to every trick of bourgeois diplomacy, to the aid of bourgeois governments, the priests, the police and the courts, to prevent Communists joining the trade unions, to force them out by every means, to make their work in the trade unions as unpleasant as possible, to insult, bait and persecute them. We must be able to withstand all this, to agree to all and every sacrifice, and even – if need be – to resort to various stratagems, artifices, illegal methods, to evasions and subterfuges, only so as to get into the trade unions, to remain in them, and to carry on Communist work within them at all costs. Under tsardom we had no “legal possibilities” whatever until 1905; but when Zubatov, a secret police agent, organized Black Hundred workers’ assemblies and workingmen’s societies for the purpose of trapping revolutionaries and combating them, we sent members of our Party to these assemblies and into these societies (I personally remember one of them, Comrade Babushkin, a prominent St. Petersburg worker, who was shot by the tsar’s generals in 1906). They established contact with the masses, managed to carry on their agitation, and succeeded in wresting workers from the influence of Zubatov’s agents.²⁹⁹ Of course, in Western Europe, where legalistic, constitutionalist, bourgeois-democratic prejudices have a particular tenacity and are very deeply ingrained, this is a more difficult job. But it can and should be carried out, and carried out systematically.

The Executive Committee of the Third International must, in my opinion, positively condemn, and call upon the next congress of the Communist International to condemn, both the policy of refusing to join reactionary trade unions in general (explaining in detail why such refusal is unwise, and what extreme harm it does to the cause of the proletarian revolution) and, in particular, the line of conduct of some members of the Communist Party of Holland, who – whether directly or indirectly, openly or covertly, wholly or partly does not matter – supported this erroneous policy. The Third International must break with the tactics of the Second International; it must not evade or gloss over sore points, but must put them bluntly. The whole truth has been put squarely to the “Independents” (the Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany); the whole truth must likewise be put squarely to the “Left” Communists.

²⁹⁸ *Industrial Workers of the World* (*I.W.W.*)—an American labor organization founded in 1905. Its activities were marked by pronounced anarcho-syndicalist traits: it did not recognize the necessity of political struggle by the proletariat, denied the leading role of the proletarian party, the need for an armed uprising to overthrow capitalism and the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat. The *I.W.W.* refused to work in the American Federation of Labor unions and subsequently degenerated into a sectarian anarcho-syndicalist group exerting no influence whatsoever on the workers.

²⁹⁹ The Gomperses, Hendersons, Jouhaux and Legiens are nothing but Zubatovs, differing from our Zubatov only in their European dress, polish, civilized, refined, democratically sleek manner of conducting their despicable policy.

1. Should We Participate in Bourgeois Parliaments?

The German “Left” Communists, with the greatest contempt –and with the greatest frivolity – reply to this question in the negative. Their arguments? In the passage quoted above we read:

*One must emphatically reject ... all reversion to parliamentary forms of struggle, which have become historically and politically obsolete.*³⁰⁰

This is said with absurd pretentiousness, and is obviously incorrect. “Reversion” to parliamentarism! Perhaps there is already a Soviet republic in Germany? It seems not! How, then, can one speak of “reversion”? Is this not an empty phrase?

Parliamentarism has become “historically obsolete.” That is true as regards propaganda. But everyone knows that this is still a long way from overcoming it *practically*. Capitalism could have been declared, and with full justice, to be “historically obsolete” many decades ago, but that does not at all remove the need for a very long and very persistent struggle *on the soil* of capitalism. Parliamentarism is “historically obsolete” from the standpoint of *world history*, that is to say, the *era* of bourgeois parliamentarism has come to an end and the *era* of the proletarian dictatorship has *begun*. That is incontestable. But world history reckons in decades. Ten or twenty years sooner or later makes no difference when measured by the scale of world history; from the standpoint of world history it is a trifle that cannot be calculated even approximately. But precisely for that reason it is a howling theoretical blunder to apply the scale of world history to practical politics.

Is parliamentarism “politically obsolete”? That is quite another matter. Were that true, the position of the “Lefts” would be a strong one. But it has to be proved by a most searching analysis, and the “Lefts” do not even know how to approach it. In the “Theses on Parliamentarism,” published in the *Bulletin of the Provisional Bureau in Amsterdam of the Communist International*, No. 1, February 1920, and obviously expressing the Dutch-Left or Left-Dutch strivings, the analysis, as we shall see, is also hopelessly bad.

In the first place, contrary to the opinion of such outstanding political leaders as Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, the German “Lefts,” as we know, considered parliamentarism to be “politically obsolete” even in January, 1919. We know that the “Lefts” were mistaken. This fact alone utterly destroys, at a single stroke, the proposition that parliamentarism is “politically obsolete.” The obligation falls upon the “Lefts” of proving why their error, indisputable at that time, has now ceased to be in error.

They do not, and cannot produce even a shadow of proof. The attitude of a political party towards its own mistakes is one of the most important and surest ways of judging how earnest the party is and how it *in practice* fulfills its obligations towards its *class* and the toiling *masses*. Frankly admitting a mistake, ascertaining the reasons for it, analyzing the conditions which led to it, and thoroughly discussing the means of correcting it—that is the earmark of a serious party; that is the way it should perform its duties, that is the way it should educate and train the *class*, and then the *masses*. By failing to fulfill this duty, by failing to give the utmost attention, care and consideration to the study of their obvious mistake, the “Lefts” in Germany (and in Holland), have proved that they are not a *party of the class*, but a circle, not a *party of the masses*, but a group of intellectuals and of a few workers who imitate the worst features of intellectualism.

Secondly, in the same pamphlet of the Frankfurt group of “Lefts” that we have already cited in detail, we read:

³⁰⁰ See “The Split in the Communist Party of Germany” quoted in this book, pp. 29-31.

The millions of workers who still follow the policy of the center [the Catholic “center” Party] are counter-revolutionary. The rural proletarians provide the legions of counter-revolutionary troops (page 3 of the pamphlet).³⁰¹

Everything goes to show that this statement is much too sweeping and exaggerated. But the basic fact set forth here is incontrovertible, and its acknowledgment by the “Lefts” is particularly clear evidence of their mistake. How can one say that “parliamentarism is politically obsolete,” when “millions” and “legions” of proletarians are not only still in favor of parliamentarism in general, but are downright “counter-revolutionary!?” Clearly, parliamentarism in Germany is not yet politically obsolete. Clearly, the “Lefts” in Germany have mistaken their desire, their political-ideological attitude, for objective reality. That is the most dangerous mistake for revolutionaries. In Russia – where, over a particularly long period and in particularly varied forms, the extremely fierce and savage yoke of tsardom produced revolutionaries of diverse shades, revolutionaries who displayed astonishing devotion, enthusiasm, heroism and strength of will – in Russia we have observed this mistake of the revolutionaries very closely, we have studied it very attentively and have first-hand knowledge of it; and we can therefore notice it especially clearly in others. Parliamentarism, of course, is “politically obsolete” for the Communists in Germany; but – and that is the whole point – we must not regard what is obsolete for us as being obsolete for the class, as being obsolete for the masses. Here again we find that the “Lefts” do not know how to reason, do not know how to act as the party of the class, as the party of the masses. You must not sink to the level of the masses, to the level of the backward strata of the class. That is incontestable. You must tell them the bitter truth. You must call their bourgeois-democratic and parliamentary prejudices – prejudices. But at the same time you must soberly follow the actual state of class consciousness and preparedness of the whole class (not only of its Communist vanguard), of all the toiling masses (not only of their advanced elements).

Even if not “millions” and “legions,” but only a fairly large minority of industrial workers follow the Catholic priests – and a similar minority of rural workers follow the landlords and kulaks (Grossbauern) – it undoubtedly follows that parliamentarism in Germany is not yet politically obsolete, that participation in parliamentary elections and in the struggle on the parliamentary rostrum is obligatory for the party of the revolutionary proletariat precisely for the purpose of educating the backward strata of its own class, precisely for the purpose of awakening and enlightening the undeveloped, down-trodden, ignorant rural masses. As long as you are unable to disperse the bourgeois parliament and every other type of reactionary institution, you must work inside them precisely because there you will still find workers who are doped by priests and the dreariness of rural life; otherwise you risk becoming mere babblers.

Thirdly, the “Left” Communists have a great deal to say in praise of us Bolsheviks. One sometimes feels like telling them to praise us less and try to understand the tactics of the Bolsheviks more, to familiarize themselves with them more! We took part in the elections to the Russian bourgeois parliament, the Constituent Assembly, in September-November 1917. Were our tactics correct or not? If not, then this should be clearly stated and proved, for it is essential in working out correct tactics for international Communism. If they were correct, then we must draw certain conclusions. Of course, there can be no question of regarding conditions in Russia on a par with conditions in Western Europe. But as regards the special question of the meaning of the concept that “parliamentarism has become politically obsolete,” it is essential to take careful account of our experience, for unless concrete experience is taken into account such concepts very easily turn into empty phrases. Did not we, the Russian Bolsheviks, have more right in September-November 1917 than any Western Communists to consider that parliamentarism was politically obsolete in Russia? Of course we did, for the point is not whether parliaments have existed for a long time or a short time, but how far the broad masses of the working people are *prepared* (ideologically, politically and practically) to accept the Soviet system and to disperse the bourgeois-democratic parliament

³⁰¹ Ibid.

(or allow it to be dispersed). That, owing to a number of special conditions, the urban working class and the soldiers and peasants of Russia were in September-November 1917 exceptionally well prepared to accept the Soviet system and to disperse the most democratic of bourgeois parliaments, is an absolutely uncontested and fully established historical fact. Nevertheless, the Bolsheviks did *not* boycott the Constituent Assembly, but took part in the elections both before the proletariat conquered political power and *after*. That these elections yielded exceedingly valuable (and for the proletariat, highly useful) political results I have proved, I make bold to hope, in the above-mentioned article, which analyzes in detail the figures of the elections to the Constituent Assembly in Russia.

The conclusion which follows from this is absolutely incontrollable; it has been proved that participation in a bourgeois-democratic parliament even a few weeks before the victory of a Soviet republic, and even *after* such a victory, not only does not harm the revolutionary proletariat, but actually helps it to prove to the backward masses why such parliaments deserve to be dispersed; it *helps* their successful dispersal, and helps to make bourgeois parliamentarism “politically obsolete.” To refuse to heed this experience, and at the same time to claim affiliation to the Communist *International*, which must work out its tactics *internationally* (not as narrow or one-sided national tactics, but as international tactics), is to commit the gravest blunder and actually to retreat from internationalism while recognizing it in words.

Now let us examine the “Dutch-Left” arguments in favor of non-participation in parliaments. The following is the text of the most important of the above-mentioned “Dutch” theses, Thesis No. 4:

*When the capitalistic system of production has broken down, and society is in a state of revolution, parliamentary activity gradually loses importance as compared with the action of the masses themselves. When then, parliament becomes the center and organ of the counter-revolution whilst on the other hand, the laboring class builds up the instruments of its power in the Soviets, it may even prove necessary to abstain from all and any participation in parliamentary action.*³⁰²

The first sentence is obviously wrong, since the action of the masses – a big strike, for instance – is more important than parliamentary activity at all times, and not only during a revolution or in a revolutionary situation. This obviously untenable and historically and politically incorrect argument only very clearly shows that the authors absolutely ignore both the general European experience (the French experience before the revolutions of 1848 and 1870; the German experience of 1878-90, etc.) and the Russian experience (see above) as to the importance of combining legal with illegal struggle. This question is of immense importance in general, and in particular, because in all civilized and advanced countries the time is rapidly approaching when such a combination will more and more become – in part it has already become – obligatory for the party of the revolutionary proletariat owing to the fact that civil war between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is maturing and approaching, owing to the fierce persecution of the Communists by republican governments and bourgeois governments generally, which resort to any violation of legality (witness the example of America alone!), and so on. This very important question the Dutch, and the Lefts in general, have utterly failed to understand.

As for the second sentence, in the first place it is wrong historically. We Bolsheviks participated in the most counter-revolutionary parliaments, and experience has shown that this participation was not only useful but essential for the party of the revolutionary proletariat precisely after the first bourgeois revolution in Russia (1905) in order to prepare the way for the second bourgeois revolution (February 1917), and then or the socialist revolution (October 1917). In the second place, this sentence is amazingly illogical. If parliament becomes an organ and a “center” (in reality it never has been and never can be a “center,” but that by the way) of counter-revolution, while the workers are building up instruments of their power in the form of Soviets, it follows that the workers must prepare – ideologically, politically and technically – for the struggle of the Soviets against parliament, for the dispersal of parliament by the Soviets. But it does not follow that this

³⁰² “Theses on Parliamentarism,” in Die Kommunistische Internationale, No. 4–5, January 1920.

dispersal is hindered, or is not facilitated, by the presence of a Soviet opposition within the counter-revolutionary parliament. In the course of our victorious struggle against Denikin and Kolchak, we never found that the existence of a Soviet, proletarian opposition in their camp was immaterial to our victories. We know perfectly well that the dispersal of the Constituent Assembly on January 5, 1918, far from being hindered, was actually facilitated by the fact that within the counter-revolutionary Constituent Assembly about to be dispersed there was a consistent, Bolshevik, as well as an inconsistent, Left Socialist-Revolutionary, Soviet opposition. The authors of the theses are utterly confused and have forgotten the experience of many, if not all, revolutions, which shows how very useful during a revolution is the combination of mass action outside the reactionary parliament with an opposition sympathetic to (or, better still, directly supporting) the revolution inside it. The Dutch, and the “Lefts” in general, argue like doctrinaire revolutionaries who have never taken part in a real revolution, or who have never deeply pondered over the history of revolutions, or who have naively mistaken the subjective “rejection” of a certain reactionary institution for its actual destruction by the combined action of a number of objective factors.

The surest way of discrediting and damaging a new political (and not only political) idea is to reduce it to absurdity on the plea of defending it. For every truth, if “overdone” (as Dietzgen senior put it), if exaggerated, if carried beyond the limits of its actual applicability, can be reduced to absurdity, and is even bound to become an absurdity under these conditions. That is just the kind of backhanded service the Dutch and German

Lefts are rendering the new truth that the Soviet form of government is superior to bourgeois-democratic parliaments. It stands to reason that anyone who subscribed to the old view, or in general maintained that refusal to participate in bourgeois parliaments is impermissible under any circumstances, would be wrong. I cannot attempt to formulate here the conditions under which a boycott is useful, for the object of this pamphlet is far more modest, namely, to study Russian experience in connection with certain topical questions of international communist tactics. Russian experience has given us one successful and correct (1905) and one incorrect (1906) example of the application of the boycott by the Bolsheviks. Analyzing the first case we see that we succeeded in preventing the convocation of a reactionary parliament by a reactionary government in a situation in which extra-parliamentary, revolutionary mass action (strikes in particular) was mounting with exceptional rapidity, when not a single section of the proletariat and of the peasantry could support the reactionary government in any way, when the revolutionary proletariat was acquiring influence over the broad, backward masses through the strike struggle and the agrarian movement. It is quite obvious that this experience is not applicable to present-day European conditions. It is likewise quite obvious – and the foregoing arguments bear this out – that the advocacy, even if with reservations, by the Dutch and other “Lefts” of refusal to participate in parliaments is fundamentally wrong and detrimental to the cause of the revolutionary proletariat.

In Western Europe and America parliament has become especially abhorrent to the advanced revolutionary members of the working class. That is incontestable. It is quite comprehensible, for it is difficult to imagine anything more vile, abominable and treacherous than the behavior of the vast majority of the Socialist and Social-Democratic parliamentary deputies during and after the war. But it would be not only unreasonable, but actually criminal to yield to this mood when deciding how this generally recognized evil should be fought. In many countries of Western Europe the revolutionary mood, we might say, is at present a “novelty,” or a “rarity,” which had been all too long waited for vainly and impatiently; and perhaps that is why the mood is so easily succumbed to. Certainly, without a revolutionary mood among the masses, and without conditions facilitating the growth of this mood, revolutionary tactics would never be converted into action; but we in Russia have become convinced by very long, painful and bloody experience of the truth that revolutionary tactics cannot be built on revolutionary moods alone. Tactics must be based on a sober and strictly objective appraisal of all the class forces of the particular state (and of the states that surround it, and of all states the world over) as well as of the experience of revolutionary movements. To show how “revolutionary” one is solely by hurling abuse at parliamentary

opportunism, solely by repudiating participation in parliaments, is very easy; but just because it is too easy, it is not the solution for a difficult, a very difficult problem. It is much more difficult to create a really revolutionary parliamentary group in a European parliament than it was in Russia. Of course. But that is only a particular expression of the general truth that it was easy for Russia, in the specific, historically very unique situation of 1917, to start the socialist revolution, but it will be more difficult for Russia than for the European countries to continue the revolution and bring it to its consummation. I had occasion to point this out already at the beginning of 1918, and our experience of the past two years has entirely confirmed the correctness of this view. Certain specific conditions, viz., 1) the possibility of linking up the Soviet revolution with the ending, as a consequence of this revolution, of the imperialist war, which had exhausted the workers and peasants to an incredible degree; 2) the possibility of taking advantage for a certain time of the mortal conflict between two world-powerful groups of imperialist robbers, who were unable to unite against their Soviet enemy; 3) the possibility of enduring a comparatively lengthy civil war, partly owing to the enormous size of the country and to the poor means of communication; 4) the existence of such a profound bourgeois-democratic revolutionary movement among the peasantry that the party of the proletariat was able to take the revolutionary demands of the peasant party (the Socialist-Revolutionary Party, the majority of the members of which were definitely hostile to Bolshevism) and realize them at once, thanks to the conquest of political power by the proletariat—these specific conditions do not exist in Western Europe at present; and a repetition of such or similar conditions will not come so easily. That, by the way, apart from a number of other causes, is why it will be more difficult for Western Europe to start a socialist revolution than it was for us. To attempt to “circumvent” this difficulty by “skipping” the difficult job of utilizing reactionary parliaments for revolutionary purposes is absolutely childish. You want to create a new society, yet you fear the difficulties involved in forming a good parliamentary group, made up of convinced, devoted, heroic Communists, in a reactionary parliament! Is that not childish? If Karl Liebknecht in Germany and Z. Höglund in Sweden were able, even without mass support from below, to set examples in the truly revolutionary utilization of reactionary parliaments, how can one say that a rapidly growing revolutionary, mass party, in the midst of the postwar disillusionment and embitterment of the masses, cannot hammer out a communist group in the worst of parliaments?! Precisely because the backward masses of the workers and – to an even greater degree – of the small peasants are in Western Europe much more imbued with bourgeois-democratic and parliamentary prejudices than they were in Russia, precisely because of that, it is only from within such institutions as bourgeois parliaments that Communists can (and must) wage a long and persistent struggle, undaunted by any difficulties, to expose, dissipate and overcome these prejudices.

The German “Lefts” complain about bad “leaders” in their party, give way to despair, and go to the absurd length of “repudiating” “leaders.” But when conditions are such that it is often necessary to hide “leaders” underground, the development of good, reliable, experienced and authoritative “leaders” is a very difficult matter, and these difficulties cannot be successfully overcome without combining legal and illegal work, and without testing the “leaders,” among other ways, in the parliamentary arena as well. Criticism – the keenest, most ruthless and uncompromising criticism – must be directed, not against parliamentarism or parliamentary activities, but against those leaders who are unable – and still more against those who are unwilling – to utilize parliamentary elections and the parliamentary tribune in a revolutionary, communist manner. Only such criticism – combined of course, with the expulsion of incapable leaders and their replacement by capable ones – will constitute useful and fruitful revolutionary work that will simultaneously train the “leaders” to be worthy of the

working class and of the toiling masses, and train the masses to be able properly to understand the political situation and the often very complicated and intricate tasks that spring from that situation.^{303, 304}

(1) No Compromises?

In the quotation from the Frankfurt pamphlet we saw how emphatically the “Lefts” advance this slogan. It is sad to see people who doubtless consider themselves Marxists and want to be Marxists forgetting the fundamental truths of Marxism. This is what Engels – who, like Marx, was one of those rarest of authors whose every sentence in every one of their great works contains remarkably profound meaning – wrote in 1874 in opposition to the manifesto of the thirty-three Blanquist Communards:³⁰⁵

“We are Communists [wrote the Blanquist Communards in their manifesto] because we want to attain our goal without stopping at intermediate stations, without any compromises, which only postpone the day of victory and prolong the period of slavery.”

The German Communists are Communists because through all the intermediate stations and all compromises, created, not by them, but by the course of historical development, they clearly perceive and constantly pursue the final aim, viz., the abolition of classes and the creation of a society in which there will no longer be private ownership of land or of the means of production. The thirty-three Blanquists are Communists because they imagine that merely because they want to skip the intermediate stations and compromises, that settles the matter, and if “it begins” in the next few days – which they take for granted – and they come to the helm, “Communism will be introduced” the day after tomorrow. If that is not immediately possible, they are not Communists.

*What childish innocence it is to present impatience as a theoretically convincing argument!*³⁰⁶

³⁰³ I have had too little opportunity to acquaint myself with “Left-wing” Communism in Italy. Comrade Bordiga and his faction of “Communist Boycottists” (*Comunista astensionista*) are certainly wrong in advocating non-participation in parliament. But on one point, it seems to me, Comrade Bordiga is right—as far as can be judged from two issues of his paper, *Il Soviet* (Nos. 3 and 4, January 18 and February 1, 1920), from four issues of Comrade Serrati’s excellent periodical, *Comunismo* (Nos. 1-4, October 1-November 30, 1919), and from isolated issues of Italian bourgeois papers which I have come across. Comrade Bordiga and his faction are right in attacking Turati and his followers, who remain in a party which has recognized Soviet power and the dictatorship of the proletariat, yet continue their former pernicious and opportunist policy as members of parliament. Of course, in tolerating this, Comrade Serrati and the whole Italian Socialist Party are committing a mistake which threatens to do as much harm and give rise to the same dangers as it did in Hungary, where the Hungarian Turatis sabotaged both the Party and Soviet government from within. Such a mistaken, inconsistent, or spineless attitude towards the opportunist parliamentarians gives rise to “Left-wing” Communism, on the one hand, and to a certain extent justifies its existence, on the other. Comrade Serrati is obviously wrong when he accuses Deputy Turati of being “inconsistent” (*Comunismo*, No. 3), for it is precisely the Italian Socialist Party itself that is inconsistent in tolerating such opportunist parliamentarians as Turati and Co.

³⁰⁴ The Italian Socialist Party was founded in 1892 under the name of the Italian Workers’ Party and renamed Italian Socialist Party in 1893. The Left wing gained strength following the October Socialist Revolution in Russia, and in January 1921, at the Livorno Congress, the Lefts broke with the party, convened a congress of their own and founded the Communist Party of Italy. An influential Left wing developed within the Socialist Party during the years of fascist dictatorship, and in 1934 the party concluded an agreement on united action with the Communist Party of Italy. The agreement was the basis for co-operation between the two parties during and after the Second World War. A Right-wing group led by Saragat, which served the interest of American imperialism, withdrew from the Socialist Party in January 1947 and formed the Socialist Party of Italian Workers.

³⁰⁵ The Blanquists were followers of the French revolutionary Louis Auguste Blanqui (1805-81). The classics of Marxism-Leninism, while regarding Blanqui as an outstanding revolutionary and adherent of socialism, criticized him for his sectarianism and conspiratorial methods of activity. “Blanquism,” wrote Lenin, “is a theory that repudiates the class struggle. Blanquism expects that mankind will be emancipated from wage slavery, not by the class struggle of the proletariat, but through a conspiracy of a small minority of intellectuals” (see V. I. Lenin, “The Congress Summed Up,” *Collected Works*, Vol. X).

³⁰⁶ Frederick Engels, “Refugee Literature. II. The Program of the Blanquist Refugees from the Paris Commune” (Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. XXIV, Lawrence & Wishart, 2010, pp. 12-18).

In the same article, Engels expresses his profound esteem for Vaillant, and speaks of the “undeniable merits” of the latter (who, like Guesde, was one of the most prominent leaders of international Socialism up to August 1914, when they both turned traitor to Socialism). But Engels does not allow an obvious mistake to pass without a detailed analysis. Of course, to very young and inexperienced revolutionaries, as well as to petit-bourgeois revolutionaries, of even a very respectable age and very experienced, it seems exceedingly “dangerous,” incomprehensible and incorrect to “allow compromises.” And many sophists (being unusually or excessively “experienced” politicians) reason exactly in the same way as the British leaders of opportunism mentioned by Comrade Lansbury: “If the Bolsheviks may make a certain compromise, why may we not make any kind of compromise?” But proletarians schooled in numerous strikes (to take only this manifestation of the class struggle) usually understand quite well the very profound (philosophical, historical, political and psychological) truth expounded by Engels. Every proletarian has been through strikes and has experienced “compromises” with the hated oppressors and exploiters, when the workers had to go back to work either without having achieved anything or agreeing to only a partial satisfaction of their demands. Every proletarian – owing to the conditions of the mass struggle and the sharp intensification of class antagonisms in which he lives – notices the difference between a compromise enforced by objective conditions (such as lack of strike funds, no outside support, extreme hunger and exhaustion), a compromise which in no way diminishes the revolutionary devotion and readiness for further struggle on the part of the workers who have agreed to such a compromise, and a compromise by traitors who try to ascribe to outside causes their own selfishness (strike-breakers also enter into “compromises!”), cowardice, desire to toady to the capitalists, and readiness to yield to intimidation, sometimes to persuasion, sometimes to sops, and sometimes to flattery on the part of the capitalists (The history of the British labor movement offers especially many instances of such treacherous compromises by British trade union leaders, but, in one form or another, nearly all workers in all countries have witnessed the same sort of thing).

Naturally, there are individual cases of exceptional difficulty and intricacy when the real character of this or that “compromise” can be correctly determined only with the greatest difficulty; just as there are cases of homicide where it is by no means easy to decide whether the homicide was fully justified and even necessary (as, for example, legitimate self-defense), or due to unpardonable negligence, or even to a cunningly executed perfidious plan. Of course, in politics, where it is sometimes a matter of extremely complicated – national and international – relations between classes and parties, very many cases will arise that will be much more difficult than the questions of a legitimate “compromise” in a strike, or the treacherous “compromise” of a strike-breaker, traitor leader, etc. It would be absurd to formulate a recipe or general rule (“No Compromises!”) to serve all cases. One must use one’s own brains and be able to find one’s bearings in each separate case. That, in fact, is one of the functions of a party organization and of party leaders worthy of the title, namely, through the prolonged, persistent, variegated and comprehensive efforts of all thinking representatives of the given class,³⁰⁷ to evolve the knowledge, the experience and – in addition to knowledge and experience – the political instinct necessary for the speedy and correct solution of intricate political problems.

Naive and utterly inexperienced people imagine that it is sufficient to admit the permissibility of compromises in general in order to obliterate the dividing line between opportunism, against which we wage and must wage an irreconcilable struggle, and revolutionary Marxism, or Communism. But if such people do not yet know that all dividing lines in nature and in society are mutable and to a certain extent conventional – they cannot be assisted otherwise than by a long process of training, education, enlightenment, and by political and everyday experience. It is important to single out from

³⁰⁷ Within every class, even in the conditions prevailing in the most enlightened countries, even within the most advanced class, and even when the circumstances of the moment have roused all its spiritual forces to an exceptional degree, there always are—and inevitably *will be* as long as classes exist, as long as classless society has not fully entrenched and consolidated itself, and has not developed on its own foundations—representatives of the class who do *not* think and are incapable of thinking. Were this not so, capitalism would not be the oppressor of the masses it is.

the practical questions of the politics of each separate or specific historical moment those which reveal the principal type of impermissible, treacherous compromises, compromises embodying the opportunism that is fatal to the revolutionary class, and to exert all efforts to explain them and combat them. During the imperialist war of 1914-18 between two groups of equally predatory and rapacious countries, the principal, fundamental type of opportunism was social-chauvinism, that is, support of “defense of the fatherland,” which, in such a war, was really equivalent to defense of the predatory interests of one’s “own” bourgeoisie. After the war, the defense of the robber “League of Nations,” the defense of direct or indirect alliances with the bourgeoisie of one’s own country against the revolutionary proletariat and the “Soviet” movement, and the defense of bourgeois democracy and bourgeois parliamentarism against “Soviet power” became the principal manifestations of those impermissible and treacherous compromises, the sum total of which constituted the opportunism that is fatal to the revolutionary proletariat and its cause.

*One must emphatically reject all compromise with other parties ... all policy of maneuvering and compromise,*³⁰⁸

write the German Lefts in the Frankfurt pamphlet.

It is a wonder that, holding such views, these Lefts do not emphatically condemn Bolshevism! For the German Lefts must know that the whole history of Bolshevism, both before and after the October Revolution is full of instances of maneuvering, temporizing and compromising with other parties, bourgeois parties included!

To carry on a war for the overthrow of the international bourgeoisie, a war which is a hundred times more difficult, protracted and complicated than the most stubborn of ordinary wars between states, and to refuse beforehand to maneuver, to utilize the conflict of interests (even though temporary) among one’s enemies, to refuse to temporize and compromise with possible (even though temporary, unstable, vacillating and conditional) allies – is not this ridiculous in the extreme? Is it not as though, when making a difficult ascent of an unexplored and heretofore inaccessible mountain, we were to refuse beforehand ever to move in zigzags, ever to retrace our steps, ever to abandon the course once selected and to try others? And yet we find that people so immature and inexperienced (if youth were the explanation, it would not be so bad; young people are ordained by god himself to talk such nonsense for a period) meet with the support – whether direct or indirect, open or covert, whole or partial, does not matter – of some members of the Communist Party of Holland!!

After the first socialist revolution of the proletariat, after the overthrow of the bourgeoisie in one country, the proletariat of that country *for a long time* remains *weaker* than the bourgeoisie, simply because of the latter’s extensive international connections, and also because of the spontaneous and continuous restoration and regeneration of capitalism and the bourgeoisie by the small commodity producers of the country which has overthrown the bourgeoisie. The more powerful enemy can be vanquished only by exerting the utmost effort, and *without fail*, most thoroughly, carefully, attentively and skillfully using every, even the smallest, “rift” among the enemies, of every antagonism of interest among the bourgeoisie of the various countries and among the various groups or types of bourgeoisie within the various countries, and also by taking advantage of every, even the smallest, opportunity of gaining a mass ally even though this ally be temporary, vacillating, unstable, unreliable and conditional. Those who fail to understand this, fail to understand even a particle of Marxism, or of scientific, modern Socialism *in general*. Those who have not proved by *deeds* over a fairly considerable period of time, and in fairly varied political situations, their ability to apply this truth in practice have not yet learned to assist the revolutionary class in its struggle to emancipate all toiling humanity from the exploiters. And this applies equally to the period *before* and *after* the proletariat has conquered political power.

³⁰⁸ “The Split in the Communist Party of Germany,” *op. cit.*

Our theory is not a dogma, but a guide to action,³⁰⁹ said Marx and Engels; and it is the greatest mistake, the greatest crime on the part of such “patented” Marxists as Karl Kautsky, Otto Bauer, etc., that they have not understood this, have been unable to apply it at crucial moments of the proletarian revolution. “Political activity is not the pavement of the Nevsky Prospect”³¹⁰ (the clean, broad, smooth pavement of the perfectly straight principal street of St. Petersburg) – N. G. Chernyshevsky, the great Russian Socialist of the pre-Marxian period, used to say. Since Chernyshevsky’s time Russian revolutionaries have paid the price of numerous sacrifices for ignoring or forgetting this truth. We must strive at all costs to prevent the Left Communists and the West-European and American revolutionaries who are devoted to the working class paying as dearly for the assimilation of this truth as the backward Russians did.

The Russian revolutionary Social-Democrats repeatedly utilized the services of the bourgeois liberals prior to the downfall of tsardom, that is, they concluded numerous practical compromises with them; and in 1901-02, even prior to the appearance of Bolshevism, the old editorial board of *Iskra* (consisting of Plekhanov, Axelrod, Zasulich, Martov, Potresov and myself) concluded (not for long, it is true) a formal political alliance with Struve, the political leader of bourgeois liberalism, while at the same time it was able to wage an unremitting and most merciless ideological and political struggle against bourgeois liberalism and against the slightest manifestation of its influence in the working-class movement. The Bolsheviks have always adhered to this policy. Beginning with 1905, they systematically advocated an alliance between the working class and the peasantry against the liberal bourgeoisie and tsardom, never, however, refusing to support the bourgeoisie against tsardom (for instance, during second rounds of elections, or during second ballots) and never ceasing their relentless ideological and political struggle against the bourgeois revolutionary peasant party, the “Socialist-Revolutionaries,” exposing them as petit-bourgeois democrats who falsely described themselves as Socialists. During the Duma elections in 1907, the Bolsheviks for a brief period entered into a formal political bloc with the “Socialist-Revolutionaries.” Between 1903 and 1912 there were periods of several years in which we were formally united with the Mensheviks in one Social-Democratic Party; but we *never* ceased our ideological and political struggle against them as opportunists and vehicles of bourgeois influence among the proletariat. During the war we concluded certain compromises with the “Kautskyites,” with the Left Mensheviks (Martov), and with a section of the “Socialist-Revolutionaries” (Chernov and Natanson); we were together with them at Zimmerwald and Kienthal and issued joint manifestos; but we never ceased and never relaxed our ideological and political struggle against the “Kautskyites,” Martov and Chernov (Natanson died in 1919 a “Revolutionary Communist” Narodnik, he was very close to and almost in agreement with us). At the very moment of the October Revolution we entered into an informal but very important (and very successful) political bloc with the petit-bourgeois peasantry by adopting the *Socialist-Revolutionary* agrarian program *in its entirety*, without a single alteration—that is, we effected an unquestionable compromise in order to prove to the peasants that we did not want to “steamroller” them, but to reach agreement with them. At the same time we proposed (and soon after effected) a formal political bloc, including participation in the government, with the “Left Socialist-Revolutionaries,” who dissolved this bloc after the conclusion of the Brest-Litovsk Peace and then, in July 1918, went to the length of armed rebellion, and subsequently of armed struggle, against us.

It is therefore understandable why attacks of the German Lefts on the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Germany for entertaining the idea of a bloc with the “Independents” (the “Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany,” the Kautskyites) appear to us to be utterly frivolous and a clear proof that the “Lefts” are in the wrong. We in Russia

³⁰⁹ Lenin is referring to the passage in Engels’ letter to P. A. Sorge dated November 29, 1886, which criticizes the German Social-Democratic emigrants in America on the ground that for them theory “is a credo [creed] and not a guide to action” (Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *op. cit.*, p. 373).

³¹⁰ N. G. Chernyshevsky, *Selected Economic Writings*, Russ. ed., 1948, Vol. II, p. 550.

also had Right Mensheviks (who participated in the Kerensky government), corresponding to the German Scheidemanns, and Left Mensheviks (Martov), corresponding to the German Kautskyites, who were in opposition to the Right Mensheviks. A gradual shift of the worker masses from the Mensheviks to the Bolsheviks was to be clearly observed in 1917: at the First All-Russian Congress of Soviets, held in June 1917, we had only 13 percent of the votes; the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks had the majority. At the Second Congress of Soviets (October 25, 1917) we had 51 percent of the votes. Why is it that in Germany the same absolutely identical movement of the workers from Right to Left did not immediately strengthen the Communists, but first strengthened the intermediate “Independent” party, although this party never had independent political ideas or an independent policy, and only wavered between the Scheidemanns and the Communists?

Evidently, one of the reasons was the *mistaken* tactics of the German Communists, who must fearlessly admit this mistake and learn to rectify it. The mistake lay in their denial of the need to take part in the reactionary bourgeois parliaments and in the reactionary trade unions; the mistake lay in numerous manifestations of that “Left” infantile disorder which has now come to the surface and will consequently be cured more thoroughly, more quickly and with greater benefit to the organism.

The German “Independent Social-Democratic Party” is obviously not a homogeneous body: alongside the old opportunist leaders (Kautsky, Hilferding and, to a considerable extent, apparently, Crispin, Ledebour and others)—who have demonstrated their inability to understand the significance of Soviet power and the dictatorship of the proletariat, their inability to lead the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat—there has arisen in this party a Left, proletarian wing which is growing with remarkable rapidity. Hundreds of thousands of members of this party (which, it seems, has some three-quarters of a million members) are proletarians who are abandoning Scheidemann and are rapidly going towards Communism. This proletarian wing has already proposed—at the Leipzig (1919) Congress of the Independents—immediate and unconditional affiliation to the Third International. To fear a “compromise” with this wing of the party is positively ridiculous. On the contrary, it is *obligatory* for the Communists to seek *and to find* a suitable form of compromise with them, such a compromise as, on the one hand, would facilitate and accelerate the necessary complete fusion with this wing and, on the other, would in no way hamper the Communists in their ideological and political struggle against the opportunist Right wing of the “Independents.” It will probably not be easy to devise a suitable form of compromise – but only a charlatan could promise the German workers and German Communists an “easy” road to victory.

Capitalism would not be capitalism if the “pure” proletariat were not surrounded by a large number of exceedingly motley types intermediate between the proletariat and the semi-proletarian (who earns his livelihood in part by the sale of his labor power), between the semi-proletarian and the small peasant (and petty artisan, handicraft worker and small master in general), between the small peasant and the middle peasant, and so on, and if the proletariat itself were not divided into more developed and less developed strata, if it were not divided according to territorial origin, trade, sometimes according to religion, and so on. And from all this follows the necessity, the absolute necessity, for the vanguard of the proletariat for its class-conscious section, for the Communist Party, to resort to maneuvers, arrangements and compromises with the various groups of proletarians, with the various parties of the workers and small masters. The whole point lies in *knowing how* to apply these tactics in order to *raise*, and not lower, the *general* level of proletarian class consciousness, revolutionary spirit, and ability to fight and win. Incidentally, it should be noted that the victory of the Bolsheviks over the Mensheviks demanded the application of tactics of maneuvers, arrangements and compromises not only before *but also after* the October Revolution of 1917, but such maneuvers and compromises, of course, as would assist, accelerate, consolidate and strengthen the Bolsheviks at the expense of the Mensheviks. The petit-bourgeois democrats (including the Mensheviks) inevitably vacillate between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, between bourgeois democracy and the Soviet system, between reformism and revolutionism, between love-for-the-workers and fear of proletarian dictatorship, etc. The proper

tactics for the Communists must be to *utilize* these vacillations, not to ignore them; and utilizing them calls for concessions to those elements which are turning towards the proletariat – whenever and to the extent that they turn towards the proletariat – in addition to fighting those who turn towards the bourgeoisie. The result of the application of correct tactics is that Menshevism has disintegrated, and is disintegrating more and more in our country, that the stubbornly opportunist leaders are being isolated, and that the best of the workers and the best elements among the petit-bourgeois democrats are being brought into our camp. This is a long process, and the hasty “decision” – “No compromises, no maneuvers” – can only injure the work of strengthening the influence of the revolutionary proletariat and enlarging its forces.

Lastly, one of the undoubted mistakes of the “Lefts” in Germany’s their outright insistence on non-recognition of the Versailles Peace. The more “weightily” and “pompously,” the more “emphatically” and dogmatically this viewpoint is formulated (by K. Horner, for instance), the less sensible does it appear. It is not enough, under the present conditions of the international proletarian revolution, to repudiate the preposterous absurdities of “National Bolshevism” (Lauffenberg and others), which has gone to the length of advocating a bloc with the German bourgeoisie for a war against the Entente. One must understand that the tactics of not admitting that it would be imperative for a Soviet Germany (if a German Soviet republic were to arise soon) to recognize the Versailles Peace for a time and to submit to it are fundamentally wrong. It does not follow from this that the “Independents” – at a time when the Scheidemanns were in the government, when Soviet government in Hungary had not yet been overthrown, and when the possibility of a Soviet revolution in Vienna supporting Soviet Hungary was not yet precluded – were right in putting forward, *under those circumstances*, the demand that the Versailles Peace be signed. At that time the “Independents” tacked and maneuvered very clumsily, for they more or less accepted responsibility for the Scheidemann traitors and more or less sank from the level of advocating a merciless (and most cold-blooded) class war against the Scheidemanns to the level of advocating a “classless” or “above-class” standpoint.

But the position is now obviously such that the German Communists should not tie their hands and promise positively and categorically to repudiate the Versailles Peace in the event of the victory of Communism. That would be stupid. They must say: The Scheidemanns and the Kautskyites have perpetrated a number of acts of treachery which hindered (and in part directly ruined) the chances of an alliance with Soviet Russia and Soviet Hungary. We Communists will do all we can to *facilitate and pave the way* for such an alliance; and we are by no means obliged to repudiate the Versailles Peace, come what may, and, moreover, immediately. The possibility of repudiating it with success will depend not only on the German, but also on the international successes of the Soviet movement. The Scheidemanns and Kautskyites hampered this movement; we are helping it. That is the substance of the matter, that is where the fundamental difference lies. And if our class enemies, the exploiters and their lackeys, the Scheidemanns and Kautskyites, have missed many an opportunity for strengthening both the German and the international Soviet movement, of strengthening both the German and the international Soviet revolution, they are to blame. The Soviet revolution in Germany will strengthen the international Soviet movement, which is the strongest bulwark (and the only reliable, invincible and world-wide bulwark) against the Versailles Peace and against international imperialism in general. To give prime place absolutely, categorically and immediately to liberation from the Versailles Peace, to give it precedence over the question of liberating other countries oppressed by imperialism from the yoke of imperialism, is philistine nationalism (worthy of Kautsky, Hilferding, Otto Bauer and Co.) and not revolutionary internationalism. The overthrow of the bourgeoisie in any of the large European countries, including Germany, would be such a gain to the international revolution that for its sake one can, and if necessary should, tolerate *a more prolonged existence of the Versailles Peace*. If Russia, by herself, could endure the Brest-Litovsk Peace for several months to the advantage of the revolution, there is nothing impossible in a Soviet Germany, allied with Soviet Russia, enduring the existence of the Versailles Peace for a longer period to the advantage of the revolution.

The imperialists of France, England, etc., are trying to provoke the German Communists and to lay a trap for them: “Say that you will not sign the Versailles Peace!” And the Left Communists childishly fall into the trap laid for them instead

of skillfully maneuvering against the crafty and, *at the present moment*, stronger enemy, and instead of telling him: “Now we will sign the Versailles Peace.” To tie our hands beforehand, openly to tell the enemy, who is at present better armed than we are, whether we shall fight him, and when, is stupidity and not revolutionism. To accept battle at a time when it is obviously advantageous to the enemy and not to us is a crime; and the political leader of the revolutionary class who is unable to “tack, maneuver, and compromise” in order to avoid an obviously disadvantageous battle, is absolutely worthless.

1. “Left-Wing” Communism in Great Britain

There is no Communist Party in Great Britain yet, but there is a fresh, broad, powerful and rapidly growing communist movement among the workers which justifies the brightest hopes. There are several political parties and organizations (the British Socialist Party,³¹¹ the Socialist Labour Party, the South Wales Socialist Society, the Workers’ Socialist Federation³¹²) which desire to form a Communist Party and are already negotiating among themselves to this end. The *Workers’ Dreadnought*, the weekly organ of the last of the organizations mentioned, in its issue of February 21, 1920, Vol. VI, No. 48, contains an article by the editor, Comrade Sylvia Pankhurst, entitled “Towards a Communist Party.” The article outlines the progress of the negotiations between the four organizations mentioned for the formation of a united Communist Party, on the basis of affiliation to the Third International, the recognition of the Soviet system instead of parliamentarism, and the dictatorship of the proletariat. It appears that one of the greatest obstacles to the immediate formation of a united Communist Party is the disagreement over the question of participation in parliament and over the question whether the new Communist Party should affiliate to the old, trade unionist, opportunist and social-chauvinist Labour Party, which consists mostly of trade unions. The Workers’ Socialist Federation and the Socialist Labour Party³¹³ are opposed to taking part in parliamentary elections and in parliament, and they are opposed to affiliation to the Labour Party; and in this they disagree with all, or with the majority, of the members of the British Socialist Party, which they regard as the “Right wing of the Communist Parties” in Great Britain.³¹⁴

³¹¹ The British Socialist Party was formed in 1911. It conducted Marxist propaganda and agitation and was described by Lenin as “not opportunist,” and as “really independent of the Liberals.” Its small membership and isolation from the masses lent the party a somewhat sectarian character. During the first world imperialist war, two trends were revealed in the Party: one openly social-chauvinist, headed by Henry Hyndman, and the other internationalist, headed by Albert Inkpin and others. In April 1916 a split took place. Hyndman and his supporters found themselves in the minority and withdrew from the party. From that moment the internationalists assumed the leadership of the British Socialist Party, which later initiated the formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1920.

³¹² The Socialist Labour Party was organized in 1903 by a group of Left Social-Democrats who broke away from the Social-Democratic Federation. The South Wales Socialist Society—a small group made up predominantly of Welsh miners. The Workers’ Socialist Federation—a small organization which grew out of the Women’s Suffrage League and was made up mainly of women. These “Left” organizations refused to join the Communist Party of Great Britain when it was founded (the inaugural congress was held on July 31-August 1, 1920), because its program included a clause calling for participation in parliamentary elections and affiliation to the Labour Party. The South Wales Socialist Society and the Workers’ Socialist Federation (which had changed their names to Communist Labour Party and Communist Party respectively) merged with the Communist Party of Great Britain at the latter’s congress in January 1921, and the party took the name of United Communist Party of Great Britain. The leadership of the Socialist Labour Party refused to join.

³¹³ I believe this party is opposed to affiliation to the Labour Party but not all its members are opposed to participation in parliament.

³¹⁴ Sylvia Pankhurst, “Towards a Communist Party,” in *A Sylvia Pankhurst Reader*, Manchester University Press, 1993, p. 93.

Thus, the main division is the same as in Germany, notwithstanding the enormous difference in the form in which the disagreements manifest themselves (in Germany the form is more analogous to the “Russian” than it is in Great Britain) and in a number of other things. Let us examine the arguments of the “Lefts.”

On the question of participation in parliament, Comrade Sylvia Pankhurst refers to an article in the same issue by Comrade W. Gallacher, who writes in the name of the Scottish Workers’ Council in Glasgow.

The above council [he writes,] is definitely anti-parliamentarian, and has behind it the Left wing of the various political bodies. We represent the revolutionary movement in Scotland, striving continually to build up a revolutionary organization within the industries, and a Communist Party, based on social committees, throughout the country. For a considerable time we have been sparring with the official parliamentarians. We have not considered it necessary to declare open warfare on them, and they are afraid to open an attack on us.

But this state of affairs cannot long continue. We are winning all along the line.

The rank and file of the I.L.P. in Scotland is becoming more and more disgusted with the thought of Parliament, and Soviets (the Russian word transliterated into English is used) or workers’ councils are being supported by almost every branch. This is very serious, of course, for the gentlemen who look to politics for a profession, and they are using any and every means to persuade their members to come back into the parliamentary fold. Revolutionary comrades must not (all italics are the author’s) give any support to this gang. Our fight here is going to be a difficult one. One of the worst features of it will be the treachery of those whose personal ambition is a more impelling force than their regard for the revolution. Any support given to parliamentarism is simply assisting to put power into the hands of our British Scheidemanns and Noskes. Henderson, Clynes and Co. are hopelessly reactionary. The official I.L.P. is more and more coming under the control of middle class Liberals, who ... have found their “spiritual home” in the camp of Messrs. MacDonald, Snowden and Co. The official I.L.P. is bitterly hostile to the Third International, the rank and file is for it. Any support to the parliamentary opportunists is simply playing into the hands of the former. The B.S.P. doesn’t count at all here ... What is wanted here is a sound revolutionary industrial organization, and a Communist Party working along clear, well-defined, scientific lines. If our comrades can assist us in building these, we will take their help gladly; if they cannot, for God’s sake let them keep out altogether, lest they betray the revolution by lending their support to the reactionaries, who are so eagerly clamoring for parliamentary “honors” (?) (the query mark is the author’s) and who are so anxious to prove that they can rule as effectively as the “boss” class politicians themselves.³¹⁵

This letter, in my opinion, excellently expresses the temper and point of view of the young Communists, or of rank-and-file workers who are only just coming to Communism. This temper is highly gratifying and valuable; we must learn to value it and to support it, for without it, it would be hopeless to expect the victory of the proletarian revolution in Great Britain, or in any other country for that matter. People who can give expression to this temper of the masses, who can rouse such a temper (which is very often dormant, unrealized and unaroused) among the masses, must be valued and every assistance must be given them. And at the same time we must openly and frankly tell them that temper *alone* is not enough to lead the masses in a great revolutionary struggle, and that such and such mistakes that very loyal adherents of the cause of the revolution are about to commit, or are committing, may damage the cause of the revolution. Comrade Gallacher’s letter undoubtedly betrays the germs of *all* the mistakes that are being committed by the German “Left” Communists and that were committed by the Russian “Left” Bolsheviks in 1908 and 1918.

The writer of the letter is imbued with a noble, proletarian hatred for the bourgeois “class politicians” (a hatred understood and shared, however, not only by the proletarian but by all working people, by all “small folk,” to use a German expression). This hatred of a representative of the oppressed and exploited masses is verily the “beginning of all wisdom,” the basis of every socialist and communist movement and of its success. But the writer apparently does not appreciate that politics is a science and an art that does not drop from the skies, that it is not obtained gratis, and that the proletariat, if it

³¹⁵ William Gallacher, “Parliamentary Action,” in *Workers’ Dreadnought*, February 21, 1920, p. 2.

wants to conquer the bourgeoisie, must train its *own*, proletarian “class politicians,” and such as will be no worse than the bourgeoisie politicians.

The writer of the letter is perfectly clear in the point that only workers’ Soviets, and not parliament, can be the instrument whereby the aims of the proletariat will be achieved. And, of course, those who have failed to understand this up to now are inveterate reactionaries, even if they are most highly educated people, most experienced politicians, most sincere Socialists, most erudite Marxists, and most honest citizens and family men. But the writer of the letter does not even ask, it does not occur to him to ask, whether it is possible to bring about the victory of the Soviets over parliament without getting pro-Soviet politicians *into* parliament, without disintegrating parliamentarism from *within*, without working within parliament for the success of the Soviets in their forthcoming task of dispersing parliament. And yet the writer of the letter expresses the absolutely correct idea that the Communist Party in Great Britain must act on *scientific* principles. Science demands, firstly, that the experience of other countries be taken into account, especially if these other, also capitalist, countries are undergoing, or have recently undergone, a very similar experience; secondly, it demands that account be taken of *all* the forces, groups, parties, classes and masses operating in the given country, and that policy should not be determined only by the desires and views, by the degree of class consciousness, and the readiness for battle of only one group or party.

That the Hendersons, the Clynes, the MacDonalds and the Snowdens are hopelessly reactionary is true. It is equally true that they want to take power in their own hands (though they prefer a coalition with the bourgeoisie), that they want to “rule” on the old bourgeois lines, and that when they do get into power they will unfailingly behave like the Scheide-manns and Noskes. All that is true. But it by no means follows that to support them is treachery to the revolution, but rather that in the interests of the revolution the working-class revolutionaries should give these gentlemen a certain amount of parliamentary support. To explain this idea I shall take two contemporary British political documents: 1) the speech delivered by the Prime Minister, Lloyd George, on March 18, 1920 (reported in the *Manchester Guardian* of March 19, 1920) and 2) the arguments of a “Left” Communist, Comrade Sylvia Pankhurst, in the article mentioned above.

Arguing against Asquith (who was especially invited to this meeting but declined to attend) and against those Liberals who want not a coalition with the Conservatives, but closer relations with the Labour Party (Comrade Gallacher, in his letter, also points to the fact that Liberals are joining the Independent Labour Party), Lloyd George said that a coalition, and a close coalition at that, between the Liberals and Conservatives was essential, otherwise there might be a victory for the Labour Party; which Lloyd George “prefers to call” Socialist and which is striving for the “collective ownership” of the means of production. “In France this was called Communism,” the leader of the British bourgeoisie said, putting it popularly for his auditors, the Liberal members of Parliament, who probably had not known it before, “in Germany it was called Socialism, and in Russia it is called Bolshevism.” To Liberals this is unacceptable on principle, explained Lloyd George, because they stand in principle for private property. “Civilization is in danger,” declared the speaker, and, therefore, the Liberals and the Conservatives must unite ...

If you go to the agricultural areas [said Lloyd George,] I agree that you have the old party divisions as strong as ever. They are removed from the danger. It does not walk their lanes. But when they see it they will be as strong as some of those industrial constituencies are now. Four-fifths of this country is industrial and commercial; hardly one-fifth is agricultural. It is one of the things I have constantly in my mind when I think of the dangers of the future here. In France the population is agricultural, and you have a solid body of opinion which does not move very rapidly, and which is not very easily excited by revolutionary movements. That is not the case here. This country is more top-heavy than any country in the world, and if it begins to rock, the crash here, for that reason, will be greater than in any land.

From this the reader will see that Mr. Lloyd George is not only a very clever man, but that he has also learned a great deal from the Marxists. It would be no sin for us to learn something from Lloyd George.

It is interesting to note the following episode which occurred in the course of the discussion that followed Lloyd George's speech:

Mr. Wallace, M.P.: I should like to ask what the Prime Minister considers the effect might be in the industrial constituencies upon the industrial workers, so many of whom are Liberals at the present time and from whom we get so much support. Would not a possible result be to cause an immediate overwhelming accession of strength to the Labour Party from men who at present are our cordial supporters?

The Prime Minister: I take a totally different view. The fact that Liberals are fighting among themselves undoubtedly drives a very considerable number of Liberals in despair to the Labour Party, where you get a considerable body of Liberals, very able men, whose business it is to discredit the Government. The result is undoubtedly to bring a good accession of public sentiment to the Labour Party. It does not go to the Liberals who are outside, it goes to the Labour Party, the by-elections show that.

It may be said in passing, that this argument shows in particular how muddled even the cleverest members of the bourgeoisie have become and how they cannot help committing irreparable stupidities. That in fact will cause the downfall of the bourgeoisie. But our people may commit stupidities (provided, of course, that they are not too serious and are rectified in time) and yet in the long run come out the victors.

The second political document is the following argument advanced by a “Left” Communist, Comrade Sylvia Pankhurst:

Comrade Inkpin (the General Secretary of the British Socialist Party) refers to the Labour Party as “the main body of the working-class movement.” Another comrade of the British Socialist Party, at the conference of the Third International, just held, put the British Socialist Party position more strongly. He said: “We regard the Labour Party as the organized working class.”

We do not take this view of the Labour Party. The Labour Party is very large numerically, though its membership is to a great extent quiescent and apathetic, consisting of men and women who have joined the trade unions because their workmates are trade unionists, and to share the friendly benefits.

But we recognize that the great size of the Labour Party is also due to the fact that it is the creation of a school of thought beyond which the majority of the British working class has not yet emerged, though great changes are at work in the mind of the people which will presently alter this state of affairs.

The British Labour Party, like the social patriotic organizations of other countries, will, in the natural development of society, inevitably come into power. It is for the Communists to build up the forces that will overthrow the social patriots, and in this country we must not delay or falter in that work.

We must not dissipate our energy in adding to the strength of the Labour Party; its rise to power is inevitable. We must concentrate on making a communist movement that will vanquish it. The Labour Party will soon be forming a government; the revolutionary opposition must make ready to attack it.³¹⁶

Thus the liberal bourgeoisie is abandoning the historical system of “two parties” (of exploiters) which has been haltered by age-long experience and which has been extremely advantageous to the exploiters, and considers it necessary to unite their forces to combat the Labour Party. A number of the Liberals are deserting to the Labour Party like rats from a sinking ship. The Left Communists believe that the transfer of power to the Labour Party is inevitable and admit that at present it has the support of the majority of the workers. From this they draw the strange conclusion which Comrade Sylvia Pankhurst formulates as follows:

The Communist Party must not compromise ... The Communist Party must keep its doctrine pure, and its independence of reformism inviolate; its mission is to lead the way, without stopping or turning, by the direct road to the communist revolution.³¹⁷

³¹⁶ Sylvia Pankhurst, “Towards a Communist Party,” *op. cit.*, pp. 94-95.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

On the contrary, from the fact that the majority of the workers in Great Britain still follow the lead of the British Kerenskys or Scheidemanns and have not yet had the experience of a government composed of these people, which experience was required in Russia and Germany to secure the mass passage of the workers to Communism, it undoubtedly follows that the British Communists *should* participate in parliamentary action, that they should, from *within* parliament, help the masses of the workers to see the results of a Henderson and Snowden government in practice, that they should help the Hendersons and Snowdens to defeat the united forces of Lloyd George and Churchill. To act otherwise would mean placing difficulties in the way of the revolution; for revolution is impossible without a change in the views of the majority of the working class, and this change is brought about by the political experience of the masses, and never by propaganda alone. “To lead the way without compromises, without stopping or turning” – if this is said by an obviously impotent minority of the workers which knows (or at all events should know) that if Henderson and Snowden gain the victory over Lloyd George and Churchill, the majority will in a brief space of time become disappointed in their leaders and will begin to support Communism (or at all events will adopt an attitude of neutrality, and for the most part of benevolent neutrality, towards the Communists), then this slogan is obviously mistaken. It is just as if 10,000 soldiers were to fling themselves into battle against 50,000 enemy soldiers, when the thing to do would have been to “stop,” to “turn,” or even to effect a “compromise” to gain time until the arrival of the 100,000 reinforcements which were on their way but which could not go into action immediately. That is the childishness of the intellectual and not the serious tactics of a revolutionary class.

The fundamental law of revolution, which has been confirmed by all revolutions, and particularly by all three Russian revolutions in the twentieth century, is as follows: it is not enough for revolution that the exploited and oppressed masses should understand the impossibility of living in the old way and demand changes; it is essential for revolution that the exploiters should not be able to live and rule in the old way. Only when the “*lower classes*” *do not want the old way*, and when the “*upper classes*” *cannot carry on in the old way*—only then can revolution triumph. This truth may be expressed in other words: revolution is impossible without a nation-wide crisis (affecting both the exploited and the exploiters). It follows that for revolution it is essential, first, that a majority of the workers (or at least a majority of the class-conscious, thinking, politically active workers) should fully understand that revolution is necessary and be ready to sacrifice their lives for it; secondly, that the ruling classes should be passing through a governmental crisis, which draws even the most backward masses into politics (a symptom of every real revolution is a rapid, tenfold and even hundredfold increase in the number of members of the toiling and oppressed masses – hitherto apathetic – who are capable of waging the political struggle), weakens the government and makes it possible for the revolutionaries to overthrow it rapidly.

In Great Britain, as can be seen, among other things, from Lloyd George’s speech, both conditions for a successful proletarian revolution are clearly maturing. And the mistakes of the Left Communists are particularly dangerous at the present time precisely because certain revolutionaries are not displaying a sufficiently thoughtful, sufficiently attentive, sufficiently intelligent and sufficiently shrewd interest in each of these conditions. If we are the party of the revolutionary *class*, and not a revolutionary group, if we want the *masses* to follow us (and unless we do, we stand the risk of remaining mere windbags), we must, firstly, help Henderson or Snowden to beat Lloyd George and Churchill (or, rather, compel the former to beat the latter, because the former *are afraid of their victory!*); secondly, we must help the majority of the working class to convince themselves by their own experience that we are right, that is, that the Hendersons and Snowdens are absolutely unsuitable, that they are petit bourgeois and treacherous by nature, and that their bankruptcy is inevitable; thirdly, we must bring nearer the moment when, *on the basis* of the disappointment of the majority of the workers in the Hendersons, it will be possible with serious chances of success to overthrow the government of the Hendersons at once, because if that most astute and solid big bourgeois, not petit bourgeois, Lloyd George, is betraying utter consternation and is more

and more weakening himself (and the bourgeoisie as a whole) by his “friction” with Churchill one day and his “friction” with Asquith the next, how much greater will be the consternation of a Henderson government.

I will put it more concretely. In my opinion, the British Communists should unite their four (all very weak, and some very, very weak) parties and groups into a single Communist Party on the basis of the principles of the Third International and of *obligatory* participation in parliament. The Communist Party should propose a “compromise” to the Hendersons and Snowdens, an election agreement: let us together fight the alliance of Lloyd George and the Conservatives, let us divide the parliamentary seats in proportion to the number of votes cast by the workers for the Labour Party and for the Communist Party (not at the elections, but in a special vote), and let us retain *complete liberty* of agitation, propaganda and political activity. Without this latter condition, of course, we cannot agree to a bloc, for it would be treachery; the British Communists must absolutely insist on and secure complete liberty to expose the Hendersons and the Snowdens in the same way as (*for fifteen years*, 1903-17) the Russian Bolsheviks insisted on and secured it in relation to the Russian Hendersons and Snowdens, i.e., the Mensheviks.

If the Hendersons and the Snowdens consent to a bloc on these terms, we shall be the gainers, because the number of parliamentary seats is of no importance to us; we are not out for seats, we will yield on this point (the Hendersons, on the other hand, and particularly their new friends – or new masters – the Liberals who have joined the Independent Labour Party are most anxious to get seats). We shall be the gainers, because we shall carry our agitation among the masses at a time when Lloyd George himself has “incensed” them, and we shall not only help the Labour Party to establish its government more quickly, but also help the masses to understand more quickly the communist propaganda that we shall carry on against the Hendersons without any curtailment or omission.

If the Hendersons and the Snowdens reject a bloc with us on these terms we shall gain still more, for we shall have at once shown the *masses* (note that even in the purely Menshevik and utterly opportunist Independent Labour Party the *masses* are for Soviets) that the Hendersons prefer their close relations with the capitalists to the unity of all the workers. We shall immediately gain in the eyes of the *masses* who, particularly after the brilliant, highly correct and highly useful (for Communism) explanations given by Lloyd George, will sympathize with the idea of uniting all the workers against the Lloyd George-Conservative alliance. We shall gain immediately because we shall have demonstrated to the masses that the Hendersons and the Snowdens are afraid to beat Lloyd George, are afraid to take power alone, and are striving *secretly* to secure the support of Lloyd George, who is *openly* extending his hand to the Conservatives against the Labour Party. It should be noted that in Russia, after the revolution of February 27, 1917 (old style) the propaganda of the Bolsheviks against the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries (i.e., the Russian Hendersons and Snowdens) benefited precisely because of a circumstance of this kind. We said to the Mensheviks and the Socialist-Revolutionaries: take over the entire power without the bourgeoisie, because you have a majority in the Soviets (at the First All-Russian Congress of Soviets, in June 1917, the Bolsheviks had only 13 percent of the votes). But the Russian Hendersons and Snowdens feared to take power without the bourgeoisie, and when the bourgeoisie delayed the elections to the Constituent Assembly, knowing perfectly well that the elections would give a majority to the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks³¹⁸ (who had a close political bloc and actually represented *one and the same* petit-bourgeois democracy), the Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks were unable energetically and consistently to oppose these delays.

If the Hendersons and the Snowdens reject a bloc with the Communists, the Communists will gain immediately as regards winning the sympathy of the masses and discrediting the Hendersons and Snowdens; and if as a result we do lose

³¹⁸ The result of the elections to the Constituent Assembly in Russia in November 1917, based on returns embracing over 36,000,000 voters, were as follows: the Bolsheviks obtained 25 percent of the votes, the various parties of the landlords and bourgeoisie obtained 13 percent, and the petit-bourgeois democratic parties, i.e., the Socialist-Revolutionaries, Mensheviks and a number of small kindred groups, obtained 62 percent.

a few parliamentary seats, it is a matter of no importance to us. We would put up our candidates in a very few but absolutely safe constituencies, namely, constituencies where putting up our candidate would not give the seat to the Liberal and lose it for the Labour candidate. We would take part in the election campaign, distribute leaflets in favor of Communism, and, in *all* constituencies where we have no candidates, we would urge the electors *to vote for the Labour candidate and against the bourgeois candidate*. Comrades Sylvia Pankhurst and Gallacher are mistaken in thinking that this is a betrayal of Communism, or a renunciation of the struggle against the social traitors. On the contrary, the cause of communist revolution would undoubtedly gain by it.

At present the British Communists very often find it hard to approach the masses and even to get a hearing from them. If I come out as a Communist and call upon the workers to vote for Henderson against Lloyd George, they will certainly give me a hearing. And I will be able to explain in a popular manner not only why Soviets are better than parliament and why the dictatorship of the proletariat is better than the dictatorship of Churchill (disguised by the signboard of bourgeois “democracy”), but also that I want with my vote to support Henderson in the same way as the rope supports a hanged man – that the impending establishment of a government of Hendersons will prove that I am right, will bring the masses over to my side, and will hasten the political death of the Hendersons and the Snowdens just as was the case with their kindred spirits in Russia and Germany.

And if the objection is raised that these tactics are too “subtle,” or too complicated, that the masses will not understand them, that these tactics will split and scatter our forces, will prevent us concentrating them on the Soviet revolution, etc., I will reply to the “Lefts” who raise this objection: don’t ascribe your doctrinairism to the masses! The masses in Russia are probably no better educated than the masses in England; if anything, they are less so. Yet the masses understood the Bolsheviks; and the fact that *on the eve* of the Soviet revolution, in September 1917, the Bolsheviks put up their candidates for a bourgeois parliament (the Constituent Assembly) and *on the morrow* of the Soviet revolution, in November 1917, took part in the elections to this Constituent Assembly, which they dispersed on January 5, 1918 – this did not hamper the Bolsheviks, but on the contrary, helped them.

I cannot deal here with the second point of disagreement among the British Communists – the question of affiliating or not affiliating to the Labour Party. I have too little material at my disposal on this question, which is a particularly complex one in view of the quite unique character of the British Labour Party, the very structure of which is so unlike the political parties common to the Continent. It is beyond doubt, however, first, that on this question, too, those who try to deduce the tactics of the revolutionary proletariat from principles like: “The Communist Party must keep its doctrine pure, and its independence of reformism inviolate; its mission is to lead the way, without stopping or turning, by the direct road to the communist revolution” – will inevitably fall into error. For such principles are merely a repetition of the mistakes committed by the French Blanquist Communards, who, in 1874, “repudiated” all compromises and all intermediate stations. Secondly, it is beyond doubt that in this question too, as always, the task is to learn to apply the general and basic principles of Communism to the *peculiar* relations between classes and parties, to the *peculiar features* of the objective development towards Communism which are characteristic of each country and which must be studied, discovered, divined.

But this must be discussed not in connection with British Communism alone, but in connection with the general conclusions concerning the development of Communism in all capitalist countries. We shall now proceed to deal with this theme.

1. Some Conclusions

The Russian bourgeois revolution of 1905 revealed a very peculiar turn in world history: in one of the most backward capitalist countries the strike movement attained a breadth and power without precedent anywhere in the world. In the *first month of 1905 alone* the number of strikers was over ten times the *annual* average for the previous ten years (1895-1904); and from January to October 1905 strikes grew continuously and reached enormous dimensions. Under the influence of a number of entirely unique historical conditions, backward Russia was the first to show the world not only the growth, by leaps and bounds, of the independent activity of the oppressed masses in time of revolution (this had occurred in all great revolutions), but also a significance of the proletariat infinitely exceeding the numerical ratio of the latter to the total population, a combination of the economic strike and the political strike, the transformation of the latter into armed uprising, and the birth of a new form of mass struggle and mass organization of the classes oppressed by capitalism, viz., the Soviets.

The revolutions of February and October 1917 led to the all-round development of the Soviets on a national scale, and to their victory in the proletarian, socialist revolution. And in less than two years there became revealed the international character of the Soviets, the spread of this form of struggle and organization to the world working-class movement, and the historical mission of the Soviets as the grave-digger, heir and successor of bourgeois parliamentarism, and of bourgeois democracy in general.

More. The history of the working-class movement now shows that in all countries it is about to experience (and has already begun to experience) a struggle between Communism, which is growing, gaining strength and marching towards victory, and, first and foremost, its *own* (in each country) “Menshevism,” i.e., opportunism and social-chauvinism, and, secondly – as a supplement so to say – “Left-wing” Communism. The former struggle has developed in all countries, apparently without a single exception, as a struggle between the Second International (already virtually killed) and the Third International. The latter struggle can be observed in Germany, Great Britain, Italy, America (at any rate, a certain *section* of the Industrial Workers of the World and the anarcho-syndicalist trends uphold the errors of Left-wing Communism side by side with an almost universal and undivided acceptance of the Soviet system) and France (the attitude of a section of the former syndicalists towards the political party and parliamentarism, again side by side with the acceptance of the Soviet system), in other words, the struggle is undoubtedly being waged not only on an international, but even on a world-wide scale.

But while the working-class movement is everywhere passing through what is actually the same kind of preparatory school for victory over the bourgeoisie, it is in each country achieving this development in *its own way*. The big, advanced capitalist countries are marching along this road *much more rapidly* than did Bolshevism, which history granted fifteen years to prepare itself, as an organized political trend, for victory. In the short space of one year, the Third International has already scored a decisive victory; it has defeated the Second, yellow, social-chauvinist International, which only a few months ago was incomparably stronger than the Third International, seemed to be stable and powerful and enjoyed the all-round support – direct and indirect, material (Cabinet posts, passports, the press) and ideological – of the world bourgeoisie.

The whole point now is that the Communists of every country should quite consciously take into account both the main fundamental tasks of the struggle against opportunism and “Left” doctrinairism and the *specific features* which this struggle assumes and inevitably must assume in each separate country in conformity with the peculiar features of its economics, politics, culture, national composition (Ireland, etc.), its colonies, religious divisions, and so on and so forth. Everywhere we can feel that dissatisfaction with the Second International is spreading and growing, both because of its opportunism and because of its inability, or incapacity, to create a really centralized, a really leading center that would be capable of directing the international tactics of the revolutionary proletariat in its struggle for a world Soviet republic. We must clearly realize that such a leading center cannot under any circumstances be built up on stereotyped, mechanically equalized and identical tactical rules of struggle. As long as national and state differences exist among peoples and countries – and

these differences will continue to exist for a very long time even after the dictatorship of the proletariat has been established on a world scale – the unity of international tactics of the Communist working class movement of all countries demands, not the elimination of variety, not the abolition of national differences (that is a foolish dream at the present moment), but such an application of the *fundamental* principles of Communism (Soviet power and the dictatorship of the proletariat) as will *correctly modify* these principles in certain *particulars*, correctly adapt and apply them to national and national-state differences. Investigate, study, seek, divine, grasp that which is peculiarly national, specifically national in the *concrete manner* in which each country approaches the fulfillment of the *single* international task, in which it approaches the victory over opportunism and “Left” doctrinairism within the working-class movement, the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, and the establishment of a Soviet republic and a proletarian dictatorship – such is the main task of the historical period through which all the advanced countries (and not only the advanced countries) are now passing. The main thing – not everything by a very long way, of course, but the main thing – has already been achieved in that the vanguard of the working class has been won over, in that it has ranged itself on the side of Soviet government against parliamentarism, on the side of the dictatorship of the proletariat against bourgeois democracy. Now all efforts, all attention, must be concentrated on the *next* step – which seems, and from a certain standpoint really is – less fundamental, but which, on the other hand, is actually closer to the practical carrying out of the task, namely: seeking the forms of *transition* or *approach* to the proletarian revolution.

The proletarian vanguard has been won over ideologically. That is the main thing. Without this not even the first step towards victory can be made. But it is still a fairly long way from victory. Victory cannot be won with the vanguard alone. To throw the vanguard alone into the decisive battle, before the whole class, before the broad masses have taken up a position either of direct support of the vanguard, or at least of benevolent neutrality towards it, and one in which they cannot possibly support the enemy, would be not merely folly but a crime. And in order that actually the whole class, that actually the broad masses of the working people and those oppressed by capital may take up such a position, propaganda and agitation alone are not enough. For this the masses must have their own political experience. Such is the fundamental law of all great revolutions, now confirmed with astonishing force and vividness not only in Russia but also in Germany. Not only the uncultured, often illiterate, masses of Russia, but the highly cultured, entirely literate masses of Germany had to realize through their own painful experience the absolute impotence and spinelessness, the absolute helplessness and servility to the bourgeoisie, the utter vileness of the government of the knights of the Second International, the absolute inevitability of a dictatorship of the extreme reactionaries (Kornilov in Russia, Kapp and Co. in Germany) as the only alternative to a dictatorship of the proletariat, in order to turn them resolutely toward Communism.

The immediate task that confronts the class-conscious vanguard of the international labor movement, i.e., the Communist parties, groups and trends, is to be able *to lead* the broad masses (now, for the most part, slumbering, apathetic, bound by routine, inert and dormant) to their new position, or, rather, to be able to lead *not only* their own party, but also these masses, in their approach, their transition to the new position. While the first historical task (that of winning over the class-conscious vanguard of the proletariat to Soviet power and the dictatorship of the working class) could not be accomplished without a complete ideological and political victory over opportunism and social chauvinism, the second task, which now becomes the immediate task, and which consists in being able to lead the *masses* to the new position that can ensure the victory of the vanguard in the revolution – this immediate task cannot be accomplished without eliminating Left doctrinairism, without completely overcoming and eliminating its mistakes.

As long as the question was (and in so far as it still is) one of winning over the vanguard of the proletariat to Communism, so long, and to that extent, propaganda was in the forefront; even propaganda circles, with all the defects of the circle spirit, are useful under these conditions and produce fruitful results. But when it is a question of practical action by the masses, of the disposition, if one may so express it, of vast armies, of the alignment of *all* the class forces of the given

society for the final and decisive battle, then propaganda habits alone, the mere repetition of the truths of “pure” Communism, are of no avail. In these circumstances one must not count in thousands, as the propagandist does who belongs to a small group that has not yet given leadership to the masses; in these circumstances one must count in millions and tens of millions. In these circumstances we must not only ask ourselves whether we have convinced the vanguard of the revolutionary class, but also whether the historically effective forces of *all* classes—positively of all the classes of the given society without exception – are aligned in such a way that everything is fully ripe for the decisive battle; in such a way that 1) all the class forces hostile to us have become sufficiently entangled, are sufficiently at loggerheads with each other, have sufficiently weakened themselves in a struggle which is beyond their strength; that 2) all the vacillating, wavering, unstable, intermediate elements – the petit bourgeoisie and the petit-bourgeois democrats as distinct from the bourgeoisie—have sufficiently exposed themselves in the eyes of the people, have sufficiently disgraced themselves through their practical bankruptcy; and that 3) among the proletariat a mass sentiment in favor of supporting the most determined, supremely bold, revolutionary action against the bourgeoisie has arisen and begun vigorously to grow. Then revolution is indeed ripe; then, indeed, if we have correctly gauged all the conditions indicated and briefly outlined above, and if we have chosen the moment rightly, our victory is assured.

The divergences between the Churchills and the Lloyd Georges – with insignificant national differences these political types exist in *all* countries – on the one hand, and between the Hendersons and the Lloyd Georges on the other, are quite minor and unimportant from the standpoint of pure, i.e., abstract Communism, i.e., Communism that has not yet matured to the stage of practical, mass, political action. But from the standpoint of this practical action by the masses, these differences are very, very important. To take account of these differences, to determine the moment when the inevitable conflicts between these “friends” which weaken and enfeeble *all the “friends” taken together* will have completely matured – that is the crux of the matter, the whole task of the Communist who wants to be not merely a class-conscious and convinced propagandist of ideas, but a practical leader of the *masses* in the revolution. The strictest devotion to the ideas of Communism must be combined with the ability to effect all the necessary practical compromises, to maneuver, to make agreements, zigzags, retreats and so on, in order to accelerate the coming to, and loss of, political power by the Hendersons (the heroes of the Second International, if we are to speak not of individuals, the representatives of petit-bourgeois democracy who call themselves Socialists); to accelerate their inevitable bankruptcy in practice, which will enlighten the masses precisely in the spirit of our ideas, in the direction of Communism; to accelerate the inevitable friction, quarrels, conflicts and utter discord between the Hendersons, the Lloyd Georges and the Churchills (the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries, the Constitutional-Democrats and the monarchists the Scheidemanns, the bourgeoisie and the Kappists, etc.), and to select the proper moment when the discord among these “pillars of sacred private property” is at its height, in order, by a determined offensive of the proletariat, to defeat them all and capture political power.

History generally, and the history of revolutions in particular, is always richer in content, more varied, more many sided, more lively and “subtle” than even the best parties and the most class-conscious vanguards of the most advanced classes imagine. This is understandable, because even the best vanguards express the class consciousness, will, passion and imagination of tens of thousands; whereas revolutions are made, at moments of particular upsurge and the exertion of all human capacities, by the class consciousness, will, passion and imagination of tens of millions, spurred on by a most acute struggle of classes. From this follow two very important practical conclusions: first, that in order to fulfill its task the revolutionary class must be able to master *all* forms, or aspects, of social activity without any exception (completing, after the capture of political power, sometimes at great risk and very great danger, what it did not complete before the capture of power); second, that the revolutionary class must be ready to pass from one form to another in the quickest and most unexpected manner.

Everyone will agree that an army which does not train itself to wield all arms, all the means and methods of warfare that the enemy possesses or may possess, behaves in an unwise or even in a criminal manner. But this applies to politics even more than it does to war. In politics it is even harder to forecast what methods of warfare will be applicable and advantageous to us under specific future conditions. Unless we master all means of warfare, we may suffer grave, often even decisive, defeat if changes beyond our control in the position of the other classes bring to the forefront forms of activity in which we are particularly weak. If, however, we master all means of warfare, victory will be certain, because we represent the interests of the really foremost and really revolutionary class, even if circumstances do not permit us to bring into play the weapons that are most dangerous to the enemy, weapons that deal the swiftest mortal blows. Inexperienced revolutionaries often think that legal methods of struggle are opportunist because in this field the bourgeoisie has especially frequently (particularly in “peaceful,” non-revolutionary times) deceived and fooled the workers, and that illegal methods of struggle are revolutionary. But that is not true. What is true is that those parties and leaders are opportunists and traitors to the working class who are unable or unwilling (don’t say you cannot, say you will not!) to apply illegal methods of struggle in conditions such as those which prevailed, for example, during the imperialist war of 1914-18, when the bourgeoisie of the freest democratic countries deceived the workers in the most insolent and brutal manner, forbidding the truth to be told about the predatory character of the war. But revolutionaries who are unable to combine illegal forms of struggle with every form of legal struggle are poor revolutionaries indeed. It is not difficult to be a revolutionary when revolution has already broken out and is at its height, when everybody is joining the revolution just because they are carried away, because it is the fashion, and sometimes even out of careerist motives. After its victory, the proletariat has to make most strenuous efforts, to suffer the pains of martyrdom, one might say, to “liberate” itself from such pseudo revolutionaries. It is far more difficult – and of far greater value – to be a revolutionary when the conditions for direct, open, really mass and really revolutionary struggle do not yet exist, to be able to champion the interests of the revolution (by propaganda, agitation and organization) in non-revolutionary bodies and often enough in downright reactionary bodies, in a non-revolutionary situation, among masses who are incapable of immediately appreciating the need for revolutionary methods of action. To be able to find, to probe for, to correctly determine the specific path or the particular turn of events that will lead the masses to the real, last, decisive, and great revolutionary struggle – such is the main task of Communism in Western Europe and America today.

Great Britain offers an example. We cannot tell, and no one can tell beforehand, how soon a real proletarian revolution will flare up there, and *what immediate cause* will most serve to rouse, kindle, and impel into the struggle the very wide masses who are at present dormant. Hence, it is our duty to carry on all our preparatory work in such a way, as to be well shod on all four feet (as the late Plekhanov, when he was a Marxist and revolutionary, was fond of saying). It is possible that the “breach” will be forced, “the ice broken” by a parliamentary crisis, or by a crisis arising out of the colonial and imperialist contradictions, which are hopelessly entangled and are becoming increasingly painful and acute, or perhaps by some third cause, etc. We are not discussing the kind of struggle that will *determine* the fate of the proletarian revolution in Great Britain (not a single Communist has any doubt on that score; for all of us this question is settled, and settled definitely); what we are discussing is the *immediate cause* that will bring into motion the at present dormant proletarian masses and lead them directly to revolution. Let us not forget that in the French bourgeois republic, for example, in a situation which from both the international and national aspect was a hundred times less revolutionary than the present,

such an “unexpected” and “petty” immediate cause as one of the many thousands of fraudulent tricks of the reactionary military caste (the Dreyfus case³¹⁹), was enough to bring the people to the verge of civil war!

The Communists in Great Britain should constantly, unremittingly and undeviatingly utilize parliamentary elections and all the vicissitudes of the Irish, colonial and world imperialist policy of the British government, and all other fields, spheres and facets of public life, and work, in all of them in a new way, in a communist way, in the spirit of the Third, and not of the Second, International. I have neither the time nor the space here to describe the “Russian,” “Bolshevik” methods of participation in parliamentary elections and in the parliamentary struggle; but I can assure the foreign Communists that it was totally unlike the usual West-European parliamentary campaigns. From this the conclusion is often drawn: “Well, that was in Russia; in our country parliamentarism is different.” A wrong conclusion. But it is just why Communists, adherents of the Third International in all countries exist – to change, all along the line, in all spheres of life, the old socialist, trade unionist, syndicalist, parliamentary work into new work, communist work. In Russia, too, there was always a great deal of opportunist and purely bourgeois commercialism and capitalist swindling in the elections. The Communists in Western Europe and America must learn to create a new, unusual, non-opportunist, non-careerist parliamentarism; the Communist parties must issue their slogans; real proletarians, with the help of the unorganized and downtrodden poor, should scatter and distribute leaflets, canvass workers’ houses and the cottages of the rural proletarians and peasants in the remote villages (fortunately there are many times less remote villages in Europe than in Russia, and in England the number is very small); they should go into the most common taverns, penetrate into the unions, societies and casual meetings where the common people gather, and talk to the people, not in learned (and not in very parliamentary) language; they should not at all strive to “get seats” in parliament, but should everywhere strive to rouse the minds of the masses and draw them into the struggle, to hold the bourgeoisie to its word and utilize the apparatus it has set up, the elections it has appointed, the appeals it has made to the whole people, and to tell the people what Bolshevism is in a way that has never been possible (under bourgeois rule) outside of election times (not counting, of course, times of big strikes, when, in Russia, a similar apparatus for widespread popular agitation worked even more intensively). It is very difficult to do this in Western Europe and America, very, very difficult; but it can and must be done, for the task of Communism cannot be fulfilled without effort; and our efforts must be devoted to fulfilling practical tasks, ever more varied, ever more closely connected with all branches of social life, winning branch after branch and sphere after sphere from the bourgeoisie.

In Great Britain, further, the work of propaganda, agitation and organization among the armed forces and among the oppressed and unenfranchised nationalities in one’s “own” state (Ireland, the colonies) must also be taken up in a new way (not in a socialist, but a communist way, not in a reformist, but a revolutionary way). Because in the era of imperialism generally, and especially now, after the war, which was a torment to the peoples and quickly opened their eyes to the truth (viz., that tens of millions were killed and maimed only for the purpose of deciding whether the British or the German pirates should plunder the largest number of countries), all these spheres of social life are being especially charged with inflammable material and are creating numerous causes of conflicts, crises and the accentuation of the class struggle. We do not and cannot know which spark – of the innumerable sparks that are flying around in all countries as a result of the economic and political world crisis – will kindle the conflagration, in the sense of specially rousing the masses, and we must, therefore, with the aid of our new, communist principles, set to work to “stir up” all and sundry, even the oldest, mustiest and seemingly hopeless spheres, for otherwise we shall not be able to cope with our tasks, we shall not be comprehensively prepared, we shall not master all arms and we shall not prepare ourselves to achieve either the victory over

³¹⁹ *The Dreyfus case*—the framed-up trial organized in 1894 by the reactionary-royalist military clique in France against Dreyfus, a Jewish officer of the French General Staff. Dreyfus was sentenced to life imprisonment on false charges of espionage and high treason. The widespread public campaign for revision of the verdict was marked by a bitter struggle between the republicans and royalists and resulted in Dreyfus’ acquittal in 1906.

the bourgeoisie (which arranged all sides of social life—and has now disarranged them – in its bourgeois way) or the impending communist reorganization of every sphere of life after that victory.

After the proletarian revolution in Russia and its victories on an international scale, which were unexpected for the bourgeoisie and the philistines, the whole world has changed, and the bourgeoisie has changed everywhere too. It is terrified of “Bolshevism,” incensed with it almost to the point of frenzy, and, precisely for that reason, it is, on the one hand, accelerating the progress of events and, on the other, concentrating attention on the suppression of Bolshevism by force, and thereby weakening its position in a number of other fields. The Communists in all advanced countries must take into account both these circumstances in their tactics.

When the Russian Cadets and Kerensky launched a furious campaign against the Bolsheviks – especially after April 1917, and more particularly in June and July 1917 – they “overdid” it. Millions of copies of bourgeois papers, shrieking in every key against the Bolsheviks, helped to induce the masses to appraise Bolshevism; and, apart from the newspapers, all public life was being permeated with discussions about Bolshevism just because of the “zeal” of the bourgeoisie. Now on an international scale the millionaires of all countries are behaving in a way that deserves our heartiest thanks. They are hounding Bolshevism with the same zeal as did Kerensky and Co.; they, too, are “overdoing” it and helping us just as Kerensky did. When the French bourgeoisie makes Bolshevism the central issue at the elections, and accuses the comparatively moderate or vacillating Socialists of being Bolsheviks; when the American bourgeoisie, having completely lost its head, seizes thousands and thousands of people on suspicion of Bolshevism, creates an atmosphere of panic and broadcasts stories of Bolshevik plots; when the British bourgeoisie – the most “solid” in the world – despite all its wisdom and experience, commits incredible follies, founds richly endowed “anti-Bolshevik societies,” creates a special literature on Bolshevism, and hires an extra number of scientists, agitators and parsons to combat it—we must bow and thank the capitalist gentry. They are working for us. They are helping us to get the masses interested in the nature and significance of Bolshevism. And they cannot do otherwise; for they have already failed to stifle Bolshevism, to “ignore” it.

But at the same time, the bourgeoisie sees practically only one side of Bolshevism, viz., insurrection, violence, terror; it therefore strives to prepare itself for resistance and opposition particularly in this field. It is possible that in certain instances, in certain countries, and for certain brief periods, it will succeed in this. We must reckon with such a possibility, and there will be absolutely nothing terrible for us if it does succeed. Communism “springs” from positively every sphere of public life; its shoots are to be seen literally everywhere. The “contagion” (to use the favorite metaphor of the bourgeoisie and the bourgeois police, the one most “pleasant” to them) has very thoroughly permeated the organism and has completely impregnated it. If special efforts are made to “stop up” one of the channels, the “contagion” will find another, sometimes a very unexpected channel. Life will assert itself. Let the bourgeoisie rave, work itself into a frenzy, go to extremes, commit follies, take vengeance on the Bolsheviks in advance, and endeavor to kill off (in India, Hungary, Germany, etc.) more hundreds, thousands, and hundreds of thousands of yesterday’s and tomorrow’s Bolsheviks. In acting thus, the bourgeoisie is acting as all classes doomed by history have acted. Communists should know that the future in any case belongs to them; therefore, we can (and must) combine the most intense passion in the great revolutionary struggle with the coolest and most sober estimation of the frenzied ravings of the bourgeoisie. The Russian revolution was cruelly defeated in 1905; the Russian Bolsheviks were defeated in July 1917; over 15,000 German Communists were killed as a result of the wily provocation and cunning maneuvers of Scheidemann and Noske working hand in glove with the bourgeoisie and the monarchist generals; White terror is raging in Finland and Hungary. But in all cases and in all countries Communism is becoming steeled and is growing; its roots are so deep that persecution does not weaken it, does not debilitate it, but strengthens it. Only one thing is lacking to enable us to march forward more confidently and firmly to victory, namely, the universal and thoroughly thought-out appreciation by all Communists in all countries of the necessity of displaying the utmost *flexibility*.

in their tactics. The communist movement, which is developing magnificently, especially in the advanced countries, now lacks this appreciation and the ability to apply it in practice.

What happened to such leaders of the Second International, such highly erudite Marxists devoted to Socialism as Kautsky, Otto Bauer and others, could (and should) serve as a useful lesson. They fully appreciated the need for flexible tactics; they learned themselves and taught others Marxist dialectics (and much of what they have done in this respect will forever remain a valuable contribution to socialist literature); but *in the application* of these dialectics they committed such a mistake, or proved in practice to be so *undialectical*, so incapable of taking into account the rapid change of forms and the rapid acquiring of new content by the old forms, that their fate is not much more enviable than that of Hyndman, Guesde and Plekhanov.

The principal reason for their bankruptcy was that they were “enchanted” by one definite form of growth of the working-class movement and Socialism, they forgot all about the one-sidedness of this form, they were afraid of seeing the sharp break which objective conditions made inevitable, and continued to repeat simple, routine, and, at a first glance, in contestable truths, such as: “three is more than two.” But politics is more like algebra than arithmetic; and still more like higher mathematics than elementary mathematics. In reality, all the old forms of the socialist movement have acquired a new content, and, consequently, a new sign, the “minus” sign, has appeared in front of all the figures; but our wiseacres stubbornly continued (and still continue) to persuade themselves and others that “minus three” is more than “minus two”!

We must see to it that Communists do not make the same mistake, only the other way round; or, rather, we must see to it that the *same mistake*, only the other way round, made by the “Left” Communists, is corrected as soon as possible and overcome as quickly and painlessly as possible. It is not only Right doctrinairism that is a mistake; Left doctrinairism is also a mistake. Of course, the mistake of Left doctrinairism in Communism is at present a thousand times less dangerous and less significant than the mistakes of Right doctrinairism (i.e., social-chauvinism and Kautskyism); but, after all, that is only due to the fact that Left Communism is a very young trend, is only just coming into being. It is only for this reason that, under certain conditions, the disease can be easily cured; and we must set to work to cure it with the utmost energy.

The old forms have burst asunder, for it has turned out that their new content—an anti-proletarian and reactionary content – had attained inordinate development. Today our work has, from the standpoint of the development of international Communism, such a durable, strong and powerful content (for Soviet power, for the dictatorship of the proletariat) that it can and must manifest itself in every form, both new and old, it can and must regenerate, conquer and subjugate all forms, not only the new, but also the old – for the purpose of reconciling itself with the old, but for the purpose of making all and every form – new and old – a weapon for the complete, final, decisive and irrevocable victory of Communism.

The Communists must exert every effort to direct the working-class movement and social development in general along the straightest and quickest road to the universal victory of Soviet power and the dictatorship of the proletariat. That is an incontestable truth. But it is enough to take one little step further – a step that might seem to be in the same direction – and truth becomes error. We have only to say, as the German and British Left Communists say, that we recognized only one road, only the direct road, that we will not permit tacking, maneuvering, compromising – and it will be a mistake which may cause, and in part has already caused, and is causing, very serious harm to Communism. Right doctrinairism persisted in recognizing only the old forms, and became utterly bankrupt, for it did not perceive the new content. Left doctrinairism persists in the unconditional repudiation of certain old forms, failing to see that the new content is forcing its way through all and sundry forms, that it is our duty as Communists to master all forms, to learn how, with the maximum rapidity, to supplement one form with another, to substitute one for another, and to adapt our tactics to every such change called forth not by our class, nor by our efforts.

World revolution has received such a powerful impetus and acceleration from the horrors, atrocities and abominations of the world imperialist war and from the hopelessness of the situation it created – this revolution is developing in

Section V: The Strategy of Patience

breadth and depth with such magnificent rapidity, with such a splendid variety of changing forms, with such an instructive, practical refutation of all doctrinairism, that there is every ground for hoping for a rapid and complete recovery of the international communist movement from the infantile disorder of “Left wing” Communism.

Revolutionary Strategy, Chapter 2: Reform Coalition or Mass Strike?

by Mike Macnair

In chapter one I discussed the idea that Marxism itself is a strategy – for the emancipation of the working class, through collective action for communism; and for the emancipation of “all human beings without distinction of sex or race” – ie, for communism – through the emancipation of the working class. I drew out some corollaries of this strategic concept: on the one hand, rejection of dependence on the existing state, and, on the other, the need for the working class to organise and act internationally before the arrival of ‘the revolution’ or the socialist millennium.

I also discussed the choice made by the socialists of, first, the German SPD and, later, the Second International to prioritise the unity of the movement above all else. I concluded that the diplomatic formulation of the Gotha programme and the general principle of unity at all costs had not succeeded in suppressing strategic debate, and the core of the ‘problem of strategy’ began to be addressed in the debates between the right wing of the movement, the Kautskyan centre, and the leftist advocates of a ‘strategy of the general strike’.

These tendencies *drew on* debates which had already begun. The ‘general strike strategy’ was a variant form of positions which had already been argued by the Bakuninists in the 1870s and were still maintained by anarcho-syndicalists.²⁹ The policy of the right had indirect roots in the Lassalleans’ policy of demanding that the German imperial state support the workers against the capitalists; its more immediate root was the (successful) coalition policy of SPD regional leaders in southern Germany, which Engels criticised in *The Peasant Question in France and Germany* (1894).

The Kautskyan ‘centre’ position took its starting point from Marx and Engels’ polemics both against the anarchists at the time of the split in the First International, and against the coalitionism of the precursors of the right. But, though Kautsky (with a bit of arm-twisting from Engels³⁰) had published Marx’s *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, he had by no means internalised Marx and Engels’ criticisms of that programme. Kautsky’s first draft of the 1891 Erfurt programme was subject to some similar criticisms from Engels,³¹ and, in the German and international centre tendency, Kautsky was allied both with the true author of the Gotha programme, Wilhelm Liebknecht, and with open Lassalleans like Mehring.

The Right: Reform v ‘Utopianism’

The underlying common idea of the right wing of the movement was that the practical task of the movement was to fight for reforms in the interests of the working class. In order to win these reforms, it was necessary to make coalitions with other tendencies which were willing to ally with the workers’ movement. And in order to make coalitions, it was necessary in the first place to be willing to take governmental office: it was by creating a coalition *government* that the possibility really arose of legislating in the interests of the working class, as well as of administrative measures (creating social security systems, etc).

Secondly, it was necessary to be willing to make substantial political compromises. Thus Engels, in *The peasant question*, polemicised against Vollmar’s programmatic concessions to the peasantry in relation to positive subsidies for family farming and in relation to trade union issues affecting agricultural labourers employed by small farmers.

The largest compromise – but, from the point of view of the right, the smallest – would be for the workers’ party to abandon its illusory and futile revolutionism; and, with it, equally illusory Marxist claims about crisis, and the notion that in an economic downswing reforms, as concessions made to the working class, would tend to be taken back unless the working class took political power into its own hands.

In the view of the right, the revolutionism was, after all, already empty of content. The German party, for example, did not call openly for the replacement of the monarchy by a republic and, though the Erfurt programme contained a good set of standard democratic-republican demands (for example, universal military training, popular militia, election of officials, including judges, and so on),³² these played only a marginal role in the party's agitational and propaganda work.

The claim that economic downswing would produce attacks on concessions already made could perfectly well be conceded by rightists as true of *the bourgeoisie*; but the argument that this was also true of *the state* depended on the claim that the state was a class instrument in the hands of the bourgeoisie, and was thus intertwined with revolutionism.

The right did not simply argue that getting rid of revolutionism would make the workers' party into a respectable party with which other parties could do business, and which could therefore achieve coalitions, and hence concessions. It also offered a variety of theoretical objections to Marx and Engels' arguments, based on Christianity, Kantianism, nationalism and early appropriations of the marginalist economists' critiques of Marx. A relatively sophisticated version was Bernstein's *Evolutionary socialism*, which argued that the scientific approach of Marx and Engels was diverted by their residual Hegelianism into a utopian revolutionism.

The actual content of the various theoretical objections to Marxism need not be considered here. The core question is the relative value of Marxist and 'constitutionalist' arguments in terms of predictive power and, hence, as a guide to action. To address this question it is necessary to separate the rightists' positive claim – that coalitions based on programmatic concessions can win real reforms – from their negative claim, that 'revolutionism' is unrealistic, worthless and illusory.

The Right's Positive Claim

It should be said right away that the positive claim is true, to the extent that we are willing to treat partial gains for particular groups of workers (eg, workers in Britain; or workers in industry; or in particular industries) as gains for the working class as a whole.

This does not, in fact, depend on the workers' party being a minority party and hence in need of formal coalitions. If the workers' party presents itself purely as a party of reform, it will also win members and voters from the existing parties of reform. It may then, like the British Labour Party after 1945, become a party which is in form a workers' party capable of forming a government on its own, but is in reality *in itself* a coalition between advocates of the independent political representation of the working class on the one hand, and liberal or nationalist-statist reformers and political careerists on the other: to use Lenin's very slippery expression, a "bourgeois workers' party".

The positive claim is, however, illusory as strategy. Part of this illusory character is due to the fact that the negative claim is false. But part of it is internal. The policy of coalitions based on programmatic concessions is, as I said earlier, based on the need to form a coalition *government* in order to get effective reforms. But this supposes from the outset that reforms will take the form of state action to ameliorate the situation of the workers. The reform policy is therefore a policy for the growth and increasing power of the state and increased state taxation: as the Conservative press puts it, for the "nanny state".

The internal problem is that working class people are no more fond of being in perpetual parental leading-reins from the state than the middle classes: the aim of the emancipation of the working class is an aspiration to collective and individual freedom. The policy of reform through coalition governments therefore contains within itself – quite apart from the falsity of the negative claim – the seeds of its own overthrow. The petty tyrannies of the council house manager, the social services officials, the benefit officials, etc, become the ground of a conservative/liberal reaction against the "nanny state" among important sections of the working class.

This is not merely a British phenomenon (the Thatcher victory in 1979). It was seen in the largest possible scale in the fall of the Stalinist regimes in 1989-91. And it has characterised the French, German and Italian electoral cycles and those of Australia, Canada and the US at least since the 1970s (in the case of the US, the Democrats play the role of the reformists).

The Right's Negative Claim

The predictive failure of the reformists' negative claim results, most fundamentally, from the national limit of its horizons. Capitalism forms itself, from its beginnings, as a global socioeconomic formation. It is an international greasy-pole hierarchy of competing firms. Within this formation the nation-state is unavoidably a firm, and there is also a hierarchy of competing states. The understanding that the nation-state is a firm competing in the world market is a trivial commonplace of modern capitalist politics: the need to preserve or improve 'British competitiveness' is a constant mantra of both Labour and Tories, and equivalents can be found in the major parties of every country. It also forms part of Marx's criticism of the Gotha programme (quoted in chapter one). To form a *government* within this framework therefore necessarily commits the participants to manage the interests of the nation-state in global competition.

Success in this competition allows the basis for reforms in the interests of the *national* working class. Or, more exactly, of *sections* of the national working class: there are always groups (particularly workers in small firms, young workers, migrants, etc) who must be excluded for the sake of compromise with the middle class parties, as Engels predicted in criticising Vollmar. But success is not 'purely economic'. Capitals are able to externalise the costs of economic downswing onto weaker *states* and the firms (and landlords, petty producers, etc) associated with these states. Competition on the world market is thus *military-political-economic*.

The policy of reform through coalition governments thus entails (a) the displacement of the downswing of the business cycle onto the weaker states and their firms and populations; and (b) the displacement of the social polarisation which capitalism produces onto polarisation *between nations*. On the one hand, this gives the reformists' negative claims their credibility: reforms are actually achieved and social polarisation is reduced in the successful states. On the other, the reformists necessarily commit themselves to sustaining and managing an *imperial* military force.

Sentimental objections to imperialism and foreign adventures, and the residual commitment to the ideas of universal military service and a people's militia, inevitably give way, once reformists are actually in government, to the hard needs of sustaining the state's success and standing in the global hierarchy, which is the only means by which reforms can be sustained.

Even this success at the price of bloody hands cannot forever be sustained, because externalising the business cycle has its own limits. As a world top-dog state, like Britain or the US, and the lead industrial sectors associated with this state, enter into decline, the externalised downswing phase of the business cycle returns, affecting not only them, but the other states near the top of the global hierarchy. Competition between these states intensifies. As a result, if the state as a firm is to remain globally competitive, it must endeavour to take back the reforms which have been given and drive wages and working conditions down towards the global average (their true market value). The project of reform through coalition government thereby comes to offer 'reformism without reforms' or merely the 'less bad' (Blair in preference to Major, and so on).

But every other state is also doing the same thing and, the more they do it, the more global effective purchasing power declines, forcing more attacks ... in reality, this is merely the downswing of the business cycle postponed. It is accumulated in time and displaced onto a global scale, returning as global market pressure on the nation-state. The downswing of the ordinary business cycle must end in bankruptcies, which both free productive capital from the claims of overproduced

fictional capital to income, and devalorise overinvested physical capital. It is the bankruptcies which free up space for a new economic upswing.

In the same way, the global downswing must end in the destruction of the global money and property claims of the declining world hegemon state: Britain in 1914-45; the US at some point in this coming century. In its (ultimately futile) efforts to put off this result, the declining world hegemon state must respond by an increased exploitation of its financial claims and its military dominance – as Britain did in the later 19th century, and as the US is doing now. The deferred and transposed business cycle can only overcome this problem by ending in war.

At the point of global war between the great powers, the illusory character of the policy of reform through coalition government becomes transparent. All that maintains the reformists are mass fear of the consequences of military defeat, and direct support from the state in the form of repression of their left opponents. Thus both 1914-18 and 1939-45 produced major weakening of the reform policy within the workers' movement and the growth of alternatives. In the event, after 1945 the destruction of British world hegemony enabled a new long phase of growth, and reformism was able to revive. We are now on the road to another collapse of reformist politics ... but what is lacking is a strategically plausible alternative.

The Left: 'All Out For...'

The alternative offered by the left wing of the Second International was the 'strategy of the mass strike'. The idea was an elementary one. In the first place, the strike weapon had been and remained at the core of the effectiveness of trade union struggles for immediate demands. Secondly, the struggle for the International itself was intimately connected with the struggle for May Day – waged through international one-day strike action – from its founding Congress in 1889.

The proposal of the left was that the International could take the political initiative by extending the use of the strike weapon in support of the demands of the minimum programme. As the working class was increasingly able to win victories by this weapon, its confidence and political self-assertiveness would grow, culminating (perhaps) in a general strike which challenged for power – either demanding the transfer of political power to the working class or (in the most Bakuninist form) immediately beginning the creation of the new society out of the free cooperation begun in the strike movement.

A range of theoretical grounds have been offered for this strategic line, from theoretical anarchist reasonings, through varieties of Hegelian Marxism, to – more recently – interpretations of Trotsky's *Transitional Programme*. As with the right, the theoretical arguments need not be considered here. Like that of the right, the strategic line of the left involved both a positive predictive claim and a negative one. The negative claim was that the method of electoral struggle and coalitions – or even the effort to build permanent mass workers' organisations, as opposed to ad hoc organisations of mass struggle like strike committees – necessarily led to corruption of the workers' representatives and organisations and the evolution of these organisations into mere forms of capitalist control of the working class. The positive claim was that the method of the strike struggle could be extended and generalised. Experience has something to tell us about the value of these claims.

The Left's Negative Claim

The negative claim may, on its face, appear to be amply proved by the experience of the 20th century. It is certainly true of the policy of reform through coalition governments, for the reasons given above. On the experience of the 20th century, it appears to be *also* true of the 'Leninist party', which claimed to escape it. Those communist parties which took

power became corrupt apparatuses tyrannising over the working classes of their countries, and most have ended in a return to capitalism, while most of the ‘official’ CPs of the capitalist countries have become simple reformist parties of the kind advocated by the right wing of the Second International. The groups to their left have, to the extent that they have attained mass support, gone down the same path and, to the extent that they have not, have in the main become fossilised sects; in either case, characterised internally by the petty dictatorship of the party bureaucracy.

The trouble is that if the left’s negative claim is taken seriously to simply true, it is self-defeating. If any effort to organise outside strikes leads to corruption, nothing can be done until the masses move into a mass strike wave, because to organise in any other situation would imply the struggle for reforms, including electoral activity, coalitions, and organisational forms which turn out to be corrupt. Unfortunately, however – as we will see in a moment – when a mass strike wave does break out, this in itself immediately poses the questions of government and forms of authority. Under these conditions, the unorganised advocates of the mass strike as an alternative to permanent organisation and the struggle for reforms are marginalised by the organised parties. Like the Russian anarchists in the summer and autumn of 1917, the anarchist CNT trade union confederation in the Spanish revolution, the Bolivian Trotskyists in 1951 and the Portuguese far left in 1974-76, they will be driven to give support to some contender for governmental power, and lose any political initiative.

What I have just said is, in fact, no novelty. It is the substance of Marx and Engels’ objection to the Bakuninists’ general strike strategy, expressed (among other places) in Engels’ *The Bakuninists at work* (1873). The Bakuninists ‘rejected authority’ – offering, in relation to the First International, an early form of the idea that organising and fighting for reforms leads to corruption, and advocating a form of general strike strategy. When the revolutionary movement in Spain allowed them to seize power in some localities in 1873, the result of their ‘rejection of authority’ was alliance with localist forces, leading to an inability to take any coordinated action to resist the counteroffensive of the military-clerical right wing against the republicans.

The underlying problem is that ‘authority’ is, at bottom, merely a means of collective decision-making. To ‘reject authority’ is therefore to reject collective decision-making and – in the end – render yourself powerless. The existing social structures of authority then reassert themselves. In the end, anarchists have themselves discovered this, in Jo Freeman’s famous pamphlet *The tyranny of structurelessness* (1970). It happens just as much within small anarchist organisations (the ‘existing social structures of authority’ then being gender and class hierarchy) as in mass workers’ parties.

The almost uniform failure, by processes of bureaucratisation and corruption, of workers’ and socialist parties, big and small, tells us that we have not solved the problem of what sort of authority – that is, what sort of mechanisms of decision-making – will serve the interests of the working class. It also tells us that it is absolutely urgent to do so; and that the standard Trotskyist response, originated by Trotsky himself, that “the party ‘regime’ is not a political question”, is profoundly false. The ‘party regime’ is inevitably the image of the sort of regime we are fighting for.

But the proposition that the tyranny of structurelessness leads to the reaffirmation of the existing social structures of authority is true not only of groups and parties, but also of mass strike movements and revolutionary crises – as the examples given above show. When we see why this is the case, we will also see why the positive side of the ‘mass strike strategy’ turns a partial truth into a strategic falsity.

The Left’s Positive Claim

Let us imagine for a moment a general strike which is both truly general (everyone who works for a wage withdraws their labour) and indefinite, to continue until certain demands are met, happening in a fully capitalist country like Britain. Power supplies are cut off, and with them water supplies and the telephone system. No trains or buses run, and no petrol

can be obtained except from small owner-run petrol stations; this soon runs out. The supermarkets are closed, and no deliveries are made to those small owner-run shops that remain open. The hospitals and doctors' surgeries are closed.

It should at once be apparent that this cannot continue for more than a few days. If the result is not to be general catastrophe, the workers need not simply to withdraw their labour, but to organise positively to take over the capitalists' facilities and run them in the interests of the working class. A truly all-out indefinite general strike, therefore, immediately demands the effective *de facto* expropriation of the capitalists. As a result, it at once poses the question: will the state protect the capitalists' property rights? In other words, it poses the question of political power.

Now, of course, what the advocates of the mass strike strategy were calling for was not such a truly all-out indefinite general strike called by the political party. The reality of mass strike movements is something a great deal more messy, of the sort described, for Russia, in Luxemburg's *The mass strike*, but seen since then in many different countries at different times.³⁶ The political regime falls into crisis. Some spark sets off the mass movement. Rather than a single, planned, truly all-out, indefinite general strike, there is a wave of mass strikes – some protest actions for political demands; some partial struggles for economic demands. They begin to overlap and are accompanied by political radicalisation.

But a movement of this sort *still* poses the question of political power, and for exactly the same reasons. A mass strike wave disrupts normal supply chains. This can be true even of a strike in a single industry, like the miners' strikes in Britain in 1972 and 1974. Equally, however, the capitalists' property rights are, from their point of view, not merely rights to things, but rights to the streams of income (ie, of social surplus product) which can be made to flow from the social relations which ownership of these things represents. The strike is therefore *in itself* an interference with their property, and a mass strike wave threatens the security of their property. They begin to disinvest, and to press the state for stronger action against strikers.

The economy begins to come unravelled. The loss of the normal (capitalist) mechanisms of authority (decision-making) impacts on the broad masses in the form of dislocation and shortages of goods. A strike wave or revolutionary crisis can last longer than a truly all-out indefinite general strike, but it cannot last longer than a period of months – at most a couple of years. In this situation, if the workers' movement does not offer an alternative form of authority – alternative means of decision-making which are capable of running the economy – the existing social structures of authority are necessarily reaffirmed. Either the military moves in (Spain in 1873-74 and 1936, etc) or the reformists, put in power, re-establish capitalist order (Ebert- Scheidemann in 1918; everywhere in Europe in the immediate aftermath of World War II; in a much weaker sense, the 1974-79 Wilson-Callaghan government in Britain).

The 'mass strike strategy' thus precisely fails to resolve the strategic problem of authority which the negative aspect of the left's approach – the critique of the struggle for reforms – posed.

All Power to the Soviets?

Lenin in 1917 believed that the Russian working class had found in the soviets – workers' councils – the solution to the strategic problem of authority posed by the mass strike movement. Growing out of the strike movement itself, the soviets created a form of authority which shared the characteristics of democracy and accountability from below which Marx described in the Paris Commune. Communism could therefore take the political form of the struggle for soviets and for soviet power.

In fact, as I have argued before, this belief was illusory.³⁷ Almost as soon as the Bolsheviks had taken power, they were forced to move from a militia to a regular army, and with it came logistics and the need for a state bureaucracy. The soviets and militia *could not* perform the core social function of the state, defending the society against external attack. The

problem of authority over the state bureaucracy was unsolved. Lenin and the Bolsheviks fell back on the forms of authority in their party and, as these proved a problem in the civil war, almost unthinkingly militarised their party and created a corrupt bureaucratic regime.

But ‘All power to the soviets’ was also illusory in another sense. Even before they withered away into mere fronts for the Russian Communist Party, the soviets did not function like parliaments or governments – or even the Paris Commune – in continuous session. They met discontinuously, with executive committees managing their affairs. Though the Bolsheviks took power in the name of the soviets, in reality the central all-Russia coordination of the soviets was provided by the political parties – Mensheviks and SRs, and later Bolsheviks. It was Sovnarkom, the government formed by the Bolsheviks and initially including some of their allies, and its ability to reach out through the Bolshevik Party as a national organisation, which ‘solved’ the crisis of authority affecting Russia in 1917.

Subsequent history confirms this judgment. Workers’ councils and similar forms have appeared in many strike waves and revolutionary crises since 1917. In none have these forms been able to offer an alternative centre of authority, an alternative decision-making mechanism for the whole society. This role is unavoidably played by a government – either based on the surviving military-bureaucratic state core, or on the existing organisations of the workers’ movement.

In Cuba, for example, the overreaction of the Batista regime to a small guerrilla organisation, the July 26 Movement, in November 1958 triggered a general strike which brought the regime down. The ensuing two years saw a succession of government arrangements and a continuing wave of action by the working class in various forms. The end result was a party-state regime formed by the merger of a minority of the July 26 Movement with the much larger Popular Socialist Party (Communist Party). It was the PSP which, in the end, provided the alternative centre of authority.

I do not mean by this to glorify the bureaucratic outcomes of the dictatorship of the ‘revolutionary’ party either in Russia or in Cuba. The point is simply that the problem of decision-making authority is not solved by the creation of workers’ councils arising out of a mass strike movement. Hence, the problem of institutional forms which will make authority *answerable to* the masses needs to be addressed in some way other than fetishism of the mass strike and the workers’ councils.

Present Relevance

The falsity of the line of ‘All power to the soviets’ brings us momentarily back to the 2006 debate in the French Ligue. At least some in the Ligue recognised the falsity of their variant of ‘All power to the soviets’ – the ‘organs of dual power’ line of the Tenth Congress of the Mandelite Fourth International (or, as LCR authors Artous and Durand put it, the strategy of the insurrectionary general strike). But then the question is, what strategy? Durand offered a version of Eurocommunism, and this was itself a variant of the positions argued by Bernstein and the right wing of the Second International. We have seen in this chapter that this is no strategy either.

We should also have seen that the problem with both strategies centres on the questions of government as a central coordinating authority, and the role and structural forms of the bureaucratic-coercive state. The right sought to form governments based on the existing state; the left adopted a strategy which, at the end of the day, evaded the whole problem of state authority. In truth, these issues, originally debated between the 1870s and 1900s, are live, unresolved questions in today’s politics. In the next chapter we will see what, if anything, the centre tendency in the Second International led by Karl Kautsky has to teach us on these issues.

Revolutionary Strategy, Chapter 3: The Revolutionary Strategy of the Centre

The centre tendency in the German Social Democratic Party and Second International was also its ideological leadership. In spite of eventually disastrous errors and betrayals, this tendency has a major historical achievement to its credit. It led the building of the mass workers' socialist parties of late 19th and early 20th century Europe and the creation of the Second International. The leftist advocates of the mass strike strategy, in contrast, built either groupuscules like the modern far left (such as the De Leonists) or militant but ephemeral movements (like the Industrial Workers of the World).

Down to 1914, Russian Bolshevism was a tendency *within* the centre, not a tendency opposed to it – even if Kautsky preferred the Mensheviks. Without the centre tendency's international unity policy there would have been no RSDLP; without the lessons the Bolsheviks learned from the international centre tendency, there could have been no mass opening of the Bolshevik membership in 1905, no recovery of the party's strength through trade union, electoral and other forms of low-level mass work in 1912-14, and no Bolshevik political struggle to win a majority between April and October 1917.

The centre tendency did not, of course, identify itself as such. It self-identified as the continuators and defenders of 'orthodox Marxism' against 'anarchists' (to its left, but not in the centre's view) and 'revisionists' to its right. In this sense it was primarily defined by negative judgments on the coalition strategy of the right and the mass strike strategy of the left. Both Kautsky's *The social revolution* (1902) and his *The road to power* (1909) are extremely cautious in making positive categorical predictive claims about strategy. There are nonetheless some core principled understandings about strategy which emerge from the arguments.

Organisation

For the centre tendency, the strength of the proletariat and its revolutionary capacity flows, not from the employed workers' power to withdraw their labour, but from the power of the proletariat as a class to *organise*. It is organisation that makes the difference between a spontaneous expression of rage and rebellion, like a riot, and a strike as a definite action for definite and potentially winnable goals.

Moreover, as soon as we move beyond craft unionism, which relies on skills monopolies to coerce the employer, the difference between victory and defeat in a strike is the ability of the solidarity of the class as a whole to sustain the strikers in the face of the economic and political pressure the employers can exert. Finally, it is the need and (potential) ability of the proletariat as a class to organise democratically when we enter into a mass strike wave or revolutionary crisis that represents the *potential* alternative authority to the authority of the capitalist class.

Proletarian organisation need not only be deployed in the form of strike action. Solidarity and the power to organise can also create cooperatives of various sorts, workers' educational institutions, workers' papers, and workers' political parties: and it can turn out the vote for workers' candidates in public elections. Strong votes for a workers' party will increase the self-confidence and sense of solidarity of the working class as a class and its ability to organise and act, not just electorally but in other arenas of struggle, such as strikes, for example.

The core of the political strategy of the centre tendency was to build up the workers' organised movement, and especially the workers' political party as its central institution. In their view, as the *organised movement* of the working class grew stronger, so would the self-confidence of the class and its ability to take political decisions and impose them on the bourgeoisie and the state. *Both* in the struggle for reforms *and* in mass strike waves or revolutionary crises, a powerful mass party of the working class which had at the core of its aims the perspective of the working class taking power and

overcoming the regime of private property would be the essential instrument of the working class asserting an alternative form of authority.

It is important to be clear that the movement that the centre tendency sought to build was *not* the gutted form of the modern social-democracy/Labourism, which is dependent on the support of the state and the capitalist media for its mass character. The idea was of a party which stood explicitly for the power of the working class and socialism. It was one which was built up on the basis of its own resources, its own organisation with local and national press, as well as its own welfare and educational institutions, etc.

This view was a direct inheritance from Marx and Engels' arguments from the time of the First International onwards. The Hegelian-Marxists, who claimed that it was an undialectical vulgarisation of Marx and Engels, faced with the historical evidence, logically had to conclude that Engels had vulgarised Marx. But this has been shown by Draper and others to be false.³⁸

The Self-Emancipation of the Majority

The second central feature of the strategic understandings of the centre tendency was that the socialist revolution is necessarily the act of the majority. This is fairly elementary and fundamental Marxism: it formed the basis of Marx and Engels' opposition to various forms of socialist putschism and support for enlightened despots.³⁹ The object of the socialist revolution is precisely the *self*-emancipation of the working class majority and through this the emancipation “of all human beings without distinction of sex or race”.⁴⁰ The idea that this can be accomplished through the action of an enlightened minority is a self-contradiction.

The centre tendency drew two conclusions from this understanding – against the left, and against the right. The first was rejection of the mass strike strategy. On this issue, the centre presented the anarcho-syndicalists and the left with a version of Morton's Fork. The first limb of the fork was that a true general strike would depend on the workers' party having majority support if it was to win. But if the workers' party already had majority support, where was the need for the general strike? The workers' party would start with its electoral majority as a mandate for socialism, rather than with the strike. It was for this reason that the centre, in Bebel's resolution at the 1905 Jena Congress of the SPD, was willing to demand the use of the mass strike weapon in defence of, or in the struggle for, universal suffrage.

The second limb of the fork was that the strategy of the working class coming to power through a strike *wave* presupposed that the workers' party had *not* won a majority. In these circumstances, for the workers' party to reach for power would be a matter of ‘conning the working class into taking power’. However formally majoritarian the party might be, the act of turning a strike wave into a struggle for power would inevitably be the act of an enlightened minority steering the benighted masses.

The argument against the right was also an argument against minority action – but minority action of a different kind. The right argued that the workers' party, while still a minority, should be willing to enter coalition governments with middle class parties in order to win reforms. The centre argued that this policy was illusory, primarily because the interests of the middle classes and those of the proletariat were opposed. Behind this argument was one made by Marx in 1850, that it would be a disaster for the workers' party to come to power on the back of the support of the petty proprietors, since the workers' party would then be forced to represent the interests of this alien class. “We are devoted to a party which, most fortunately for it, cannot

yet come to power. If the proletariat were to come to power the measures it would introduce would be petty-bourgeois and not directly proletarian. Our party can come to power only when the conditions allow it to put *its own* view into practice.

Louis Blanc [French socialist who participated in a republican coalition government in 1848] is the best instance of what happens when you come to power prematurely.”⁴¹

This logic applied all the more to the creation of a coalition government with the political representatives of the petty proprietors. By becoming part of such a coalition, the workers’ party would in practice accept responsibility for the petty-proprietor government. Again, the opposition to participating in coalitions as a minority was no novelty, but followed arguments already made by Marx and Engels. Thus, for example, Engels wrote to Turati in 1894, anticipating a possible Italian (democratic) revolution:

“After the common victory we might perhaps be offered some *seats in the new government* – but always in a *minority*. *Here lies the greatest danger*. After the February Revolution in 1848 the French socialistic democrats … were incautious enough to accept such positions. As a minority in the government they involuntarily bore the responsibility for all the infamy and treachery which the majority, composed of pure republicans, committed against the working class, while at the same time their participation in the government completely paralysed the revolutionary action of the working class they were supposed to represent.”⁴²

This is a hard judgment, but it is one which has been repeatedly confirmed by history. Participation by communists in nationalist and ‘democratic’ governments, and ‘critical support’ policies, animated by the desire to ‘do something for the workers’, has in the course of the 20th century brought on the workers’ movement in several countries disasters far worse than those of 1848: the fates of the mass Indonesian, Iraqi and Iranian communist parties spring to mind. The effect of the coalition policy can be not merely defeat, but the destruction of the very idea of socialism and working class politics as an alternative to the capitalist order.

Patience

The centre’s strategic line was, then, a strategy of patience as opposed to the two forms of impatience; those of the right’s coalition policy and the left’s mass strike strategy. This strategy of patience had its grounds in the belief that the inner-logic of capital would inevitably tend, in the first place, to increase the relative numbers and hence strength of the proletariat as a class, and, in the second, to increase social inequality and class antagonism. Kautsky makes the argument most clearly in *The social revolution*. In this situation the workers’ party/movement could expect to build up its forces over the long term to a point at which it would eventually be able to take power with majority support.

This strategic line can be summed up as follows. Until we have won a majority (identifiable by our votes in election results) the workers’ party will remain in opposition and not in government. While in opposition we will, of course, make every effort to win partial gains through strikes, single issue campaigns, etc, including partial agreements with other parties *not amounting to government coalitions, and not involving the workers’ party expressing confidence in these parties*.

When we have a majority, we will form a government and implement the whole minimum programme; if necessary, the possession of a majority will give us legitimacy to coerce the capitalist/pro-capitalist and petty bourgeois minority.

Implementing the whole minimum programme will prevent the state in the future serving as an instrument of the capitalist class and allow the class struggle to progress on terrain more favourable to the working class.

I have left on one side the question of imperialism, which I discussed at considerable length in a series in the *Weekly Worker* in July-August 2004. As I indicated there and in chapter two, it has significant implications for the centre tendency’s strategy of patience. The inherent tendency in capitalism towards social polarisation is partially displaced from the imperialist countries onto the colonial countries.

In particular, the material division of labour on a world scale results in a proportional increase in the professional, managerial and state official middle classes in the imperialist countries – a phenomenon observed by Hobson of south

eastern England and then in Lenin's *Imperialism*, and one which has been considerably more marked in the period since 1945. An increasing proportion of the total population of the imperialist countries becomes wholly or partly dependent on the spoils of empire. The version of the strategy of patience adopted by the SPD/Second International leadership depends on the workers' party actually achieving an electoral majority. But the economic and social effects of imperialism in the imperialist countries mean that this is unlikely in any single imperialist country and outside of conditions of acute political crisis.

The State

What distinguished the centre tendency from post-1917 communists most fundamentally was the belief that the working class could take over and use the existing capitalist state bureaucratic apparatus, a view developed most clearly in Kautsky's *The road to power*. This, too, had its roots in claims made by Marx and – particularly – Engels.

In *The civil war in France* Marx had asserted precisely that the working class "cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes," and had proposed the Commune as a model of the future workers' regime.⁴³

In the first draft of *The civil war in France*, indeed, Marx had characterised the Commune by saying that "This was, therefore, a revolution not against this or that, legitimate, constitutional, republican or imperialist form of state power. It was a revolution against the state itself, of this supernaturalist abortion of society, a resumption by the people for the people of its own social life."⁴⁴

In an April 1871 letter to Kugelmann, Marx wrote: "If you look at the last chapter of my *Eighteenth Brumaire* you will find that I say that the next attempt of the French revolution will be no longer, as before, to transfer the bureaucratic-military machine from one hand to another, but to *smash* it, and this is essential for every real people's revolution on the continent".⁴⁵

But that was in the first flush of the revolutionary movement. Later, in the aftermath of the Commune, the Bakuninists argued that the mass strike revolution was to abolish the state. In response to the uselessness of the Bakuninists' line, Marx and – in particular – Engels 'bent the stick' against it in a number of texts.

In *On authority* (1872), Engels uses a series of arguments for the need for authority (ie, collective decision-making mechanisms) in modern cooperative production.⁴⁶ But he explains them in a very unqualified way, which makes no distinction between the *temporary* subordination of one individual to another which is unavoidable in collective decision-making, and the *permanent* division of labour between managers and grunts which characterises both capitalist (and other class), and bureaucratic, regimes. Engels' arguments in this respect were to be used both by Kautsky against the left, and by Lenin in the 1918-21 process of construction of the bureaucratic regime in Russia.

Engels' 1891 afterword to *The civil war in France* is a little more ambiguous on 'smashing up' the state than Marx's letter to Kugelmann: "In reality, however, the state is nothing but a machine for the oppression of one class by another, and indeed in the democratic republic no less than in the monarchy; and at best an evil inherited by the proletariat after its victorious struggle for class supremacy, whose worst sides the proletariat, just like the Commune, cannot avoid having to *lop off* at the earliest possible moment, until such time as a new generation, reared in new and free social conditions, will be able to throw the entire lumber of the state on the scrap-heap" (emphasis added).⁴⁷

In Engels' 1895 *Introduction* to Marx's *Class struggles in France, 1848-1850* we find Engels asserting that: "With [the SPD's] successful utilisation of universal suffrage, however, an entirely new method of proletarian struggle came into operation, and this method quickly took on a more tangible form. *It was found that the state institutions, in which the rule of the bourgeoisie is organised, offer the working class still further levers to fight these very state institutions.* The workers

took part in elections to particular diets, to municipal councils and to trades courts; they contested with the bourgeoisie every post in the occupation of which a sufficient part of the proletariat had a say. And so it happened that the bourgeoisie and the government came to be much more afraid of the legal than of the illegal action of the workers' party, of the results of elections than of those of rebellion" (emphasis added).⁴⁸

It is clear from Engels' correspondence in 1895 that he did not by any means intend to rule out illegal or forcible action, and was exasperated at the SPD leadership's use of the *Introduction* to suggest that he did.⁴⁹ But this does not alter the significance of the positive arguments, only part of which have been quoted here.

Theory

Behind these ambiguities is a problem of theory.⁵⁰ Marx and Engels had started out with an appropriation and 'inversion' of Hegel's theory of the state: Hegel saw the state as growing out of the internal contradictions of 'civil society' (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*); Marx and Engels identified *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* with capitalism. But they became conscious that the state as a social form in general is historically prior to the emergence of capitalism. In *The civil war in France*, Marx projects the rise of capitalism back onto the emergence of the *absolutist* state in the phase of the decline of feudalism.

Behind the argument of *The civil war in France* is, in fact, an earlier understanding that *absolute monarchy* must be broken by revolution. In *England's 17th century revolution* (1850) Marx and Engels wrote that "Although M Guizot never loses sight of the French Revolution, he does not even reach the simple conclusion that the transition from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy can take place only after violent struggles and passing through a republican stage, and that even then the old dynasty, having become useless, must make way for a usurpatory side line."⁵¹

Marx's 1871 letter to Kugelmann similarly refers to the need to smash the state "on the continent" (ie, as opposed to Britain and the US). Engels' 1891 critique of the Erfurt programme makes a similar distinction: "One can conceive that the old society may develop peacefully into the new one in countries where the representatives of the people concentrate all power in their hands, where, if one has the support of the majority of the people, one can do as one sees fit in a constitutional way: in democratic republics such as France and the USA, in monarchies such as Britain, where the imminent abdication of the dynasty in return for financial compensation is discussed in the press daily and where this dynasty is powerless against the people. But in Germany where the government is almost omnipotent and the Reichstag and all other representative bodies have no real power, to advocate such a thing in Germany, when, moreover, there is no need to do so, means removing the fig-leaf from absolutism and becoming oneself a screen for its nakedness."⁵²

Marx's late work found in the *Ethnological notebooks* indicates that he recognised the insufficiency of this account, which ties the state to early modern absolutism. In *The origins of the family, private property and the state*, Engels' "execution of a bequest" of Marx's anthropological work, Engels identifies the origins of the state with the break-up of clan society in antiquity: the social contradictions which produce the state are then given by the emergence of full alienable private property and classes.

The result, both in Marx's *Civil war in France* version and in Engels' *Origins* version, is that capitalism inherits "the state" from the prior social orders. It is then rational to suppose that socialism (either as the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', or as the 'first phase of communism'), will inherit "the state" from capitalism.

What is missing is a general theory which will explain *why* the absolute monarchies had to be 'smashed' in order for fully capitalist states to emerge, in a process which was completed in the Netherlands in 1609 and England in 1688, but was not completed until 1871 in France and 1918 (and perhaps even 1945) in Germany.

But such a theory should also explain why the late antique state had to be ‘smashed’ in order for feudal state regimes to emerge, in a process completed in the former western Roman empire over the 7th-11th centuries, but which in Byzantium failed, ending in the *conquest* of the still stubbornly late antique state by the Ottoman regime in 1453. Similarly, in China a regime very similar to the late antique state recapitulated itself on changes of dynasty until it finally fell in the 1911-12 revolution, but in Japan such a state was ‘smashed’ in the 12th century, opening the way to a feudal development.

Such a theory could not properly stop at the immediate outcome, the particularity of the late feudal bureaucratic-coercive state and its relationship to capitalism. Nor could it stop at the beginning, at the absolute generality of the emergence of the state in connection with the transition to class society (which was probably in Mesopotamia, ancient Egypt, China, India and Mesoamerica rather than, as Engels placed it in *Origins*, in Greek and Roman classical antiquity). It would have to grasp the relation of concrete state *forms* (city-state and god-empire, national kingdom as part of a larger religious unity, rule-of-law constitutional state as part of a system of states) to their class bases (slavery, feudalism, capitalism).

In approaching the matter in this way, it would become visible that Engels’ 1891 judgment that in France, the USA and England “the representatives of the people concentrate all power in their hands, [and], if one has the support of the majority of the people, one can do as one sees fit in a constitutional way” was false. The inner secret of the capitalist state form is not ‘bourgeois democracy’. Rather, it has three elements: 1. the ‘rule of law’ – ie, the judicial power; 2. the deficit financing of the state through organised financial markets; and 3. the fact that capital rules, not through a single state, but through an international state system, of which each national state is merely a part.

This, in turn, carries the implication that Engels’ 1891 critique of the SPD’s failure in the Erfurt Programme to call for the democratic republic was true but insufficient, and that his 1895 claim that “It was found that the state institutions, in which the rule of the bourgeoisie is organised, offer the working class still further levers to fight these very state institutions” was misconceived.

In the absence of an explicit democratic-republican critique of the state hierarchy forming part of the SPD’s *agitation*, the party’s participation in the local and sectoral governmental organs of the German Second Empire served, not to undermine the imperial state, but to integrate the workers’ movement behind that state and to support the development of bureaucratic hierarchies within the workers’ movement.

The problem of failure to grasp the character of the nation-state system as part of an international state system and subject to the world market was one the centre shared with the right wing, and was more profoundly disastrous than the failure to grasp the problem of the class character of state forms. It, too, has its origins in Marx and Engels.

The Nation-State

“Though not in substance, yet in form, the struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie is at first a national struggle. The proletariat of each country must, of course, first of all settle matters with its own bourgeoisie” (*Communist manifesto*).

There is a peculiarity about this statement. Early in the *Manifesto*, we are told: “To this end, Communists of various nationalities have assembled in London and sketched the following manifesto, to be published in the English, French, German, Italian, Flemish and Danish languages.” The ideas of Marx and Engels reflected in the *Manifesto*, moreover, could be said to be drawn from the appropriation and critique of German philosophy, English political economy (and Chartism, though Lenin left this source out), and French utopian socialism.⁵³ Moreover, what immediately followed (not, of course, as a result of the *Manifesto*) was the outbreak of an *international* revolutionary wave affecting France, Germany, Austria, Hungary.

Indeed, *previous* (bourgeois) revolutionary movements had also been international: the Europe-wide commune movement of the 12th and 13th centuries, 16th-17th century protestantism (in particular Calvinism) and Enlightenment republic-

canism of the 18th and early 19th centuries. Future, more proletarian, revolutionary waves were also to be international in character, as in the rise of class struggles which led up to the 1914-18 war, those of the end and immediate aftermath of that war, the aftermath of 1945, and the late 1960s-early 1970s.

True, in the Critique of the Gotha programme Marx wrote: “It is altogether self-evident that, to be able to fight at all, the working class must organise itself at home as a class and that its own country is the immediate arena of its struggle – insofar as its class struggle is national, not in substance, but, as the Communist manifesto says, ‘in form’.” But he went on, however, to criticise the programme for saying “Not a word, therefore, about the international functions of the German working class! And it is thus that it is to challenge its own bourgeoisie – which is already linked up in brotherhood against it with the bourgeois of all other countries – and Herr Bismarck’s international policy of conspiracy.”⁵⁴

Engels’ contemporaneous critique in a letter to Bebel has a similar insistence both on the workers’ party initially organising nationally, and on its underlying international content: “There was, of course, no need whatever to mention the International as such. But at the very least there should have been no going back on the programme of 1869, and some sort of statement to the effect that, *though first of all* the German workers’ party is acting within the limits set by its political frontiers (it has no right to speak in the name of the European proletariat, especially when what it says is wrong), it is nevertheless conscious of its solidarity with the workers of all other countries and will, as before, always be ready to meet the obligations that solidarity entails.

Such obligations, even if one does not definitely proclaim or regard oneself as part of the ‘International’, consist for example in aid, abstention from blacklegging during strikes, making sure that the party organs keep German workers informed of the movement abroad, agitation against impending or incipient dynastic wars and, during such wars, an attitude such as was exemplarily maintained in 1870 and 1871, etc.”⁵⁵

The growth of the SPD, however, gave rise to a shift in Engels’ attitude. An increased emphasis was placed on the defence of Germany as the country in which the workers’ movement was strongest. In 1891 the initial emergence of an alliance of France with Russia threatened a war in which Germany might be attacked on two fronts (as, in the event, happened in 1914).

Engels wrote to Bebel that “we must declare that since 1871 we have always been ready for a peaceful understanding with France, that as soon as our Party comes to power it will be unable to exercise that power unless Alsace-Lorraine freely determines its own future, but that if war is forced upon us, and moreover a war in alliance with Russia, we must regard this as an attack on our existence and defend ourselves by every method …”

And “if we [Germany] are beaten, every barrier to chauvinism and a war of revenge in Europe will be thrown down for years hence. If we are victorious our party will come into power. The victory of Germany is therefore the victory of the revolution, and if it comes to war we must not only desire victory but further it by every means.”⁵⁶ The same position was publicly adopted by Bebel on behalf of the SPD, and Engels published it (as his own opinion) in France.⁵⁷

With this we have arrived at the position which the SPD took up in August 1914. It is, in fact, dictated by the inner logic of the combination of the claims that “the proletariat of each country must, of course, first of all settle matters with its own bourgeoisie” and that the (nation-) state is “an evil inherited by the proletariat after its victorious struggle for class supremacy”. In August 1914 these commitments left the centre as badly enmeshed in the defence of ‘national interests’ as the right, and led them to support feeding the European working class into the mincing machine of the war.

Dialectic

It is a commonplace of the far left, following hints from Lenin elaborated by Lukacs and others, to accuse Kautsky in particular and the centre in general of an insufficient grasp of dialectic. I have argued against this approach before.⁵⁸ In

particular, it is clear that Kautsky and his immediate co-thinkers did not imagine an uninterrupted social peace which would allow the SPD to progress without crises and setbacks, and that they did grasp that history moves *both* in a slow molecular fashion *and* in an accelerated and chaotic fashion in periods of crisis.

The trouble was that their errors on the state and the nation-state rendered this understanding useless when it came to the test of war. They were to have the same result in the revolution of 1918-19 and when, in 1931-33, the SPD was confronted with the rise of Nazism.

The centre's strategy of patience was more successful than the other strategies in actually building a mass party. Its insistence on the revolution as the act of the majority, and refusal of coalitionism, was equally relevant to conditions of revolutionary crisis: the Bolsheviks proved this positively in April-October 1917, and it has been proved negatively over and over again between the 1890s and the 2000s. However, *because* it addressed neither the state form, nor the international character of the capitalist state system and the tasks of the workers' movement, the centre's strategy collapsed into the policy of the right when matters came to the crunch.

Supplemental Readings

Section V: The Strategy of Patience

A Perfectly Ordinary, Highly Instructive Document - Lars Lih (short)

An examination of Grigory Zinoviev's review of Kautsky's 'Path to Power.' Contrary to interpretations placing him as a supporter of the Mensheviks or stalwart of the SPD 'center', the Kautsky of 1909 was widely understood as a supporter of the Bolsheviks in their struggle against the RSDLP right-wing.

<https://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1087/a-perfectly-ordinary-highly-instructive-document/>

Theory and Practice: A Polemic Against Kautsky's Idea of the Mass Strike - Rosa Luxemburg (medium)

Luxemburg polemicized against Karl Kautsky's suppression of her writings in the context of the 1910 Prussian suffrage struggle calling for a democratic republic. Contrary to Kautsky's claims, Luxemburg explains that the democratic republic is a crucial Marxist demand.

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1910/theory-practice/index.htm>

German Social Democracy: 1905-1917 (especially Chapter Seven) - Carl E. Schorske (medium - long)

A classic work on the SPD between the two Russian Revolutions. Chapter seven focuses on the party's relation to the 1910 Prussian suffrage movement and the different approaches taken by Kautsky and Luxemburg.

<https://platypus1917.org/wp-content/uploads/German-Social-Democracy-1905%20%931917-The-Development-of-the-Great-Schism-by-Carl-E.-Schorske.pdf>

Rethinking War of Maneuver/War of Position - Daniel Egan (short)

An examination of the military writings of Engels, Lenin, and Trotsky through the lens of 'war of position' and 'war of maneuver.' Of particular interest is Engels' discussion of political strategy in the era of massive and powerful standing armies.

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1CHX8JZKpgD4N3QFAXMYM0Yij8qfW2J-R?usp=sharing>

Section VI

Anti-Coalitionism in Liberal Constitutional Regimes

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Summary

This week's reading begins with Lars Lih's essay "The Book That Didn't Bark," published in Issue 863 of *The Weekly Worker* in April 2011. In this piece, Lih prepares us to read Karl Kautsky by clarifying popular misconceptions, old and new, about his political ideology (and Lenin's — his lifelong mentee).

The first misconception, the one Kautsky himself sought to redress in this section's keynote text, was that he (as a Marxist) was opposed to the form of the republic. This was because the Orthodox Marxists of the Third Republic strongly opposed socialist participation in bourgeois government, such as with Alexandre Millerand's position in the cabinet of Waldeck-Rousseau. However, it was not so that he or other Marxists opposed the form of the republic — their fierce opposition was because they saw the Third Republic as a *bourgeois* republic rather than a *democratic* republic, **the true form of the dictatorship of the proletariat**. Friedrich Engels was Kautsky's mentor, and their analysis of the French Republic in this period was similar — Kautsky called it a "monarchy without a monarch," and Engels labeled it "nothing but the empire established in 1799 without the emperor" in his *Critique of the Erfurt Programme*. Kautsky was struggling against the "republican superstitions" that neutered class struggle and placated the working class, obscuring the necessity for revolution — more on these republican superstitions later! He polemicized in this way by first laying out the history of class struggle and the republican tradition in France, including the 1789 Revolution, the First Republic of 1792-1804, and the Paris Commune of 1871, all the way up to the Third Republic. He then offered an extensive critique of the bourgeois nature of the Third Republic from the point-of-view of proletarian socialism. We will come back to this text in the next section of this reading, but suffice it to say Kautsky was a *true believer* in the republic — that ideal *democratic republic* propounded by the Commune.

Lih next undertakes the second misconception, one that still plagues the Left of today's understanding of Kautsky — that Lenin's denunciation of Kautsky as a "renegade" could appropriately be understood as a denunciation of the whole of his political thought and work. Lih takes great care to disprove this misapprehension of Lenin's criticism. In fact, Lenin's criticism at this time was informed by Kautsky's own work in the pre-war period before 1914; Lih writes, "Lenin made no secret of this fact and indeed continually emphasized the merits of 'Kautsky, when he was a Marxist.'" His criticism in *State and Revolution* (his only criticism of that pre-war Kautsky) was particularly aimed at the fact that in certain works, Kautsky failed to discuss "the radical democratic institutions of the Paris Commune nor about the necessity of 'smashing the state.'" However, Lenin referred only to a select few works in noting this absence.

So, did Kautsky subscribe to the Commune ideal? Did he believe in the "smashing of the state"? Lih returns to Kautsky's *The Republic and Social Democracy in France* for answers — and reveals a resounding YES. As we stated in the previous paragraph, the Commune ideal was the guide for his criticism of the Third Republic. He wrote at length about capitalist states and their oscillation between "Russian bureaucratic corruption" and "American republican corruption." He diagnosed the French Republic as "uniting [both]" with its undemocratic constitution, prescribing the remedy of a "large, strictly disciplined proletarian party" and "the most comprehensive expansion of the proletarian party." To the question of "smashing the state," Lih shows that Kautsky made no secret of his position by praising the Jacobins' *Zerstörung* [destruction] of the church, bureaucracy and army, and defining the conquest of state power by the proletariat not as conquest of the means of rule but of their *Auflösung* [dissolution]. Kautsky was "constantly invoked as an almost unimpeachable authority during ideological disputes within Russian social democracy." For Lenin, Kautsky was a renegade because he failed to live up to the political standards for Marxists that he himself had set.

With Lih's introduction under our belt, we move into Kautsky's text: *The Republic and Social Democracy in France*. Chapter Two addresses the American republic, of particular interest to us as American democratic republican Marxists. France experienced intense class antagonisms due to highly developed means of class domination, the heteronomy of municipalities and departments, and the concentration of administration and of intellectual and political life within a huge capital. In the United States, however, class antagonisms were particularly weak for the absence of the characteristics in France, and because land (particularly crucial among the various means of labor) was readily available for any who demanded it (of course, this is no longer the case whatsoever). However, he noted the conditions of weakened class antagonisms were changing, citing SPA founder Morris Hillquit's description of the boom in workers' disputes against capital between 1887 and 1894.

In the American republic, Kautsky observed, the proletariat is suppressed by the ruling class "systematically corrupting the masses, by flooding the country with a commercially bribable [*käuflich*] press, by buying votes in elections, by winning over influential labor leaders" — a machinery of obscurantism he terms "**duping the workers.**" The result of this obfuscation, those *dupes errants*, if you will, was a working class that *believed* they held political power and had no need for socialism. Kautsky determines the task of American socialists to be tearing that Veil of Maya — in his own words, "to make the worker see reason, to point out that he is no less exploited and enslaved than his comrade living in a monarchy and that, just like in a monarchy, democracy has become a tool of class rule, and that democracy can only again become a tool to break this class rule when he has overcome its **republican superstitions**" (as mentioned earlier). In an analysis that feels it could've been made just yesterday, Kautsky observes, "As much as it would like to, the American bourgeoisie is unable to "obscure" class contradictions permanently ... the more zealously it attempts to tame the working class using the carrot, the more angrily it employs the stick when the carrot fails." Nearly 120 years after this was written, this machinery of systematic mendacity and violent repression is stronger and more powerful than ever.

In Chapter Five, "The Second Empire and the Paris Commune," Kautsky explicates the history of the emergence of Marxism and the ideal of the democratic republic. We already addressed this section in the second paragraph, so we will not redundantly restate its aims and theses in this summary. We will, however, pull out some crucial political and historiographical insights. While the constitution of 14 January 1852 restored universal suffrage to France in an attempt to reconcile the estranged working class, and even after the Empire ceded further concessions like expansion of parliament and liberalization of press and assembly, the proletariat remained **intransigent** in its opposition to the Empire and faith in the republic - American Marxists today must help the proletariat come to similar disenchantment with our imperial governance and undemocratic constitution, even with such concessions as the liberal Bill of Rights. In this section, Kautsky delineates **Marxism** as "the synthesis of all the viable seeds within the three tendencies of French socialism": the Proudhonists, the Blanquists, and the Bakuninists. Marxists knew the proletariat could only emancipate itself by organizing itself into a mass, independent, proletarian party, both politically and economically — not in secret, but in active struggle against the working class, which would nurture the moral and material preconditions which were necessary for their seizure of political power. They knew capital wouldn't offer them the means to build communism, but that it may offer concessions in the protection of labor-power and workers' protections. Marx's intervention in The First International was not just to organize his followers, but to unite all members in class struggle. He was successful for a time, but after the rise and fall of the Paris Commune, each other group would eventually go their own way, and came to resent the "intolerant" Marx for deigning to synthesize their ideas theoretically.

Later in this section, Kautsky advocates "eschewing any adventures in geopolitics," by describing how Napoleon III's empire engaged *Weltpolitik* primarily to massage the egos of the French bourgeoisie and to preoccupy the army on whom the Empire depended. Of course, these adventures inevitably led to the economic breakdown of the Empire, and later the imprisonment of Napoleon III by Germany, paving the way for the Third Republic. The National Guard had been expanded,

and as a result, the people had been armed. When the Empire collapsed, the bourgeoisie dreaded the Paris National Guard. Kautsky notes the proletariat's missed opportunity — despite the bourgeoisie's fears, the bourgeois republicans successfully formed a centrist government upon the ruins of that Empire. Paralyzed by the armed proletariat, class conflicts became hostile until a ceasefire was announced and a National Assembly elected by universal suffrage. The reactionaries won the majority and formed a coalition of the bourgeoisie and peasants against the proletarian minority. Kautsky's account of this result is as follows: "The reactionary composition of the assembly arose far more from the desire for peace than from monarchist sentiments ... [the] revolutionary proletariat terrified all of them." Reflecting on the following Civil War in France, Kautsky notes: "As bad as the theoretical fragmentation and ignorance of the Parisian proletariat was, it was not so much damaged by this as it was by its lack of a uniform organization ... partly [caused] by the absence of the right to association and assembly ... [rendering] proletarian mass struggle impossible." Regarding Louis Blanc's defection to the government of Versailles against the Commune, in an astute deterrent against fairweather friends, Kautsky observed: "Anybody who, coming over from the side of the bourgeoisie, does not possess the courage and abjuration to join the fighting proletariat against the bourgeoisie wholeheartedly and break all ties with it can eventually, notwithstanding his proletarian sympathies, all too easily be pushed onto the side of the proletariat's opponents at the decisive moment." Finally, we come to his great celebration of the political ideals of the Commune as mentioned above. In short, "Despite everything ... Paris had never been administered so well as during the Commune."

In Chapter Six, Kautsky takes on the Constitution of the Third Republic at greater length. Interesting to us here are the obvious parallels with our own Constitution and the anti-democratic regime it enshrines today. Kautsky condemns the constitution's permanent institutionalization of the presidency and notes how monarchist sentiment permitted even greater power to this office than had ever before been seen: In 1848, the president did not hold supreme military command and was only given a four-year term; in 1875 he was granted total control of the army and a seven-year term. The President was allotted ministers for the administration of his office whereas before it was his own responsibility. He enjoyed the power to adjourn the chamber according to his will and dissolve it with the Senate's approval. He was able to make individual decisions about most treaties without even informing the chamber or the country. Kautsky points out that this President was yet a monarchist — elected by universal suffrage, but not **universal, equal, and direct suffrage**. The Senate was similarly anti-democratic, for it was elected by electoral colleges that disenfranchised large cities such as Paris and bolstered "small, mainly reactionary rural communities." Furthermore, the number of state officials increased, with the positions granted to the friends and allies of those already in power — thereby increasing their ranks of allies who would stand with their regime and cementing their own power.

In Chapter Seven, Kautsky challenges the bourgeois republicans. He notes that they once contained a faction of Radicals who opposed the Senate and presidency for their anti-democratic nature; however, they left the military and bureaucracy unopposed — they were **opportunist**s who hoped to secure their own positions within the bureaucracy. They offered no political strategy to the masses for liberation from the bureaucracy's oppression other than to elect them — the better, more radical bureaucrats. They could rhetorically sell reforms and even radicalism to proletarian and petty-bourgeois voters without ever having to make good on those promises. Now, Kautsky reports, they don't bother even challenging the presidency nor the Senate — in fact, they even glorify them as necessary reinforcements for the republic.

Finally, in Chapter Eight, Kautsky once again reflects on the duping of the workers. He notes that the bourgeoisie likes to lead the charge against **clericalism** while fear-mongering over the danger to the republic that "class hatred" posed. He points out that the bourgeoisie has no genuine interest in dismantling the Church. They want to distract the proletariat from the more immediate source of material, spiritual, and intellectual oppression — the capitalist class and its corrupt constitutional regime. So long as the bourgeois liberals could ally with the proletariat against clericalism, they could stave off class conflict. For the bourgeois liberals, this illusion of battle could go on forever with no victory in sight. Furthermore,

Kautsky points out that the Church gains its strength from the faith of lower classes who hope desperately for salvation — even if not in this life, the idea that they could someday be *free of suffering* motivated clericalist sentiment among the working class. Only socialism could materialize this striving. Only belief in proletarian self-liberation could loosen religiosity's grip. In other words, putting anti-clericalism ahead of class struggle would be putting the *hors* before the *carte*. That isn't to say that Marxists should oppose anti-clericalist measures. However, they should not prioritize them before class organization and action. Primarily agitating against monarchism and clericalism while disregarding capitalism is one way the bourgeoisie uses the history of the **revolutionary tradition** to stifle the proletarian revolution.

Next, Kautsky once again identifies Marx's doctrine as borne out of three tendencies in international socialism: the proletarian class struggle of France, its theoretical justification from England, and its practical application in Germany. In this synthesis, Marx was able to move away from sentimentalism and moralism and instead toward a deep analysis of the mechanisms of capitalist production and the subjects produced out of this mode, "thereby transforming the socialist goal from a demand born out of a sense of injustice or mere proletarian disgust into an outcome of scientific research." Yes, as rightly iterated by Kautsky, Marx was the first proponent of truly **scientific socialism**. We will spare the details of the rest of the historiography in this chapter for the sake of brevity, but what's worth identifying is that two parties merged as the *Parti Socialiste de France* at the Ivry Congress in 1901 after the formation of the *Parti Ouvrier Français* by Guesde, "based on Marxism from the outset," and after the revitalization of the *Parti Socialiste Révolutionnaire* by Vaillant saw the Blanquists move closer to Marxism. However, alliances emerged again between the proletariat and the bourgeois republicans. Boulangism was the result, and with it, a split in the party that drove the opportunistic Possibilists into government. They prioritized localism and rejected party discipline for the sake of "freedom" while limiting their program to immediately achievable reforms. They held their own Congress separate from the Marxists.

Boulangism eventually faded, but this split set the ground for independent socialists such as Millerand. While the expansion of Marxism phased out anarchism with its **propaganda of the deed**, ministerial socialism (founded on the human rights of 1789) introduced a new kind of anti-parliamentarism (which always rears its head when the "merger of socialists and bourgeois democrats comes around"): *Generalstreiklerei*, or general-strike-ism, born out of disgust for parliamentary corruption and the trade-union movement. Kautsky affirms that while these impulses are understandable, and that strikes certainly have their place, the disavowal of parliamentary struggle and the decentralization of socialists outside other party apparatus is a great mistake. He finishes, "it is only when the French state is transformed along the lines of the constitution of the First Republic and the Commune that it can become that form of the republic, that form of government, for which the French proletariat has been working, fighting, and shedding blood for over one hundred and ten years."

We end with Ben Lewis' introduction to this work. We won't rehash what we've already gone over, but instead identify its unique or yet unnamed insights. First, we recognize that republican agitation cannot cease until the political demands of the Erfurt Programme have been realized and the conditions for the working class are ripe for their seizure of political power. Secondly, we will note the specific ideals Kautsky cites from *The Civil War in France* as the revolutionary features of the Commune: "the replacement of the standing army by a people's militia, universal suffrage, public servants working for an average worker's wage, the disestablishment of the Church and a secular state, the election of judges on short terms of service, and self-government in the localities."

Study Questions

*Independent Study questions are italicized

1. *What are Lenin's and Kautsky's positions on "smashing the state"?*

2. How do bourgeois republicans try to win over socialists to their cause? How is the specter of “clericalism” deployed? How does this relate to our present situation?
3. What does Kautsky mean by “republican superstitions” among the U.S. working class? Is this term useful today?
4. According to Kautsky, why do bourgeois republicans need to court and seek alliances with socialists? To what extent is this similar and/or different today?
5. *How does Kautsky analyze class collaboration and class independence?*
6. What is the role of propaganda criticizing bourgeois republicans?
7. *What are the core issues with the politics of anarchism and “general strike-ism”? How do these issues relate to the issues of “ministerial socialism”*

The Book That Didn't Bark

by Lars T Lih

Weekly Worker issue 863, April 2011

At the end of 1904, Karl Kautsky began a series of articles under the general title of *Republic and Social Democracy in France*. Kautsky's reflections on the proper Marxist attitude toward the republic arose out of a dispute among European socialists about the propriety of socialist participation in a bourgeois government, as exemplified by the case of Alexandre Millerand in France. Orthodox Marxists such as Kautsky opposed Millerand's presence in the French cabinet. Their criticism of the "bourgeois" Third Republic in France was so vehement that some German Social Democrats concluded that the Marxists were prejudiced against the republic as a political form. Perhaps the Marxists were politically indifferent – perhaps they even preferred a monarchy, such as Germany.

Kautsky took pen in hand to reject these suspicions and to clarify the somewhat complicated Marxist attitude toward the republic. The Marxists were far from politically indifferent, Kautsky asserted: they strongly supported the republic, and in particular saw the *democratic* republic as the only possible form of the dictatorship of the proletariat. But the bourgeois Third Republic was not particularly democratic – in fact, it was accurately described as a "monarchy without a monarch".³²⁰

One of the tasks of Social Democrats in countries like France and the USA was to struggle against "republican superstitions" that led workers to underestimate the fierceness of the class struggle even in a parliamentary republic. At the same time, French workers could and should look back with pride at certain episodes in the republican tradition: the First Republic (1792-1804) and the Paris Commune (1871).

To make his case, Kautsky first went through the history of the class struggle in France, starting from the 1789 revolution and going on to the Third Republic that had arisen from the smoking ruins of the Paris Commune in the 1870s. Then, in the second half of his series, he mounted a full-scale critique of the institutions and policies of the "bourgeois" Third Republic from the point of view of proletarian socialism. The resulting 90-page treatise made an impact at the time. In Russia, for example, a translation was issued shortly after the original German publication. In the early years of Soviet Russia, when works by Kautsky continued to be published in large editions, *Republic and Social Democracy in France* was again made available.

Today, Kautsky's treatise is forgotten except for brief discussions by Kautsky specialists, but there are good reasons to bring it back into circulation. Extended treatments by leading Marxists on strictly political questions are not so common that we can afford to neglect one of this calibre. Kautsky's Marxist approach to French revolutionary history and his analyses of French political institutions retain their value, both for content and method. Ben Lewis is therefore much to be commended for undertaking the task of rendering Kautsky's treatise into English. [...] The finished result, I am sure, will quickly be seen as the major Marxist statement on the republic as a political form.

There is one more reason why I find Kautsky's treatise to be a fascinating historical document: it was *not* cited by Lenin in *State and revolution* (1917). The rest of my introductory remarks will be devoted to explaining the significance of this absence.

³²⁰ Very similar points are made by Kautsky's mentor, Friedrich Engels, in his influential *Critique of the Erfurt programme* (1891). He writes: "If one thing is certain it is that our party and the working class can only come to power under the form of a democratic republic. This is even the specific form for the dictatorship of the proletariat, as the Great French Revolution has already shown." Further: "So, then, [we should support — LTL] a unified republic. But not in the sense of the present French republic, which is nothing but the empire established in 1799 without the emperor"

Lenin's Critique of Kautsky

Lenin had a life-long love/hate relationship with Kautsky. Most of us are familiar with the hate side – one that found expression after 1914 in Lenin's almost obsessive denunciations of Kautsky as a "renegade" who betrayed socialism. Current research is steadily revealing the other side of the relationship.

For Lenin, as for almost all Russian Social Democrats, Kautsky's writings were the gold standard of Marxist orthodoxy. All Russian Social Democrats constantly invoked Kautsky as an almost unimpeachable authority during ideological disputes within Russian Social Democracy. But the intensity of Lenin's relationship to Kautsky's writings goes way beyond this. Indeed, Kautsky was an ideological mentor for Lenin at all stages of his career, at least up to 1917. Paradoxically, even Lenin's programme in 1914-1917, when he was loudly denouncing Kautsky's current position, was explicitly based on Kautsky's pre-war writings. Lenin made no secret of this fact and indeed continually emphasised the merits of "Kautsky, when he was a Marxist": that is, before 1914.

Only once did Lenin make a public criticism of anything written by "Kautsky, when he was a Marxist". This criticism came in the concluding section of Lenin's *State and revolution*. Yet this section also shows Lenin's ambivalence about Kautsky in all its glory. The section opens with an effusive (and historically accurate) compliment to Kautsky's role as a mentor to Russian Social Democracy. Although Lenin goes on to attack Kautsky's *Social Revolution* (1902) and *Road to Power* (1909) for their "evasions" about the state, Lenin still cannot help remarking that the books contain "a great deal of valuable material" and reveal "the *high promise* of German Social Democracy before the war".

For the most part, Lenin's critique in *State and Revolution* is aimed not at what Kautsky said, but at what he did not say. Lenin's case is that Kautsky avoided any discussion of the state in certain influential works written specifically to refute "opportunism". In particular, Kautsky did not talk about the radical democratic institutions of the Paris Commune nor about the necessity of "smashing the state", although these topics formed a prominent part of the legacy of Marx and Engels.

Proving a negative – in this case, that Kautsky did not talk about certain topics – is always a difficult undertaking. Lenin wrote *State and revolution* in 1917 while in exile in Switzerland and after his return to Russia. He had neither access nor time to do a search of Kautsky's writings. He therefore entitled the relevant section of his critique 'Kautsky's polemics against the opportunists': that is, he restricted his case to a few major works. But this self-limitation is never noted, and most readers came away from *State and Revolution* with the idea that Kautsky explicitly repudiated the democratic ideals of the Commune and that he was opposed to any form of "smashing the state".

So the question arises: did Kautsky ever address these questions in other works, and, if so, what were his views? Trying to answer this question is what led me in the first place to dig up Kautsky's long-forgotten treatise on the French Republic. I am sure that Lenin read Kautsky's work back in 1904-05 when it was first published, although there are no specific references to it in his writings. Nevertheless, he seems to have forgotten about it when he wrote *State and Revolution* in 1917. What does Kautsky's text tell us about his attitudes toward the political institutions of the Paris Commune or about the need to "smash the state"?

The 'Commune Ideal'

In the excerpts translated on the following pages, we find Kautsky's account of the Second Republic (1848-50) and the Paris Commune (1871). At the end of this section, Kautsky writes: "to set out the political ideal of the Commune is not so easy, since various different tendencies clashed within it. But fundamentally all the practical demands and organisational efforts of the Commune arose from the same type of democratic republic that had already been established by the Great

Revolution [of 1789]." Kautsky then gives a page-and-a-half quotation from Marx's *Civil War in France*, in which Marx eulogises the political institutions of the Commune.

Among the specific points mentioned by Marx in this citation are suppression of the standing army, short terms for elected officials, local democratic control of the police, workmen's wages for bureaucrats, and decentralisation. Marx ends by saying: "While the merely repressive organs of the old governmental power were to be amputated, its legitimate functions were to be wrested from an authority usurping pre-eminence over society itself, and restored to the responsible agents of society." For Kautsky, these political institutions were the ideal democratic republic that "the Parisian proletariat created as a tool for its emancipation".

During for the rest of his discussion, Kautsky uses these features of the ideal democratic republic as a template for a critique of the institutions of the French Third Republic. In every way, he finds, the actual republic fell far short of the standard created by the Paris Commune. After an extensive discussion of the corruption and decadence of actually-existing "parliamentarianism", Kautsky concludes:

"Russian bureaucratic corruption or American republican corruption: these are the two extremes between which the life and being of all large capitalist states moves and must move. Only socialism can put an end to this by means of a [state] organisation such as the one the Paris Commune started to create: that is, by means of the most comprehensive expansion of self-government, the popular election of all officials and the subordination of all members of representative bodies to the control and discipline of the organised people. Already today, the best way to counter parliamentary corruption is through the formation of a large, strictly disciplined proletarian party ... Thanks to its basic constitution, today's French republic can enjoy all the advantages of uniting parliamentary with bureaucratic corruption."

Thus we must conclude that, contrary to the impression left by *State and Revolution*, Kautsky subscribed to the Commune ideal, presented it to his readers (including Russian readers), and used it as a foundation of a scathing critique of the existing "bourgeois republic" in France.

Before moving on, a conceptual clarification will be helpful. In 1917, Lenin called for a "soviet republic", but this political ideal should not be set in opposition to the democratic republic. Soviet-style democracy is an institutional form of the democratic republic. Whether or not it is the most expedient form is, of course, a matter of debate. Lenin contrasted soviet-style democracy to "bourgeois democracy" and to "bourgeois parliamentarianism", but he was certainly not rejecting the ideal of representative democracy.

Similarly, although Kautsky stoutly defended the "democratic republic" as a goal and defended representative democracy, he was explicitly not endorsing current republics and current parliaments. For obvious reasons, Kautsky does not use the vocabulary of "soviet democracy" in 1904. Nevertheless, Kautsky is calling for a radical democratisation of existing political institutions in all European countries, both monarchies and republics. We should not let conceptual sloppiness obscure the large overlap in the political ideals of Lenin and Kautsky, however significant the remaining differences.

'Smash the State'

Before embarking on the topic of 'smash the state', some preliminary clarification will again be helpful.

This resonant phrase has at least three principal meanings. Making these distinctions is not just a matter of logic-chopping. Each meaning represents a separate scenario of revolution, and these scenarios can be advocated by people with strongly conflicting agendas. There is no logical contradiction between advocating one or more of these scenarios and rejecting the rest. These possible meanings of 'smash the state' need to be clear in our minds before turning to the texts.

7. The anarchist scenario. According to the anarchists, the state is the *source* of all evil, and therefore the *first* duty of a socialist revolutionary was to raze all centralised authority structures, including democratic ones.

The democratisation scenario. If we *define* the state as a tool of class exploitation that sets one part of society above another, then full democratisation that overcomes the alienation between society and its decision-making organs is equivalent to smashing the state.

The ‘art of revolution’ scenario. One of the lessons drawn by Marx and Engels from the failed revolutions of 1848 was the necessity of preventing counterrevolutionary forces from using the repressive apparatus of the state to crush the revolution. Leaving these old structures intact was extremely dangerous. They needed to be smashed.

There is another important meaning of ‘smash the state’ that I call the “breakdown and reconstitution” scenario, but this meaning is irrelevant to our present discussion. The very brief descriptions of different scenarios given here are meant primarily to show that ‘smash the state’ can be understood in sharply distinct ways.

What was Lenin’s position on these various scenarios as of 1917? If we put *State and Revolution* alongside everything else Lenin was saying in 1917 (a necessary procedure not always followed), we find that Lenin energetically rejected the anarchist scenario about the immediate destruction of the state. One writer on Lenin, Neil Harding, equates ‘smash the state’ with anarchism and says that, in 1917, Lenin inscribed the war cry of the anarchist icon, Mikhail Bakunin, on his banner. This assertion is utterly misleading. Rather, when Lenin talked about ‘smashing the state’, he had in mind *both* of the other two scenarios: the democratisation and the ‘art of revolution’ scenarios - although he did not always take sufficient care to separate these two meanings.

We turn now to Kautsky. No-one will dispute that Kautsky rejected the anarchist scenario. In previous sections, we have seen that he also strongly advocated a programme of a wide-ranging and radical democratisation of existing political structures. What about the ‘art of revolution’ scenario about breaking up the state repressive apparatus? Kautsky’s 1904 article provides documentation of his views on this issue as well.

Kautsky argues that the "petty bourgeois" Jacobins of the French Revolution were able to accomplish as much as they did because they "destroyed [*zerstört*] the means of rule of the ruling classes": namely, the church, the bureaucracy and the army. He then draws the lesson for later proletarian revolutionaries:

"The proletariat, as well as the petty bourgeoisie, will never be able to rule the state through these means of rule. This is not only because the officer corps, the top of the bureaucracy and the church have always been recruited from the upper classes and tied to them with the most intimate links, but also because the very nature of these bodies as means of rule includes a striving to raise themselves above the mass of the people in order to rule them, instead of serving them. They will always be for the most part anti-democratic and aristocratic ..."

"The conquest of state power by the proletariat, therefore, does not simply mean the conquest of [the existing] ministries, which then, without further ado, use these previous means of rule – an established state church, the bureaucracy and the officer corps – in a socialist sense. Rather, it means the dissolution [*Auflösung*] of these means of rule."

The two key words in Kautsky's discussion are *zerstört* and *Auflösung*. My German-English dictionary defines *zerstören* as "wreck, ruin, destroy" and *Auflösung* as "dissolving, disappearance, dispersal, disbandment". So, while Kautsky may not have used the word 'smash', his feelings about these bourgeois "means of rule" are hardly ambiguous.

Once we are aware of the positions staked out by Kautsky in his 1904 treatise on class struggles and the French republic, Lenin's 1917 critique of "Kautsky, when he was a Marxist" loses a good deal of its sting. The political positions of the two men overlapped to a much greater extent than any reader of *State and Revolution* would expect. No doubt very substantive differences remain. But, as Great Britain celebrates (if that's the word) a "royal wedding", perhaps we should focus on the political programme *common* to the Marxist left during the early years of the previous century: a republic with radically democratic institutions of the Commune type.

The Republic and Social Democracy in France, Chapter 2: The American Republic

Karl Kautsky (1905)

One can explain our matter of dispute in two ways. One way is to investigate abstractly the essence of the republic, the republic of the bourgeoisie and of the proletariat and its class contradictions – a very cumbersome path, which is all the more tiring for not leading through very well-known territory. For our practical purposes it is certainly shorter and less fatiguing to investigate not an abstract republic, but a concrete one, the one around which the whole controversy revolves – the French.

However, simply in order to highlight that we are not dealing with a specifically French issue, but a problem particular to each and every bourgeois republic, let us quickly deal with the American republic, which represents a very different type to that of the French. In the French republic we see the extensive centralisation of administration as well as intellectual and political life in a huge capital, the greatest possible limits on the autonomy of the municipalities and departments and all the means of class domination – military, police and state church – highly developed. All of these are absent in the United States. There, class antagonisms have been particularly weak for a very long time.

The basis of capitalist exploitation is formed by separation of the mass of the population from their means of labour, especially from the most important of these means – land. But for a long time in the US there was more than enough land for all who demanded it. Thus not only could anybody become an independent farmer: the internal market grew too, as did the demand for intellectuals – lawyers, administrators, etc. The most brilliant careers were opened up to anybody who was sufficiently energetic and intelligent, even those who began without means. Especially to workers who were best placed to take advantage, the position of a wage worker simply appeared to be a transitional phase. This prevented the workers from obtaining proletarian class-consciousness just as much as it held the capitalists back from harassing the proletariat – or at least its most militant layers – and challenging it to fight. The republic did not seem to allow class struggle and socialism to develop.

But, as is well known, this has changed enormously in recent decades. As Hillquit puts it: ‘In 1870 strikes and lockouts were hardly known in America; between 1887 and 1894 the country witnessed 14,000 disputes between capital and labour, in which about four million working men participated’.³²¹ But, the more the American proletariat grows and class contradictions increase, the more the bourgeoisie is anxious to use all means the republic offers it to suppress the proletariat. It engages in the much-vaunted ‘duping the workers’ on the most tremendous scale – not through social reforms (those which have been passed recently are not worth talking about), but by systematically corrupting the masses, by flooding the country with a commercially bribable [käuflich] press, by buying votes in elections, by winning over influential labour leaders.

Today, in every country, they are trying these methods to confuse and corrupt the workers. Even absolutist Russia saw the attempts of the police officer, Zubatov,³²² to create a workers’ movement kept on a lead by the police. But nowhere are

³²¹ Morris Hillquit (1869–1933) was a founder member of the Socialist Party of America. The English text quoted here is taken from Hillquit 1903.

³²² Sergei Vasilyevich Zubatov (1864–1917) was a Tsarist police administrator. Having been active in the Russian workers’ movement in his early years, he became disillusioned with the revolutionary cause and – convinced that repression alone could not thwart the increasing threat posed by the labour movement – he established pro-government unions between 1901 and 1903. He has thus become associated with ‘police socialism’. A convinced monarchist, he committed suicide when hearing of Tsar Nicholas II’s abdication in March 1917.

these experiments carried out on such a scale and with such tenacity as in the republic, precisely because of the power of the ballot paper, the press and the trade unions. But these efforts are nowhere more successful than in the republic.

The traditions of the past live on in the American worker, traditions where each one of them carried a marshal's baton in his satchel. The American worker still believes that thanks to his democracy he is better off than workers living under monarchies, and that he has no need of socialism, a mere product of European despotism. He still believes that in democracy there are no classes and no class rule, because the whole people hold political power. The main task of our American comrades today is to destroy this republican superstition, to make the worker see reason, to point out that he is no less exploited and enslaved than his comrade living in a monarchy and that, just like in a monarchy, democracy has become a tool of class rule, that democracy can only again become a tool to break this class rule when he has overcome its republican superstitions.

That is what our American comrades' agitation consists of today – and they would laugh mockingly at anybody who wanted to make them believe that the republican bourgeoisie's 'duping the workers' brought the proletariat any benefits

In their agitation against the republican 'duping of the workers', the American socialists are strongly supported by the fact that in using this means to hold down the proletariat, the American bourgeoisie does not stand still. As much as it would like to, the American bourgeoisie is unable to 'obscure' class contradictions permanently: the veil it attempts to throw over them tears again and again, and, the more zealously it attempts to tame the working class using the carrot, the more angrily it employs the stick when the carrot fails. One has only to remember what happened in Colorado³²³ to show how brutally the bourgeoisie uses all the instruments of power made available by the republic if it is necessary to crush recalcitrant workers.

In America, therefore, republican superstitions have very little resonance in party circles. In France, however, the matter is not so simple.

³²³ This refers to the miners' strikes of 1903–4 in the Cripple Creek District. The all-out walkout turned into what are now known as the 'Colorado labour wars'. The anti-union Republican governor, J.H. Peabody, declared martial law, with the state militia crushing organised labour and sending many of its leaders into exile.

The Republic and Social Democracy in France, Chapter 5: The Second Empire and the Paris Commune

One of the first acts of the Empire was to try to reconcile the working class, which the bourgeois republic had estranged. Under Louis Philippe,³²⁴ the number of voters for the second chamber had been very limited – there were only 300,000 in total. The revolution suddenly caused this to swell to around nine million. The electoral law of 31 May 1850 then reduced it by three million again. The constitution of 14 January 1852 restored universal suffrage, which has existed to this day in France.

But the proletariat did not allow itself to be bought off by this. Its opposition to the Empire remained intransigent. It remained faithful to the republic, even when the empire made further political concessions in addition to universal suffrage from 1860 on, expanding the parliament's powers and dealing with the press, clubs and meetings in a more liberal fashion.

The bourgeoisie came to terms with the Empire more easily, even though this meant restricting the parliament, which was condemned to utter impotence. This hit its chosen means of rule, the political institution which most closely corresponds to bourgeois class interests, the hardest. But the empire brought about protection of property from communism, as well as an economic boom. And this is a spell which the bourgeoisie has never been able to resist.

The decades following the February Revolution³²⁵ were the golden age of industrial capitalism in England and France. As Gladstone³²⁶ put it, it was the period of the ‘intoxicating augmentation of wealth and power’. The Empire had not created this, but it profited from it and won the bourgeoisie’s recognition. But, just like in England, in France this ‘intoxicating augmentation of wealth and power’ was almost entirely restricted to the capitalist class (including the large estates). The working classes’ share of this was small, imperceptible; for wide layers of working people this development even expressed itself in a direct depression of their living standards, so that their opposition to the capitalist class grew and grew, as did their opposition to the ruling regime.

But, if the days after the February Revolution had been particularly favourable to the tendencies of Louis Blanc, now Proudhonism came to the fore. Louis Blanc’s illusions had been drowned in the blood of June for a long time to come. But this defeat had also paralysed the power to engage in a political rebellion along the lines of Blanqui. The bulk of the socialist working class despaired of politics, believed political activity to be as futile as it was corrupting, and predominantly turned to the advancement of peaceful economic organisations.

When the International³²⁷ emerged in the middle of the 1860s, the Proudhonists were also predominant in its French section. But, the more it grew in strength, the more it was persecuted; the more the opposition against the empire grew, the

³²⁴ Louis Philippe I (1773–1850) was King from 1830 to 1848. He spent 21 years in exile following the French Revolution, mainly in the USA. He was proclaimed King after Charles X was forced to abdicate. When, in 1848, he was forced to abdicate the throne, he again went into exile – this time to England.

³²⁵ This refers to the revolution of February 1848 in France, which ended the Orléans monarchy and created the French Second Republic.

³²⁶ William Ewart Gladstone (1809–98) was a British Liberal who served as prime minister four times. As chancellor of the exchequer in 1860, he presided over the Cobden-Chevalier treaty, which reduced trade tariffs between France and Britain.

³²⁷ The International Workingmen’s Association, or First International, was established in 1864 and disbanded in 1876. Seeing that its creation represented a real step forward for the working-class movement, Marx and Engels threw their weight into the organisation and its work. However, they did not actually set up the organisation, but were invited to join. According to August Nimtz, ‘Marx had turned down apparently similar invitations’ in the preceding years. What made this one different, and made it worth entering despite the dubious politics of many who were involved, was that it con-

more the French section of the International went from the society of peaceful social studies and experiments it initially was to a fighting organisation. With this, it increasingly lost its original Proudhonist character. From 1868 other elements arose alongside the Proudhonists: Blanquists and Bakuninists. Bakunin, who had escaped from Siberian exile in 1860, exaggerated both Proudhon's distrust of the state and the Blanquists' putschism, uniting these two extremes into a mixture very much to the taste of the declassed intellectuals in the Romance countries.

Besides these, however, a new tendency began to emerge in the International: Marxism, which in this context can be viewed as the synthesis of all the viable seeds contained within the three tendencies of French socialism. Like Blanquism, it recognised the necessity of conquering political power as an indispensable precondition for the emancipation of the proletariat. But Marxism was clear that the methods of 1793 were not suitable for this, that the proletariat could no longer be victorious by organising a small number of conspirators, but only by organising itself in an independent political party of the majority of the people. But in addition it also understood that the seizure of state power was tied to a series of moral and material preconditions, which not only demanded the political organisation of the proletariat, but its economic organisation as well. This economic organisation should not develop behind the backs of the ruling powers, but in the struggle against them.

Marxism substituted the organisation of the economic struggle – the strike organisation, the *union* – for the peaceful economic organisations of petty-bourgeois Proudhonism such as insurance institutions, exchange and credit banks, cooperatives, etc. At the same time, it also recognised the need to use the available political means to wrest as much as possible from the contemporary state, to carry out measures through the bourgeois state in favour of the workers. But unlike Louis Blanc it did not expect from the capitalist state the means to build a new, cooperative, anti-capitalist mode of production, but a means to protect labour-power, that commodity in whose largest possible use-value capitalist society is always most actively interested. It did not demand from the state that it subsidise workers' cooperatives, but that it concede a normal working day and similar measures of worker protection.

As I have already said, this reasoning signified a synthesis of the viable seeds of all three tendencies of French socialism. But it was too much at odds with the revolutionary traditions of France and the traditions of each and every one of these tendencies. It was only assimilated by a few members of the French section of the International. These few were, of course, its best members. Incidentally, Marxism went through a similar experience in the other sections of the International. In the International, Marx did not merely seek to organise the Marxists. Just as in theoretical terms his politics were themselves a synthesis of all the viable seeds of the various proletarian movements, he also wanted to fashion their practical application into an organisational synthesis of these movements in a united class struggle.

The International was open to all: Proudhonists and Blanquists, British trade unionists and German social democrats. Albeit with great effort and difficulty, Marx initially succeeded in keeping together these various elements. But eventually each of these tendencies again sought to go its own particular way to the exclusion of the others. In the name of freedom of expression and tolerance, they were up in arms against the 'intolerant' Karl Marx, the one who had wanted to unite them all. And so that each tendency could one-sidedly restrict itself to its own specialised hobby, they rebelled against the 'narrow and one-sided dogmatism' of Marxism, which had given voice to their various concerns within the framework of a comprehensive theory. This, however, only happened after the fall of the Paris Commune, which had risen on the ruins of the Empire.

tained real working-class forces. As Marx wrote to Engels, 'I knew on this occasion "people who really count" were appearing, both from London and from Paris' (Nimtz Jr. 2008, p. 179).

TABLE I State revenue (millions of francs)

Types of tax	1847	1870
A. Direct taxation	331.7	332.8
B. Transaction taxes (stamps, transportation, transfer duties)	253.8	446.5
C. Indirect taxation		
Customs	160.3	75.1
Salt	70.7	31.8
Beverages	102	243.4
Domestic sugar	19.3	111.8
Tobacco monopoly	112.5	246.8
Total	464.8	708.9
D. Remaining small taxes	48	54.8
Total (A-D)	1098.3	1543

The Third Republic

In his conflict with Germany a few years later, Napoleon III became the prisoner of victorious Germany after a few quick blows. With this, the Third French Republic was created. This time, this ripe fruit fell into the lap of the people without any exertion at all.

Today, due to the existence of modern mass armies on the one hand and the modern mass proletariat on the other, a capitalist state can no longer fend off a foreign invasion without arming the proletariat. Under the impression of the first military defeats, the bourgeois republicans had demanded an expansion of the National Guard in the chamber of the old Empire. In the Empire, the National Guard had become the meaningless gimmick of a few select bourgeois circles. All citizens of full age were to be armed – ‘as long as they have been living in the community for at least a year’. This nonetheless signified a manner of arming the people, which included numerous proletarians.

It was a most democratic measure when one comes to think that the new battalions of the National Guard were conceded the right to choose their officers and non-commissioned officers themselves. It was their fear of the victorious Germans, and even more so of the outraged Parisians, which on 11 August forced the reactionaries in the chamber to accept this proposal of the Radicals. But when the Empire collapsed and the people of France again became the master of their own destiny, the bourgeoisie was seized by an even greater fear: that of the battalions of the Paris National Guard.

Of course, in the hours of the Commune’s distress the proletariat did not think about its specific class interests. It unhesitatingly put up with the fact that the bourgeois republicans in the chamber simply formed a centrist government, without consulting any proletarian elements.³²⁸

³²⁸ (Kautsky’s footnote): Here I would like to confront a misconception surrounding a claim I made in the Amsterdam tactical commission. I explained that, among the predicaments in which a socialist may enter into a bourgeois government, I count ‘situations like, for example, that after 4 September 1870 in France, when demands came from socialists that a socialist like Blanqui or Deleseluze ought to join the government, which had the aim of organising national defence’. Jaurès thinks that if for the defence of the fatherland I am accepting something which I reject for the defence of the republic then I am countering his republican ministerialism with a far worse ‘nationalist ministerialism’. This same reasoning is repeated by Pressensé in his article on the Amsterdam Congress in the first issue of *La Vie Socialiste*. In fact, nowhere did I mention that the defence of the fatherland justified a socialist joining the government *per se*; this would mean that the Russo-Japanese war would eventually force our Russian comrades to support the tsar’s government. I spoke of ‘situations, like that after 4 September 1870 in France’. Back then it was not simply a matter of defending a country against foreign invasion, but also of defending a democratic republic against an enemy which wanted to maim and weaken it, to force the hated usurper onto it. It was a situation where all liberal-minded elements of the whole civilised world, including German Social Democracy but not German liberalism, took the side of France.

On the other hand, the bourgeois leaders of the new republic were from the outset paralysed in defending the country by their fear of the armed Parisian proletarians. The defence of Paris suffered just as much from the their attempt not to allow the National Guard to become too powerful, or even to achieve victory, as it did from the arms of the besiegers. This time around, the arming of the people, the *levée en masse* from which miracles were expected, had quite a different effect than it did in the Great Revolution.

In 1793, the great mass of the people consisted of peasants and petty bourgeois. The class contradiction between capitalists and proletarians was still weakly developed and pushed into the background by the great common opposition of all these classes to the aristocracy, which was allied with the foreign enemy. Back then, the arming of the people had signified the highest military power of the nation. In 1870, the class antagonism between capital and labour already dominated the whole of France. Here the capitalist class was presented with much less of a threat from the enemy without. Whereas this enemy would weaken it financially and restrict its domestic market, the enemy within threatened the foundations of its very existence.

The situation was thus quite different to that of 1793. The revival of the revolutionary traditions, the belief in being able to drive out the enemy abroad through the *levée en masse*, was therefore illusory. It was precisely the arming of the people which paralysed the country in defending its key point, Paris, by severing those defending it into two hostile camps.

Finally, on 29 January, there was a ceasefire which was to initiate peace. In order to conclude this peace, a National Assembly was elected by universal suffrage on 8 February. The elections resulted in a large majority for the reactionaries – 450 of the 750 deputies were monarchists. If the proletariat and the proletarian parties were the most determined advocates of the republic, and also in favour of continuing the war, then the peasant and the bourgeois alike cursed it. The former particularly did so because it ruined him. The latter did so because the war entailed the arming of the people and increasingly brought the armed proletariat to the fore. It cursed the republic, along with the war.

The reactionary composition of the assembly arose far more from the desire for peace and the hatred of revolutionary republican Paris than from monarchist sentiments. The clerical-royalist country squires were also welcomed by the liberal-bourgeois republicans as angels of peace. In equal measure, they were welcomed as opponents of Paris, whose revolutionary proletariat terrified all of them. When it came to weakening Paris and humiliating it, republicans and monarchists worked together in the national assembly. This is something which must be established in the face of the current attempts of the revisionists to shift the blame for the battle against the Paris Commune and for the battle of June in 1848 from the bourgeois republicans entirely onto the clerical monarchists.

It was not a member of the latter tendency who became head of the executive power of the republic. It was Thiers,³²⁹ who to this day is admired by the French bourgeois republicans as their great man. And at the time of the Commune, radical

If in 1899 the republic had been just as much at threat as in 1870, and if back then the government participation of socialists had increased the forces defending the republic, then in such a predicament – solely for the purposes of defending the republic and only for the duration of its defence – Millerand's participation in a bourgeois administration would have been justified. However, it has never been demonstrated that this was the case. And a bourgeois administration was a far cry from an administration of general Gallifet. The inclusion of this man in the government was an insult to the socialists. But rescuing the republic cannot be initiated by insulting its staunchest defenders.

³²⁹ Adolphe Thiers (1797–1877) was Prime Minister under King Louis-Philippe of France. Following the overthrow of the Second Empire, he came to prominence as the French leader who suppressed the Paris Commune. From 1871 to 1873 he held the presidential post of head of state.

republicans such as Jules Favre,³³⁰ Picard³³¹ and J. Simon³³² were members of this government. From the outset, the hatred against Paris dominated the national assembly. Its delegates were verbally abused. Paris itself was divested of its status as the capital of France by the order of 10 March, which made Versailles the seat of the government and the national assembly. This again had the petty bourgeoisie of Paris up in arms against the assembly, driving it into the ranks of the revolutionary elements.

Civil War

This contradiction became increasingly trenchant, ultimately breaking out into open civil war when Thiers consigned a few regiments to steal the Parisian National Guard's cannons in the early hours of 18 March – a move he hoped would initiate the disarmament of Paris. The attempt was detected and thwarted. But with this war was declared. From the defence of the Parisian proletariat's weapons ensued that violent war which both initiated and toppled the first modern proletarian regime. It was initially a struggle for the National Guard, in which the proletariat was victorious in Paris. On 26 March, it then gave itself its own government in the Commune.

Unfortunately, it was not a united one: within it, we again find the three directions of French socialism present. Alongside the Proudhonists were the Blanquists. Alongside these there was a third tendency, admittedly no longer a theoretically based one such as that represented by Louis Blanc, but a mere petty-bourgeois and proletarian mishmash – devoid of any particular programme, but boasting a good deal of passion and drive. Above all, this tendency was steeped in the traditions of the Great Revolution.

At this point, Louis Blanc himself was no longer to be found in Paris. Paris may have elected him as a deputy to the national assembly, but when the assembly declared war on Paris, he remained in Versailles and supported the government in its fight against the Commune. His illusory belief that the proletariat had to collaborate with the most advanced and noble parts of the bourgeoisie in order to liberate itself culminated in his collaboration with the most backward and brutal elements of the country squires in order to defeat it. In doing so his theoretical views and sympathies had hardly changed. But class divisions were stronger than his pious wishes. Anybody who, coming over from the side of the bourgeoisie, does not possess the courage and abjuration to join the fighting proletariat against the bourgeoisie wholeheartedly and break all ties with it can eventually, notwithstanding his proletarian sympathies, all too easily be pushed onto the side of the proletariat's opponents at the decisive moment.

As bad as the theoretical fragmentation and ignorance of the Parisian proletariat was, it was not so much damaged by this as it was by its lack of a uniform organisation. This was indeed partly caused by theoretical disjointedness and partly by the absence of the right to association and assembly, which had rendered the creation of any proletarian mass organisation impossible since 1794. We shall return to the latter point further on.

³³⁰ Jules Favre (1809–80) was Vice-President of the Government of National Defence under General Trochu and Minister of Foreign Affairs, tasked with negotiating peace with Germany.

³³¹ Ernest Picard (1821–77) held the portfolio of finance in the Government of National Defence. In January 1871 he accompanied Jules Favre to Versailles to negotiate the capitulation of the Paris Commune, and in the next month he became minister of the interior in Adolphe Thiers's cabinet.

³³² Jules François Simon (1814–96) was Education Minister in the government of Thiers. He became French president in 1876.

Proletarian Rule

However, notwithstanding its theoretical ignorance and organisational fragmentation, the Parisian proletariat achieved amazing things in the organisation of economic and social life. It came upon one of the most difficult situations: the misery of the siege which had left Paris completely exposed followed the mismanagement and bankruptcy of the Empire. Circumstances forced on the proletariat the administration of this enormous, completely ruined area without any preparation at all. During a war, and in the face of the betrayal of the previous administration, it had to build up a new administration with new forces in an instant. Despite everything, it was most successful in this task. Paris had never been administered as well as during the Commune.

We may hold up this example to those faint-hearted in our ranks, who fear nothing more than our victory, and consider it their main task to convince the world that for a long time to come the conquest of political power by our party will necessarily mean chaos and the bankruptcy of our party. If a generation ago the proletariat of Paris – completely undeveloped and operating under the most trying circumstances – proved up to its social tasks, then today we may look forward to our victory with the most joyous expectation.

Where the Commune utterly failed, however, was in military affairs and politics. In these matters, it completely lost its way. While it could doubtless boast some serious, capable men in these areas too, their effectiveness was more than paralysed by vain dandies, bawlers and do-nothings who stayed away from organisational and administrative work, preferring those aspects of work where one could feign greatness with sabre-rattling and rhetoric. Above all, however, it was here in particular that the disjointed character of the Commune had the most severe consequences.

Whatever the individual socialists' theoretical quirks may have been, when they were faced with the practical work of socio-political organisation, their instincts led them to unite quickly around what was necessary and work out what the most indispensable tasks were, even if this ran contrary to their outdated theories.

Things were different when it came to the *military* and *political* struggle against the enemy. It became apparent that the modern mode of production and its elemental [*urwüchsig*] social struggles might by themselves develop the proletariat's capacity for social and political organisation, but not the higher art of war and high politics. We can easily appreciate the absence of the former.

On the other hand, political education can actually be more easily accessed by the proletariat than military training. But political education was also lacking among the Parisian workers in 1871. Such education requires knowledge not only of one's own needs and strengths, but also those of the enemy. But this can only be attained by detailed study or extensive political practice. The proletarians of 1871 lacked both. Extensive participation in parliamentary work provides the best school for the political struggle against the bourgeoisie, but neither the Proudhonists nor Blanquists had participated in the parliamentary struggle, and the petty-bourgeois radical 'sentimental socialists' *à la Rochefort*³³³ were generally incapable of learning anything politically.

The little bit of political insight which all of these tendencies were able to develop was obscured by the traditions of the Great Revolution. They were still guided by these traditions and failed to realise that the situation had completely changed.

Rapid, uniform and consistent action was needed if Paris were to be victorious against the forces of the whole of France, deployed by the central government of Versailles – or rather, if Paris were to paralyse this government and win so many of the country's forces over to its side that it could attain a settlement securing the democratic republic and the

³³³ Victor Henri Rochefort (1830–1913) was a republican journalist and politician.

proletariat's political and military ability to put up a fight. But this rapid and uniform action was impossible. For Paris had not sought the war: rather it was surprised by it. And there was no single political organisation with specific goals which could have led the Commune politically and militarily.

Manifold organisations whirled around – each with different goals and different tactics. They took the political and military leadership of the Commune in a different direction with each day that passed. One day would see an aggressive stance. The next would see this aggression countered with peaceful mediation. The roar of cannons the day after would then undermine this newly initiated mediation before it had brought any results.

Whereas the proletariat did not quite know what to expect from the bourgeoisie and how it could best deal with it, the government was determined from the outset to suppress and decimate the armed proletariat at all costs. And in this endeavour it met with the unanimous approval of the National Assembly – including its far left. Even though the proletariat's capability for social organisation and administration manifested itself most brilliantly, the politically disjointed Commune succumbed to this unity and confidence of bourgeois politics and warfare.

Since then, the supremacy of bourgeois politics has come to an end. Three decades of parliamentary struggles have sufficiently acquainted the proletariat with bourgeois politics. The military superiority of modern rulers, on the other hand, only lasts as long as the army remains its submissive tool. With an unreliable army, even the greatest general cannot be victorious.

To set out the political ideal of the Commune is not so easy, since various different tendencies clashed within it. But fundamentally all the practical demands and organisational efforts of the Commune arose from the same type of democratic republic that had already been established by the Great Revolution.

Marx on the Commune

There is no better way for me to describe the constitution initiated by the Commune than by repeating Marx's classical description in his declaration on the Civil War in France. He says:

Paris could resist only because, in consequence of the siege, it had got rid of the army, and replaced it by a National Guard, the bulk of which consisted of working men. This fact was now to be transformed into an institution. The first decree of the Commune, therefore, was the suppression of the standing army, and the substitution for it of the armed people. The Commune was formed of the municipal councillors, chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of the town, responsible and revocable at short terms. The majority of its members were naturally working men, or acknowledged representatives of the working class. The Commune was to be a working, not a parliamentary, body – executive and legislative at the same time. Instead of continuing to be the agent of the central government, the police was at once stripped of its political attributes, and turned into the responsible, and at all times revocable, agent of the Commune.

So were the officials of all other branches of the administration. From the members of the Commune downwards, public service had to be done at a workman's wage.³³⁴ The acquired interests and the representation allowances of the high dignitaries of state disappeared, along with the dignitaries themselves. Public functions ceased to be the private property of the tools of the central government. Not only municipal administration, but the whole initiative hitherto exercised by the state was laid into the hands of the Commune.

Having once got rid of the standing army and the police – the physical-force elements of the old government – the Commune was anxious to break the spiritual force of repression, the 'parson-power', by the disestablishment and disendowment of all churches as proprietary bodies. The priests were sent back to the recesses of private life, there to feed upon the alms of the faithful in imitation of their predecessors, the apostles. The whole of

³³⁴ (Kautsky's footnote): 'The biggest salary was 6,000 francs'.

the educational institutions were opened to the people gratuitously, and at the same time cleared of all interference of church and state.

Thus, not only was education made accessible to all, but science itself freed from the fetters which class prejudice and governmental force had imposed upon it. The judicial functionaries were to be divested of that sham independence which had but served to mask their abject subservience to all succeeding governments, to which, in turn, they had taken, and broken, the oaths of allegiance. Like the rest of public servants, magistrates and judges were to be elective, responsible, and revocable.

The Paris Commune was, of course, to serve as a model to all the great industrial centres of France. The communal regime once established in Paris and the secondary centres, the old, centralised government would in the provinces too have to give way to the self-government of the producers. In a rough sketch of national organisation, which the Commune had no time to develop, it states clearly that the Commune was to be the political form of even the smallest country hamlet, and that in the rural districts the standing army was to be replaced by a national militia, with an extremely short term of service. The rural communities of every district were to administer their common affairs by an assembly of delegates in the central town, and these district assemblies were again to send deputies to the national delegation in Paris, each delegate to be at any time revocable and bound by the mandat imperatif (formal instructions) of his constituents. The few but important functions which would still remain for a central government were not to be suppressed, as has been intentionally misstated, but were to be discharged by communal and thereafter responsible agents.

The unity of the nation was not to be broken, but, on the contrary, to be organised by a communal constitution, and to become a reality by the destruction of the state power which claimed to be the embodiment of that unity, independent of, and superior to, the nation itself, from which it was but a parasitic excrescence. While the merely repressive organs of the old governmental power were to be amputated, its legitimate functions were to be wrested from an authority usurping pre-eminence over society itself, and restored to the responsible agents of society.³³⁵

Thus the ideal of the democratic republic was created, which the Parisian proletariat of 1871 would seek to form into an instrument of its emancipation.

³³⁵ Marx 1871.

The Republic and Social Democracy in France, Chapter 6: The Constitution of the Third Republic

After the ‘bloody week’ of May 1871, it seemed as if things were going to follow the same course that they did after 9 Thermidor in 1795 and in 1848 after the battle of June. After the proletariat had been butchered, the ground was once again cleared for the monarchy.

If this time around the monarchy was not re-established, this was above all down to the pretenders to the throne. If two pretenders fight over the throne, the idea of the monarchy suffers tremendously. Even the fight for the regency of Schaumburg-Lippe in such a piously monarchist nursery as Germany has shown us that. How very different the effects the three pretenders tussling over the throne had to be on a country such as France, which was so accustomed to its lack of respect for the monarchy. But when the Orléans and the Bourbons finally arrived at what was at least a temporary agreement, with the former renouncing its entitlement in favour of the Count of Chambord,³³⁶ it turned out that Chambord was an impotent idiot. While a purple-born prince may possess every possible mental and physical deficiency and still be able to wear the crown, somebody who wishes to *conquer* the throne must possess at least the grout and cockiness of a lucky adventurer, otherwise he will not be able to be imposed on the country, not even by a monarchist parliament.

Thus, in the absence of a pretender to the throne who was more or less reputable and acceptable to all monarchist elements, the national assembly had to forego the pleasure of the monarchy. Yet if it was not able to produce this delectable good for real, then in its stead it placed a surrogate, which yielded little to the real thing. In 1848, the German ‘small staters’³³⁷ were mocked for wanting a republic with the Grand Duke at its head. The squires of the ‘untraceable chamber’ recreated the Empire with a president of the republic at its head.

The First Republic was wary of placing an individual at the head of the state. Even the Second Republic only felt the need to consolidate all executive power in a single pair of hands after the battle of June. From the outset, however, the National Assembly of the Third Republic believed that it could not do without what S. Brie describes as a ‘unitarily centralised executive authority which was suited for energetic action’.³³⁸ Obviously, this was to allow for more vigorous suppression of the proletariat. Immediately after the assembly met in February 1871, it elected Thiers ‘head of the executive power’. Then the constitution of 1875 not only made the institution of the presidency a permanent one. In determining the powers of the President, it went far beyond those accepted by the reactionary chamber of 1843.

In the constitution of 4 November 1848, the President was elected for four years. Now the President’s term of office was seven years. In 1848, he was refused supreme command over the army. In 1875, he was granted it. In the Second Republic, the President of the National Assembly was responsible for administering his office. He no longer is – now his ministers are responsible for it. In 1848, the chamber was permanent and could not be adjourned or dissolved. Today, he can adjourn the chamber as he sees fit, and can dissolve it with the approval of the Senate. In 1848, all treaties required the approval of the National Assembly. Today, with certain exceptions such as trade agreements, the President can conclude treaties of which he only needs to inform the chamber when ‘the interests and security of the state permit’. He may, there-

³³⁶ Henri of Artois, Count of Chambord (1820–83) was the disputed monarch of France from 2– 9 August 1830 as Henry V, although this was never officially proclaimed as such. Afterwards, he was the legitimist pretender to the French throne from 1844–83.

³³⁷ Proponents of German unification on the basis of all German-speaking statelets but to the exclusion of Austria. This solution was mainly put forward by the increasingly powerful King- dom of Prussia.

³³⁸ Brie 1893, p. 23.

fore, conclude alliances with other countries which pledge the military support of his country without the country having to interfere in such decisions, or without even learning more precise details. Note the famous alliance with Russia, under which France can be rushed into a devastating war at any moment. This alliance was concluded without any questions being asked and without the population being informed of the content of this alliance. Only recently did the Paris correspondent of the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*³³⁹ report on the treaty between France and Spain over Morocco:

As if mocking them, the minister merely answered the respective questions of the oppositional deputies Denis Cochin and Charles Benoist by literally repeating the sibylline formulations of the Franco-Spanish declaration which had already been made public. However, at least in reactionary Spain the party leader has been made aware of the treaty's content. But there is more. The British government is aware of the treaty's content. In France, however, the representatives of the people are only allowed to find out about it after fifteen years – along with the rest of the world.

And they call this sovereignty of the people! Like a monarch, the President appoints all civil servants. He has a civil list of 120,000 francs, a palace and a royal court. Ultimately, he is the grand master of an order, meaning that even this monarchist growth is lacking in the Third Republic. Founded by Napoleon in order that the vanity of his big men would become a pillar of his personal regime, the Order of the Legion of Honour³⁴⁰ has blossomed in the Third Republic in a way which nobody could have imagined. It also flourished under the Socialist Minister of Commerce,³⁴¹ who was able to reward the services to the fatherland of the particularly successful capitalist exploiters for slowly but surely ‘preparing’ socialism and ‘undermining’ capitalism. For all that, the order is an expensive business, because it pays its members’ pensions. Annually it costs over 16 million. A nice little republican slush fund!

Finally, according to the law of 22 July 1881, defaming the President will be punished more strictly than defaming an ordinary mortal. The President is thus considered a majesty exalted over and above his fellow citizens. The pro-monarchist professor Oncken³⁴² is quite right when he satisfactorily notes that ‘the President of the new republic held the very healthy position occupied by every territorial Prince in every country with a constitution, only that he was elected and stepped down from office himself after seven years’.³⁴³

We see that the monarchists are quite content with the monarchist position of the President of the republic. The President is elected. That is the entire difference between him and a constitutional monarch like that of Belgium or Italy. But is he not elected by universal suffrage? Indeed he is, but not by equal and direct suffrage. In 1848, the President was elected by the population through universal, equal and direct suffrage. According to the constitution of 1875, he is elected by the National Assembly, which consists of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate.

The Senate is the second anti-democratic institution with which the Constitution of 1875 enriched the Republic. As reactionary as it was, the National Assembly did not dare to touch universal and equal suffrage to the Chamber of Deputies.

³³⁹ The *Leipziger Volkszeitung* was a social-democratic daily newspaper which first appeared in 1894 and which was distributed for free. The newspaper became closely associated with the radical left of the SPD, with figures such as Franz Mehring, Rosa Luxemburg and – before his shift to the extreme right of the party – Paul Lisch working for its editorial board. In 1917 the publication was handed over to the Independent Social Democrats. The publication continued to exist in the German Democratic Republic and has continued through to this day. It is now partly owned by the infamous Springer publishing house.

³⁴⁰ The highest French military and civil order, which was established in 1802 by Napoleon Bonaparte.

³⁴¹ A reference to Alexandre Millerand.

³⁴² Wilhelm Oncken (1838–1905) was a National Liberal historian.

³⁴³ Oncken 1890–2, p. 807.

In the two decades of the Empire, it had settled too deeply in the population. The republic could no longer retreat behind the Empire. This was even more the case when, at the same time, the new German Empire made universal suffrage the basis of the Empire.

But just as the German Empire maintained the Reichstag, elected by universal, equal and direct suffrage, as rear cover for the *Landtag* parliaments, which were for the most part elected by universal but unequal and indirect suffrage, the constitution of 1875 created the Senate for the very same purpose. This institution, unknown to both the First and Second Republics, was borrowed from the monarchy.

Just like the Chamber of Deputies, it is based on universal suffrage, yet it is elected by electoral colleges, not directly by voters. Each *département* chooses a certain number of senators. Even the smallest *département* elects at least 2, the Northern *département* 8 and the Seine *département* 10. This distribution alone hinders the representation of the industrial, revolutionary *départements* and favours that of the agrarian and reactionary ones. For instance, the *département* of Hautes Alpes had 109,510 inhabitants in 1901. Here there was a senator for every 54,755 residents. In the Northern *département* on the other hand, there were 1,866,994 residents, or 1 senator for every 233,374 inhabitants. Finally, the Seine *département* of 3,669,930 inhabitants only had 1 Senate representative for every 3,669,993 inhabitants. Thus the Parisians only have one-sixth of the franchise of those living in the Hautes Alpes.

This is indeed the beauty of dividing up constituency boundaries, a beauty which also embellishes the franchise to the German Reichstag. On top of this, there is the composition of the electoral college in each and every department which elects the senators. It is composed of the *département*'s deputies, its general councils and district councils and ultimately of the delegates from the district councils. The latter are particularly of note here. According to the constitution of 1875, every council, however small or large, had the right to elect a delegate to the electoral college. The law of 9 December 1884 staggered the number of delegates roughly according to the size of the districts, but still in a very inadequate fashion. As the following table shows, today too, the small, mainly reactionary rural communities are enormously privileged to the detriment of the large cities. The number of delegates sent to the electoral college as Senate electors from each district is as follows:

Population of the district	Delegates
Up to 500 inhabitants	
From 501 to 1500	1
From 1501 to 2000	2
From 2001 to 2500	3
From 2501 to 3000	6
From 3001 to 3500	9
From 3501 to 10,000	12
From 30,001 to 40,000	15
From 40,001 to 50,000	18
From 50,001 to 60,000	21
Over 60,000	24
Paris	30

We see how disadvantaged the large cities of over 60,000 inhabitants are – Paris in particular. In 1901, 137 districts were on record as having fewer than 50 inhabitants, and 10,567 districts with 50 to 300 inhabitants. Each of these 1074 districts sends somebody to elect the Senate. Paris and its 2,700,000 inhabitants, however, only send 30 – 1 per 90,000 inhabitants. This six-fold reduction of Paris's representation *vis-à-vis* the smallest departments is combined with a reduction of between 300 and 1,800 times *vis-à-vis* the smallest districts, which make up a third of all of France. And both the former

and latter injustices increase to the extent that the population of Paris and the industrial centres grows and the flat land becomes depopulated.

Between 1881 and 1901, the number of districts with fewer than 50 inhabitants increased from 67 to 137. The number of districts with between 50 and 300 inhabitants has increased from 6,771 to 10,567. At the same time, Paris grew from a population of 2,239,928 to 2,714,068 inhabitants. These figures alone show what the rhetoric about the role of universal and equal suffrage in the French Republic is all about. The President is not only chosen by the Chamber, but also by the Senate, which elect him in a joint session, united in the National Assembly. But chosen by unequal suffrage, the President appoints the ministers, and these are just as dependent on the Senate as they are on the Chamber.

A Socialist minister in France is now a minister by the grace of the Senate, an entity which must be amongst the most conservative in the world and which can boast of being one of the few entities in Europe elected by universal suffrage that is just as free of social democrats as the Prussian and Saxon *Landtag* state parliaments are. Just as it had distanced itself from a legislative body, the constitution of 1875 also distanced itself from the example of the First Republic and the Paris Commune in matters of organising public administration, completely following in the footsteps of the Empire. Next to nothing was changed in terms of the rule of the centralised bureaucracy. The prefect continued to lord it over the *département*. Without his cooperation, the district was unable to undertake anything of importance. The mayors were the prefect's subordinates.

All ministries and major branches of the administration are represented in the department's main town: war is represented by the general, the cult by the bishop, finances by the general state treasurer and by various other officials (mortgage keepers, the directors of enregistrement,³⁴⁴ customs duties and indirect taxation etc.) public works by the chief engineer, public education by various inspectors ... And all these service managers are in constant rapport with the prefect, who is the boss of most of these managers and combines these different administrations into a single bundle. This ensures that the different administrations know, support and communicate with each other, and in the last instance ensures that the prefect is active alongside nearly all of these civil servants in their official circles.

Indeed, even if he does not command the army corps, the prefect, who is the direct organ of the minister of the interior, actually is in firm control of recruitment; even if he does not gather taxes, he actually plays a part in the administration of the revenue of the departments and the districts. He might not be occupied with matters of the judiciary, but the convicts are placed in his hands, and the prisons are under his exclusive control. He hires and fires teachers and imposes fines on them; he also exerts his influence on the chief engineer of the department in all matters regarding the département's streets and vicinal paths; last but not least, he manages the département's fortune under the supervision of the general council.³⁴⁵

Josat could also have added the following to the prefect's duties: spying on everyone to ascertain their political reliability and using all the means available to him – no small amount – to support the candidates the government was comfortable with during elections. In addition to the prefects, there are the representatives of the départements – the general councils – and the district councils. According to the Napoleonic constitution of 1800, both the general councils and the mayors of the larger cities were appointed by the government, while the district councils and the mayors of districts with less than 5,000 inhabitants were appointed by the prefect. The July Revolution ensured that these institutions were elected by census suffrage. The revolution of 1848 made them elected by universal suffrage. The only considerable progress the Third Republic made beyond this was the election of the mayor by the districts (1882), something from which Paris is excluded to this day. It is still subordinate to the Seine prefect, a mayor appointed by the government, to whom a police prefect is

³⁴⁴ That is to say, the entering of legal documents into the public record.

³⁴⁵ Josat in Lebon 1886, p. 102.

attached. This institution of the law of 26 Pluviose³⁴⁶ in the year VIII (1800) has been maintained right down to the twentieth-century republic, and Mr Lépine ensures that we are readily made aware of its existence on a regular basis. Even Francis de Pressensé³⁴⁷ recently wondered in *L'Humanité* what the old republicans who had fought the Empire would say if they saw how ‘Prussian power under the regime of Mr Lépine³⁴⁸ is stronger and more independent, the control by the citizens and the monitoring of the ministers more absent than ever!’³⁴⁹ Serving in the government as he does, Pressensé’s latter phrase is intended to reduce the complicity of the government in Lépine’s infamies. Lépine is always protected by the government. But what democratic impotence is expressed in this member of the ruling party’s cry of pain!

Even today, every decision of the district council is subject to the sanction of the prefect or the minister of the interior; the minister can annul any act of the head of the district – the mayor – and recall any of the appointed police servants of the district. The mayor is not merely a representative of the community, but also of the central authority, whose orders he must carry out. And these orders do not remain on paper, nor do they merely serve to remove clumsiness or misunderstandings. One example: the district council of Roubaix, which the ‘Girondists’ had taken over, decided, amongst other things, to establish district pharmacies as well as a free legal information centre – a kind of workers’ administration. The prefect annulled these decisions and the government sided with him.

The Third Republic did not reduce the army of state officials that it encountered. On the contrary, each ministry sought to strengthen its influence by increasing the number of posts in the civil service, which could be given to the minions of one’s friends. I currently have one example to hand. Things were not going well for Gambetta³⁵⁰, the Prime Minister of the time, when on 8 December 1881 ‘the salaries for two new ministries (agriculture and fine arts) and two new deputy state positions for war and agriculture were to be approved, all of which Gambetta had established himself in order to satisfy a few friends whom he could not otherwise use’. Ribot³⁵¹ used this opportunity to get one over on Gambetta in the chamber. He confessed that he had always believed that the advantage of a democratic government, something which distinguishes it from a monarchy, lies particularly in the fact that the powers are distributed among a small number of people. And, moreover, that the superfluous people of the whole ostentatious courtly state who were expected to decorate the old monarchies disappear.

He was astounded to see how for some years the staff of the ministries, instead of decreasing, had constantly been on the rise. From a comparative summary of the budgets since 1674 it became clear that the salaries of the officials of the main administrations alone had increased by millions of francs etc.³⁵²

Of course, as a minister the virtuous Mr Ribot does not do any better. Paul Louis³⁵³ says that to the extent that the petty bourgeoisie declined and the crisis in the country grew, the ruling class added to the army of officials in order to disarm

³⁴⁶ 14 February 1795.

³⁴⁷ De Pressensé, Francis (1853–1914, Paris) was a French politician and journalist.

³⁴⁸ Lépine, Louis (1846–1933) was prefect of the Parisian police at the beginning of the twentieth century.

³⁴⁹ *L'Humanité*, 2 October 1904.

³⁵⁰ Léon Gambetta (1838–82) was a liberal-republican politician and Prime Minister of the Third Republic between 1881 and 1882.

³⁵¹ Alexander Ribot (1842–1923) was a leading member of the French Radical Party and French Prime Minister on three different occasions during the 1890s.

³⁵² Oncken 1890–2, pp. 826–7.

³⁵³ Paul Louis (1872–1955) was a French socialist journalist and historian.

the new recruits of the revolutionary reserve and to win new contingents to its banner. It added to the military bulwark of 600,000 a civil one of 700,000 to 800,000 families. In doing so it made more than a tenth of the population participants in its rule, and thus in solidarity with it.³⁵⁴

The ministerial socialists now join the government in championing bureaucratic parasitism. One of the most superfluous categories of officials is the subprefecture.³⁵⁵ Year on year, there is a motion to abolish it. In vain. This year, even the budget commission had supported it. Its motion was rejected by 314 votes to 193. All but seven of the ministerial socialists found themselves on the side of the majority.

It is the same story with the judiciary. The republic has not changed anything of significance here either. There is no trace of professional judges being elected by the people. The Third Republic has made the Empire's entire judicial equipment its own, including the position of state prosecutor, which dominates judicial proceedings.

Kurt Eisner is very enthusiastic about the French judges, on whom he believes the French bourgeoisie has bestowed an excellent education. For Eisner, the 'good judge' serves as evidence of this. Unfortunately, he can only come up with one such judge – one perhaps might be able to find a white raven amongst the German judges too. But if one wants to know how 'well educated' the French judges are, then it is worth remembering the trial of Zola,³⁵⁶ who received a year in prison for suing the military court that convicted Dreyfus. A more shameless perversion of the course of justice – and a more shifty judicial process – is inconceivable.

One year for Zola's struggle for the truth – exactly the same sentence received by the Crettiez sons (of manufacturing). With cool deliberation, they cowardly and treacherously killed three workers who did not in the least pose a threat to them.

The members of the court helped the assassins wherever they could. As the Paris correspondent of reported: 'The trial chamber directly debased itself to the status of the murders' lawyer'.³⁵⁷ Indirectly, therefore, the judges are encouraging the factory owners to shoot down striking workers – most reminiscent of conditions in that large republic across the Atlantic. The republican bourgeoisie has indeed educated its judges well. It has taught them the highest clemency for wealthy or respected murderers of workers, and unrelenting severity against simple proletarians and those who attempt to sue the people who murdered them.

We will later have an opportunity to acquaint ourselves with the friendliness of the French judges in yet another context. Regarding the relationship between Church and state, the Third Republic has hitherto left everything as it was under the Empire. The Concordat concluded between Bonaparte and Pope Pius VII in 1801 has been retained in its entirety down to today. Even the Socialist minister has approved the cult budget on several occasions. And if there has now been a split between Church and state, then this can be ascribed to a Church provocation. Nevertheless, it can still be doubted whether this split will be a permanent one. We will return to this later.

There is only one more means of rule, the most important one, left to consider. The army. Here, the republic has made drastic changes, but these changes are no different to those carried out by Austria and Russia, for example. Just like them, the Third Republic adopted the Prussian way of destroying military service and replacing it with a standing army. The Great Revolution had already introduced military service and organised a real people in arms. Napoleon replaced universal

³⁵⁴ Louis 1901, p. 280.

³⁵⁵ A local administrative entity that has survived in France to this day.

³⁵⁶ Émile Charles Antoine Zola (1840–1902) was a French journalist and playwright. He was brought to trial for criminal libel in 1898, after writing his well-known defence ('J'accuse') of Alfred Dreyfus – an indictment of the military hierarchy and the Catholic Church, which Zola published in order to bring to the public new evidence in support of Dreyfus.

³⁵⁷ *Vorwärts*, 29 November 1904.

military service with conscription, as well as the opportunity for the propertied to buy themselves out of military service. The mayors and the subprefecture were to determine this.

According to the law of 27 July 1872, every fit Frenchman is obliged to carry out military service. But he is not an armed citizen trained in the use of weapons. Just like the old professional soldier, he lives in barracks, cut off from the people. Outside of his working life in the military, he is subject to a particular discipline and jurisdiction enforced by a privileged caste of officers who are above bourgeois law. The army's specific discipline and jurisdiction are solely dependent on the soldiers' superiors – in the last instance, the President, who appoints them.

The Third Republic introduced universal conscription not in order to arm the people but to increase the number of soldiers as much as possible. At the same time they abolished the last remnant of the armed people which had been preserved since the Great Revolution, the National Guard. Of course, the National Guard had withered away under the monarchical regime and had become a privilege of the rich, degraded to the status of a mere game with weapons. But as the month of February 1848, and also the period 1870/71 during the war and the events immediately after it demonstrate, in times of revolution the National Guard had nonetheless provided an all too dangerous toehold for arming the people. In 1848, one of the ways in which revolutionaries got hold of weapons was to fetch them from the homes of the wealthy, who made no moves to defend their homes. Thus, in 1871 the bourgeoisie could only sleep peacefully if there were no weapons outside of the barracks, outside of military discipline, and if all classes of the people were disarmed. So it was that the National Guard was abolished in 1872. The introduction of military service went hand-in-hand with the complete disarming of the people.

This was done with the cooperation of the very same bourgeois republicans who, as late as December 1867, had put forward a motion in the chamber demanding the introduction of a militia along the lines of the Swiss system and had demanded the arming of the people in their programme.

Disarming the people put paid to the armed revolution from below; at the same time, however, it opened the floodgates to the putschist appetites of the Praetorian Guard.³⁵⁸ Today, even the bourgeois republicans are afraid of this rule of the sword, something which they themselves evoked. They attempt to hold back the officer corps through their pathetic system of spying. But in vain. Today the bourgeoisie has come so far that it can only resist the rule of the sword by arming the proletariat. It can only delay the increasingly threatening and ever-encroaching dictatorship of the proletariat with the rule of the sword. It is no longer possible to master both of these factors. Yet since, in the last analysis, it would actually prefer to put up with the dictatorship of the officer caste than with the dictatorship of the proletariat, it obstinately refuses to resort to the only means which could put an end to the regime of the sword for ever – the arming of the people.

This dilemma is not pleasant for the friends of the republic. Yet that is not a reason to close our eyes to the real reasons behind the position of power which the general staff has acquired in the republic, and to nurture the belief that the proletariat can best defend the republic by expecting miracles from bourgeois police-spying and not by energetically asserting its demand for the arming of the people.

The dominant position which the officer corps has necessarily grown into from the militarism of the French Republic becomes most evident in the republic's monarchist sentiment. The constitution of the Third Republic has nothing in common with the state institutions which can be subsumed under the name of the republic; that is, those state institutions established by the First Republic, brought into being by the Second Republic according to the will of the victors of February 1848, or those with which Paris attempted to carry out the Commune in 1871. On the contrary, it has taken over all the institutions of the monarchy which the three great French revolutions attempted to destroy.

³⁵⁸ Presumably a reference to pro-monarchist counterrevolutionary forces and fighting formations such as *Action Française*, which was established in 1899.

The only thing which is republican in the Third Republic is the fact that the direct rule of the bourgeoisie is not mediated by hereditary representatives in the executive arm of the state. But because of this, the bourgeoisie is more likely to collide directly with the proletariat or the petty bourgeoisie on the one hand, and with its own means of rule on the other. The latter strive to morph from means of ruling the lower classes into means of ruling the state.

Modern class contradictions intensify much more sharply than under a monarchy, because classes encounter each other more directly. But these contradictions have to express themselves most trenchantly in a republic with monarchist means of rule, because on top of the suddenness of class battles in a republic there is the political inequality and oppression associated with the monarchy. This creates a constant desire for political change, something absent in pure democracies. Today, the danger to the republic lies in its monarchist, not its republican, institutions. Yet these monarchical institutions are currently being defended most keenly by the governing republicans of all shades – including the ministerial socialists.

The Republic and Social Democracy in France, Chapter 7: The Bourgeois Republicans at Work

The constitution of the Third Republic is based on the state foundations created by the First Empire. The constitution received its specific form through, as the bourgeois republicans say themselves, the most reactionary chamber that France has ever had. One would have thought that, as soon as this monarchical-clerical chamber was replaced by another one dominated by the anti-clerical, democratic republicans, then the constitution would be revised in a democratic sense. Not at all. To a considerable degree, today's French constitution remains the one provided by Napoleon I and the country squires. For a while, a section of the bourgeois republicans, the Radicals,³⁵⁹ demanded that the Senate and the presidency – the two institutions that appear to be the most averse to democracy – be abolished. Yet they did not dare to touch militarism or the bureaucracy. They held on to the latter because they were angling for posts within it. But they tried to hoax the population into believing that it was precisely centralisation that formed the best means of carrying out, in the quickest possible fashion, all the blessed reforms with which the republic was pregnant. The population did not need to change anything, it just had to make them – the Radicals – ministers in the place of the existing ones, and everything would go swimmingly. For them, any involvement of the people beyond electing a sufficient number of Radicals to the chamber was superfluous. These gentlemen no longer understand the democratisation of the administration to mean replacing bureaucratic paternalism with self-government, but replacing those from the right of the chamber protecting such paternalism with those from its left side.

Of course, the President – jointly elected with the Senate – and the Senate itself initially stood in their way. Yet because the Radicals turned out to be harmless elsewhere, the Senate's doors opened themselves up to them too. On the other hand, the Senate proved very useful to the Chamber of Deputies as well. As its members are elected by unequal suffrage every nine years, the Senate does not need to be popular amongst the mass of the people. It can put up with being unpopular more easily than the deputies of the Chamber can. Thus these deputies may conduct themselves in a fashion that is friendlier to the people, may promise the electorate more and may vote in a more radical fashion. They know, after all, that if all the nice decisions really were to restrict capital's dominance or exploitation, then the Senate would ensure that they merely remain on paper.

Thanks to the Senate, the bourgeois Radicals can reap all the advantages of their radicalism amongst petty-bourgeois and proletarian voters – without ever having to worry about damaging the capitalist regime in the process. In this way, the Senate that is not dependent on ‘duping the workers’ becomes the necessary addition for bourgeois demagogic, which bases itself on ‘duping the workers’.

Finally, revising the constitution became increasingly dangerous with the strengthening of the extreme parties on the left and right, who sought not to conserve the existing order but to overthrow it. So it is that, for quite some time now, the Radicals have dropped all agitation against the presidency and the state; today, they consider the monarchical head of state and unequal suffrage to be the sturdiest buttresses of the republic and universal suffrage. The ‘republic’ that is being defended in France today is still the creation of the country squires who killed the Paris Commune.

Yet a large part of the bourgeois republicans did not require this detour in order to arrive at a point where they recognise, or even worship, the country squires' constitution. They immediately recognised just how much this constitution corresponded to the bourgeoisie's needs to rule, and thus they light-heartedly threw their democratic airs and graces overboard – these were not a living force in them, but mere memories of the Great Revolution. They happily worked on the

³⁵⁹ Founded in 1901, the Radicals (*Parti radical*) were a liberal-republican party. In this period, they were at their most influential as part of a bloc with the Socialists that are the target of Kautsky's critique here.

new constitution and adapted to it. They were the *opportunistes*. They did not give up on their radical programme *vis-à-vis* the masses, but knew how to pass off the disavowal of their programme as its completion. Turning black into white through the power of speech is a basic condition for the political existence of opportunism, as it is for the ‘cooperation of the classes’. Gambetta developed the art of intoxicating oneself and one’s audience in words as much as Louis Blanc.

For example, just listen to how Gambetta spoke about the fact that senators were not to be elected directly, but by electoral bodies. Originally, every municipality – whether consisting of 50 or 2 million inhabitants – was to send an elector to these bodies. It is very difficult to think of a more reactionary electoral franchise, a worse attack on universal, equal and direct suffrage. Yet what a wonderful democratic achievement Gambetta was able to turn this wretchedness into!

‘For a long time I have been reluctant’, he said to his voters, the workers of Belleville on 23 April 1875, ‘to believe that this assembly (the National Assembly), which is certainly the most monarchist and – how shall I put it – the least unclerically disposed that France ever had, and imbued though it is with the prejudices of oligarchal rule, would nonetheless provide the first chamber that it established with the most democratic basis that France owns: that community spirit, that is to say the 36,000 local authorities in France’. ‘Do you now see to what extent the spirit of democracy has permeated all of our minds, and even those of our most avowed enemies, in order for the Senate, which the legislators wanted to create in 1871, to be based on the 36,000 French communes as the source of their inspiration? Indeed, admire the consequences and significance of such a law!’ And now Gambetta contrived a glowing picture of all the wonderful things that would happen to France as a result of this electoral law, a law which would not create a Senate, but rather a ‘great council of France’s communes’.

In this way the abolition of equal suffrage for the Parisian workers was swindled into a victory of the principle of the Paris Commune. A democratic etiquette is glued to this reactionary changeling, and democracy has triumphed over the reaction! This is a method which in terms of its peacefulness and security is incomparable to any other. Victories can only be fought and won if we are prepared to call every defeat a victory!

However, it was only the proletariat and petty bourgeoisie that Gambetta cheated with this method. He did not cheat the bourgeoisie – that class whose interests he was actually representing. He cheated that class whose votes he strove to win, in order to make it subservient to capitalist interests. He was not under any illusions – those who elected him were. The Senate completely corresponds to bourgeois interests.

The constitution of 1875 came about during the aftermath of the uprising of the Paris Commune. Thus its overriding consideration was to shape the republic in a way that made proletarian rule impossible. Today, however, the proletariat is the only power that can effectively thwart the capitalist class, because it is the only class that represents a higher mode of production than the capitalist one. Among the restrictions on the capitalist class, only those won by the proletariat, or those that serve its permanent interests, signify cultural progress, the raising of society to a higher level. All of capitalism’s other restrictions inhibit social development, preventing the highest form of economic life hitherto achieved in favour of lower, more backward and outmoded forms, leading to intolerable conditions.

Thus, again and again, capitalism must come to dominate in every constitution that does not lead the proletariat to power. Whether it is as anti-liberal as possible, whether it prefers the petty bourgeoisie, peasants, junkers, soldiers, clerics, absolutist bureaucrat or any other non-capitalist or anti-capitalist classes, capital will rule in any of these constitutions. Wherever the people, the ‘demos’, is composed of more petty-bourgeois and peasants than proletarians, capital ultimately usurps the democratic republic too. Yet the ‘Empire without the Emperor’, as the Third Republic was aptly named, provided a favourable basis for the dominance of capital from the outset. In the Empire with the Emperor, capital ruled with the Emperor and through him, although the Emperor still pursued dynastic aims alongside capitalist ones. In the Empire without the Emperor, it will be the Emperor himself who appoints the ministers, compiles the Senate and the Chamber of

Deputies and directs them both. Thus republican politics more easily become capitalist politics than monarchist politics do. This is clearly evident in the example of colonial policy.

Parliamentary Corruption and Economic Stagnation

We have seen that, in all the areas where the interests of the industrial bourgeoisie and the proletariat clash, the Third Republic has done no more for the proletariat than the first monarchy and that, on the contrary, it has allowed tendencies hostile to the proletariat to emerge even more than was the case under the monarchy. It is all the more surprising then, that industry – that is, industrial capital – by no means continued to enjoy the boom it had enjoyed under the Empire. The reasons for this are manifold, but they partly lie in the republic's economic policy. The industrial capitalists themselves are not always the best advisors for their interests. In their greed for profit, they are only too inclined to undermine the basis of enduring prosperity in favour of momentary advantage, to slay the goose that lays golden eggs. It is well known that low wages and long working hours generally deliver the most expensive product. In addition to the fight against trade unions and worker protection laws, French industrial capital also led the fight for high protective tariffs – that is, for a rise in the cost of the conditions of production – here too. The transition to free trade had been the wisest economic deed of the Empire. The regime of protective tariffs began with its fall.

With the short-sightedness of the industrial capitalists came the fact that they did not rule the state by themselves, but had to share power with the bureaucracy and the military as well as with a strong landowner class. But above all, they had to share it with high finance, which for more than a hundred years had been the power which, despite all changes in the forms of government and dynasties, has always remained the supreme ruler of France. In league with high finance, as a means of making the country's democratic forces subservient to it in order to plunder the state alongside high finance, are the *professional politicians*. Admittedly a smaller part of the bourgeoisie, they are all the more powerful for it, and they play a role in every parliamentary state. In fact, their role is greater where parliament is more powerful, where the area whose exploitation it oversees is richer and where the mass of the people is weaker *vis-à-vis* the parliamentarians; that is to say, where the parties are less democratically organised and disciplined and where the parliamentarians only have to manage an unorganised mass of voters, with whom they have always been able to deal easily.

In a republic, these professional politicians become representatives of a state power that has assumed a life of its own, like the sovereign in a monarchy: as with the Caesar under Caesarism, they also will all too easily become pure booty politicians, with even pettier and more base perspectives than those of a Caesarian Emperor. Engels outlined this well in his Introduction to the *Civil War in France*:

What had been the characteristic attribute of the former state? Society had created its own organs to look after its common interests, originally through simple division of labour. But these organs, at whose head was the state power, had in the course of time, in pursuance of their own special interests, transformed themselves from the servants of society into the masters of society, as can be seen, for example, not only in the hereditary monarchy, but also in the democratic republic. Nowhere do 'politicians' form a more separate, powerful section of the nation than in North America. There, each of the two great parties which alternately succeed each other in power is itself in turn controlled by people who make a business of politics, who speculate on seats in the legislative assemblies of the Union as well as of the separate states, or who make a living by carrying on agitation for their party and on its victory are rewarded with positions. It is well known that the Americans have been striving for thirty years to shake off this yoke, which has become intolerable, and that in spite of all they can do they continue to sink ever deeper in this swamp of corruption. It is precisely in America that we see best how there takes place this process of the state power making itself independent in relation to society, whose mere instrument it was originally intended to be. Here there exists no dynasty, no nobility, no standing army, beyond the few men keeping watch on the Indians, no bureaucracy with permanent posts or the right to pensions. And nevertheless we find here two great gangs of political speculators, who alternately take possession of the state power and exploit it by the most corrupt means and for the most corrupt ends – and the nation is powerless

*against these two great cartels of politicians, who are ostensibly its servants, but in reality exploit and plunder it.*³⁶⁰

The monarchists and absolutists, however, have no reason to sniff at this republican and parliamentary corruption. Indeed, what alternative do they have to it? Nothing but the absolute rule of the bureaucracy, which is no less corrupt than parliamentary corruption. The former only differs from the latter in that its corruption does not emanate from a conflict between two gangs over the available booty, but from the secure monopoly of a single gang. The glorious consequences of this system are becoming clear enough in Russia. Russian bureaucratic corruption or American republican corruption: these are the two extremes between which the life and being of all large capitalist states moves and must move. Only socialism can put an end to this by means of an order such as the one the Paris Commune started to create: that is, by means of the most comprehensive expansion of self-government, the popular election of all officials and the subordination of all members of representative bodies to the control and discipline of the organised people. Already today, the best way to counter parliamentary corruption is through the formation of a large, strictly disciplined proletarian party; by contrast, parliamentary corruption will not be fought by socialist representatives joining one of the ‘cartels of politicians’ who ‘dominate’ the nation and ‘plunder’ it, to use the words of Engels. That can only ensure that the socialists will be less able to fight bourgeois corruption and that they will be made jointly responsible for it. And thanks to its constitution, today’s French republic can enjoy all the advantages of uniting parliamentary and bureaucratic corruption.

Let me give just one example of how participating in a bourgeois ‘bloc’ forces the socialists to tolerate bourgeois-parliamentary corruption. The following resolution was tabled at the 1902 Tours Congress of the Jaurès wing of social democracy:

As it has become well-known for some time that some members of the Socialist party have sought out decorations of various kinds;

And that such applications are incompatible with all principles of the party, and have to compromise its independence and dignity:

2. *Each member of the party is prohibited from demanding any decoration, from accepting such a decoration or bearing such a decoration*
3. *Party members with elected positions are forbidden from supporting or promoting any demand of this nature.*

First to speak was one of the resolution’s signatories, citizen Parsons. He demanded that the last passage of the resolution he had signed be deleted:

This part of the resolution contains a mix-up, because it is clear that when editing up the resolution, Citizen Mallo (who moved the resolution) only thought of demands that would arise for party members themselves. But the resolution could be interpreted in a way that would mean that a Socialist deputy should not have the right to support applications for an accolade that came from the circle of those who elected him. Well, then we would place our deputies at a disadvantage against the other deputies, and we would deny them the means which are necessary under the capitalist and parliamentary regime in order to attain public office.

Later during the debate, the same delegate said:

You will never be able to prevent demands being placed on a Socialist from those who elected him who do not yet know the socialist ideal, demands of which he disapproves, but which he then supports out of a certain disregard for those demanding it, and because he is of the opinion that it will not hurt to corrupt a bourgeois.

³⁶⁰ Engels 1975–2004a, p. 189.

It is of course necessary to keep the party free of any corruption, but since we are a parliamentary party and have set ourselves the goal of infiltrating public office, we cannot demand of our deputies things that are contradictory to the requirements imposed on them by parliamentary tactics.

This is quoted word for word from the official congress record. Following him, Kosciusko spoke in favour of the resolution: ‘It is bad enough that we have to establish that our deputies and city councils have to some extent become *employment agencies*, so that we do not yet need to use them to distribute decorations’. Then another deputy, Krauss, came to speak:

*I am a signatory of the resolution and I confess that you would do me a great service if you freed me from today’s almost absolute obligation to do what our colleagues are accusing us of. But Parsons is right on one point: those who demand the most from us, and accuse us of most, are our own socialist comrades. I want to talk openly. Before I came here a few days ago, a member of our organisation approached me in the corridors and said: ‘It is for a friend, and therefore of no importance, write me a recommendation for the award of a palm (an academic award)’. Yes terday, it was possible to read about the award in the *Journal officiel*. Think about this question, then. I ask only one thing: that you free my door from all the candidates for red, blue or any other coloured decorations, which are overwhelming us ... How many times have I had signed such claims, because I dare not refuse it to a comrade, and you also sign for an influential voter, who has nothing to do with socialism: you wangle palms for them, or another award ... In the records of our congresses there are resolutions which originate from the most puritanical comrades. And the same comrades that have denounced us, have asked for our protection behind the scenes, saying ‘Never mind, this is only for a bourgeois’, or ‘Go to Millerand or Baudin³⁶¹ and do your utmost to ensure that the comrade is promoted’.*

Following Krauss, Camus explained that he condemned the trading of political offices, but that according to the party statutes, deputies were only responsible to their constituency and thus the party had no right to lay down instructions to them. Last to speak was the chairman, the deputy Gérault-Richard, who introduced a unique proletarian moment, saying that the previous attempts of mainly hunting after offices for comrades and the trading of such offices had been directed at corrupting influential bourgeois voters:

There are different categories of awards: we have, for example, the medals³⁶² for the old workers ... It is quite cruel, if you, who are in no need of such a childish delight, deprive it of those who have nothing else. You cannot expect to convert humanity overnight: even if we made such a decision, it would not be possible for us to eradicate the need for human beings to distinguish themselves from each other.

If you rob a poor old devil of the innocent joy he gets from wearing a little red hand,³⁶³ you will prove to be a great Puritan, but at the expense of honest people whose pleasure harms no one and will cost you nothing. If we are talking about decorations, then we must think of Madame de Girardin’s³⁶⁴ apposite remark: ‘It costs so little and makes for such great pleasure’. This famous plea in favour of the trading of posts freely admitted that the ‘old workers’ who were being decorated were often careerists and strike-breakers. When Millerand was in Bordeaux, he decorated a worker who had been the industrialists’ candidate in the last employment tribunal (*Conseil de prud’hommes*) election.

The outcome of this debate was as characteristic as the debate itself. The resolution could not be rejected and it could not be adopted, because – as Parsons noted so beautifully – the trading of posts and positions is a necessary parliamentary

³⁶¹ Pierre Baudin (1863–1917) was Minister of Transport between 1899 and 1902.

³⁶² (Kautsky’s footnote): Workers who continuously work for more than thirty years in the same company can be ‘honoured’ by a medal, which is presented to them by the Minister of Commerce. It is a very inexpensive way of ‘satisfying’ the workers. In the 1904 budget 39,000 francs were set aside for these medals, as against 16 million for the Legion of Honour, the Order of the Proprietor.

³⁶³ An award handed out to French workers.

³⁶⁴ Presumably a reference to the French author Delphine de Girardin (1804–55).

tactic for a party which wants to participate in bourgeois government. They saved themselves from embarrassment by opting for cheap radicalism. The resolution was referred to a commission and replaced by another, which urged the deputies to table a bill that would abolish all types of decorations. However, as yet there has been no speech about this bill. Hopefully the unification currently being prepared³⁶⁵ will succeed in placing the party on a new footing, making all those means that are necessary to those who ‘under the capitalist regime’ ‘want to attain public office’ inaccessible to socialist deputies.

These *documents humains* are sufficient to show that socialist entry into the bloc of governing parties changed nothing about the old ‘parliamentary necessities’, but rather subjected the socialists to them. Today in the republic we can still find both ‘cartels of politicians’, who scuffle over the spoils. They are now called ‘blocs’. However, even the most corrupt cartel booty politicians cannot govern at will. Their policies are given by the circumstances of the time. Because they belong to the bourgeoisie, these gentlemen carry out bourgeois politics: they carry out the politics of high finance, which has paid for them in one form or another; but they also have to carry out politics that do not snub their voters too much. They thus have to be anxious about demagogic concessions. But eventually every cartel must defend those principles that make them appear plausible and that keep the competing cartel away from the feeding trough, which is not large enough to satisfy both at the same time.

The politics that emerge from this do not always have to be deleterious, and from time to time can coincide with the real needs of social development. But often they come into conflict with these needs. In France, the impact on its parliamentarians has hitherto been an economic policy that does not even ensure the progress of industry, let alone that of proletarian interests. If the National Assembly of the Great Revolution was guided by comprehensive theories and high politics, thus pursuing a consistent and bold policy which raised France from ruin to the head of the European nations, then the parliamentary system of the Third Republic is a discharge of the most baseless and short-sighted politics of the moment, which is allowing France to sink deeper and deeper economically.

³⁶⁵ See the final sections of this part for more on this unification.

The Republic and Social Democracy in France, Chapter 8: Socialism in the Third Republic

How the Bourgeois Republicans Dupe the Workers

If we take a look at the course which events have taken in France since the monarchists have taken possession of it in order to plunder it and use it as a tool of power, adapting it to meet its needs and those of the bourgeoisie – especially of high finance, industrial capitalists, landowners, careerists and professional politicians – then we might be curious as to how to answer the following question: how under these circumstances is the bourgeoisie able to dupe the workers, something it needs far more under the republic than under monarchies?

But lo and behold, the republic itself helps the bourgeoisie out of its embarrassment. The republican idea itself has hitherto proved to be an effective way of furnishing the ‘cartel of republican politicians’ with the votes they need. At several points in his work, the most recent historian of French socialism, the bourgeois Georges Weill,³⁶⁶ points to this with contentment:

Until 1876, politics for the workers exclusively consisted in supporting the Republican Party. The workers, Barberet wrote, silently put up with their lot because the state calls itself a republic. The word has a magical effect on the mind of the worker. This fata morgana fills them with hope. The republican bourgeoisie and the proletariat marched arm in arm, united by the same fervour against the monarchy, clericalism and reaction. ‘Gone are the days’, wrote Renouvier, a republican philosopher, ‘when a few socialists, as a rule themselves of bourgeois origin or students, were illadvised enough in their writing to divide France into two hostile camps – one of the workers and one of the owners of the means of production. This one-sided separation, which in a free society was always wrong and always will be, must definitely vanish today, where the political question – which formerly seemed as if it were solved at all levels – is more important and burning than ever, and will necessarily drive back all others. Today, all of us – capitalists and workers – are forced to fight for our rights, for our most elementary freedoms, for our consciences’.³⁶⁷

The threat posed to the republic from monarchists and clericals – this was what was supposed to unite the workers and the republican bourgeoisie under one banner. Back then, Gambetta’s newspaper *La République française* wrote that class hatred represented the greatest danger to the republic. And these ideas break through over and again. Georges Weill comes to this conclusion as well:

The tendency to form a class party is not available to the French workers: far from seeking isolation, they easily turn against anything that would have the effect of corralling them into a caste. The love of politics drives them into alliance with the bourgeoisie of the left, and its behaviour in elections has often proved this. In 1868, Proudhon advised them to abstain; in 1864, Tolain wanted workers’ candidates; and in 1869 Vermorel suggested standing socialist candidates – none of them were listened to. 1885, 1889, 1902 – in all periods of crisis the working-class voters have left the revolutionary organisations and shelved their economic demands in order to vote for the men of the [bourgeois – KK] left and to act in favour of the republic.³⁶⁸

From his bourgeois republican point of view, George Weill has every reason to note this phenomenon with contentment – a phenomenon from which his party is drawing great advantage. The question is merely whether the revolutionary

³⁶⁶ Georges Weill (1865–1944) was a historian of socialism and Saint-Simonism in France. Kautsky probably stresses ‘the bourgeois’ Georges Weill so as to differentiate him from the SPD parliamentarian of the same name.

³⁶⁷ Weill 1904, pp. 188–9.

³⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 455.

proletariat can achieve what it wants to achieve – the safeguarding of the republic and intellectual emancipation from the yoke of the church – if it places the class struggle against capital after the struggle against the monarchists and clericalists.

In France, the struggle of the revolutionary-minded sections of the bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie and the proletariat against the Church is over two hundred years old. ‘*Écrasez l’infâme*’, cried Voltaire.³⁶⁹ ‘Clericalism is the enemy’, Gambetta repeated a century later. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the same battle cry can be heard again in France, and clericalism appears to be more of a threat than ever.

But does this fact alone not prove that the bourgeoisie is incapable of dealing with the Church, and that the proletariat will burden itself with a labour of Sisyphus if it faithfully follows the bourgeoisie in this struggle and acts as its knave?

Indeed, today the bourgeois liberal politicians have every interest in the *struggle* against the Church, but by no means in triumphing over it. They can only count on the alliance of the proletariat as long as this struggle continues. If it comes to an end, their ally will be transformed into an enemy on the very day the Church goes down. Even in the time of their greatest revolutionary power, the bourgeoisie could not get by for long without the Church. The First Republic had completely put a stop to the Church. Under Napoleon, bourgeois reaction officially reintroduced it.

The Commune of 1871 then made short work of it. But the Third Republic has now been leading a struggle against the Church for three decades without getting anywhere. From time to time, there is a conflict with it, this conflict heats up, the wildest words are exchanged and great legislative acts are prepared: but at the decisive moment the government collapses or it is left in the lurch by the chamber. But if the Church remains in force, then this only happens because it is sure that the two pillars of the monarchical Third Republic – the Senate and the President – will do their duty. If the *Kulturkampf*³⁷⁰ – which raged in France as much as it did in Germany – came to an end in the 1880s, then this was mainly due to the Senate, which removed the worst fangs from the anti-clerical laws (1880 and 1882). And finally, President Grévy³⁷¹ did his bit to ensure that the struggle did not end in a decisive defeat for the Church.

Even today we may no longer expect such a defeat, despite the sharp intensification of the conflict between Church and state in recent years. As recently as May 1903, Combes said in the Chamber that his Church policy was based on ‘the loyal and complete observation of the Concordat laws’. Should these laws be broken, then this could only be done by that power that has never ceased to violate the Concordat and to whom all responsibility for its abolition would fall. That did not sound very militant. In vain, the socialists demanded a formal promise from the socialist government that it would prepare the separation of Church and state. If, since then, there has been a rupture between the government and the Church, we can only ascribe this service to the latter. Yet just how easily the government is still failing in relation to clericalism is shown by the case of the teacher Thalamas,³⁷² who was reprimanded by the government because a few fanatical Catholics

³⁶⁹ Voltaire (François-Marie Arouet, 1694–1778), was a French Enlightenment historian and philosopher. The slogan quoted by Kautsky ('crush the infamous') was aimed at the French Church and the nobility.

³⁷⁰ Refers to measures taken against the Catholic Church and the influence of Catholicism. In newly-established Germany, this saw many bishops imprisoned or exiled, and led to stringent state intervention in the affairs of the Catholic Church. Bismarck later abandoned this policy when he became aware of the fact that secularists and the growing socialist movement were using the atmosphere created by the *Kulturkampf* in order to question religion's place and role in society as a whole.

³⁷¹ François Paul Jules Grévy (1807–91) was President of France between 1879–87 and a leading member of the 'Opportunist' Republicans.

³⁷² Amédée Thalamas (1867–1953) was a professor of history and geography at the Sorbonne in Paris. His lectures on Joan of Arc, which urged students to adopt a more critical-historical understanding of her life and times, sparked a national controversy and clash in parliament. The right attacked him and sought to disrupt his lectures, whereas Jaurès publicly defended him.

felt offended by his teaching. In the chamber, Jaurès spoke against the Minister of Education, but then voted with the majority in favour of him.

We cannot trust such methods and such a majority to deal with a power like the Catholic Church. We may therefore expect that the current struggle against the Church will end in the same way that previous struggles did, or the way the struggle of the Dreyfusards against the army did – a struggle which began as a campaign for the overthrow of militarism and which ended with amnesty for all the criminals of the general staff and the maintenance of their position in the state.

As it would require a separate article, I do not want to go into more detail about how even the abolition of the Concordat and the separation of Church and state would still not signify France's liberation from the former. This is proved by Austria, which abolished the Concordat in 1870, and Belgium, where the Church is independent of the state. In the last instance, the power of the Church lies in the fact that it exercises welfare functions which the capitalist state is unable to obviate the need for, as it necessarily creates a large proletariat which it cannot absorb because military expenditure eats up the state's resources. The power of the Church also lies in the fact that in capitalist society the lower classes feel an ineluctable need for salvation, for better social conditions beyond those of today, which bourgeois liberalism – knowing no other possibility than the capitalist social order – is unable to satisfy. Only the ideal of a socialist society can replace the religious need of the poor for a better world beyond the existing one: only the awareness that the proletariat is destined to be its own saviour can overcome the belief in the religious saviour.

So the only way to emancipate the minds of lower classes from the domination of the Church is by fighting for the socialist ideal, by proletarian class struggle against capitalism and militarism – even if these are supported by bourgeois republicans. The fighting proletariat is the only power that possesses the stubborn will to deal with the Church. Proletarian class struggle is the only way to overcome it. In contrast, bourgeois *Kulturmampf* against the Church will never achieve decisive results and is not interested in such results either. Bourgeois *Kulturmampf* means staving off the proletariat indefinitely. If it means postponing the class struggle until the struggle of bourgeois free-thinking with the Church has been fought out, then this is the very opposite of an effective anti-clerical policy.

The proletariat must indeed support all measures that are capable of weakening the rule of the Church, but in doing so it cannot allow its class organisation and class actions to be impaired. And what is true of the struggle against the Church is true of the struggle for the republic.

The bourgeois republicans have ruled the republic for three decades. And with what success? The republic is said to be at greater risk today than ever before, so that in order to rescue it the proletariat and the bourgeoisie should forget everything that divides them and unite to march against the common enemy.

On what is the threat to the republic based? Not even the keenest eye can discover a single trace of a monarchist pretender, or a serious effort to replace the republic with a monarchy. The republic is only at risk from itself. On the one hand, it is at risk from its *constitution*, which, as we have seen, is quite monarchical and cries out for an individual at its head. But it is also at risk from its capitalist agrarian policy and parliamentary corruption. Having been welcomed as a saviour from the plight of working people, it is the *disappointment* at the republic that threatens it. This disappointment can only be dispelled by transforming the capitalist parliamentary republic and its corruption into a truly social republic, not by preserving it. And only through self-government and the arming of the people can the republic be secured against coup attempts.

If we want to strengthen the propagandist power of the republican idea in France, then we have to show, above all, that the republic we want – the republic that the fighters of 1793, 1848 and 1871 strove to achieve – is fundamentally different from the republic of today, as different from this republic as the last republic was from the monarchy. But we must also ensure that it is impossible to identify us with the 'cartel' of bourgeois business republicans that governs and exploits the republic. If we want to secure the republic, then we must raise, strengthen and make politically independent

that class which is alone among all classes of modern society in that it is republican in principle, alone in its willingness to stand up for the republic under any circumstances, to shed its blood for it: the proletariat. So here too we would consider it to be the most perverse policy, if, in order to save the republic, the proletariat were to renounce the defence of its class demands until the threat to the republic had passed, so as not to weaken the republic through the class struggle. Nothing undermines the republic's foundations more than the renunciation of this class struggle: nothing can lay stronger foundations for the republic than the successful continuation of this struggle.

The more the bourgeois republicans tried to dupe the masses of workers by presenting their next goal solely as that of salvaging the republic in association with the bourgeoisie and fighting the Church by supporting its regimes and its methods, the more socialist propaganda had to confront critically the bourgeois aims and means of struggle in order to show: how little the proletariat would gain from these; that the proletarian republic is different from the bourgeois republic; that the proletarian methods of salvaging the republic and fighting the Church are fundamentally different from those of the bourgeoisie; and that social democracy rejects an alliance with the bourgeois republicans, rejects becoming an accomplice in everything that these forces have done and failed at.

To do this it was also necessary to criticise the revolutionary tradition, which most worked towards making the proletarians the followers of the bourgeois republicans and estranging them from their own historical tasks. The revolutionary tradition leads to the view that the proletariat of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has no other task than to continue the revolution of the eighteenth century, to take it up where it left off. But this revolution was a *bourgeois* revolution – even during the time of terror the proletariat played no special role and was merely the most energetic and most ruthless champion of petty-bourgeois and bourgeois interests and ideas. Back then, the struggle against the monarchy and the clergy necessarily took first place, and the struggle against capital came a mere second: if an independent proletarian policy was still impossible, then the proletariat had to form the followers of the petty bourgeoisie and its ideologues, and often those of the bourgeoisie too. Seeking to shape the ideas and tasks of the revolution of the eighteenth century into living forces of the proletarian movement today means keeping the proletariat in its stage of infancy, in dependence and ignorance about its own historical tasks. From the standpoint of the bourgeois republicans, this revolutionary tradition is invaluable, for it alone allows them to ‘dupe the workers’ in France, something which they need so much and which will become all the more difficult as class antagonisms become more acute. This tradition is one of the biggest obstacles to proletarian socialism.

The Three Tendencies of the Socialist Movement

In light of this situation, the task of the French socialists was obvious: in order to make the proletariat politically independent and detach it from the liberal bourgeoisie, they had above all to confront the republican superstition, which in France assumes various forms: the superstition that the republic as such signifies a mitigation of the class rule of the bourgeoisie; that today's Third Republic is a realisation of the republican ideal that the proletarian masses have had in their heads since 1793; that because it shares the same name then its essence is the same too. And finally, the republican superstition that the republic is endangered by anything other than its own grievances, than by its own means of rule, and that the struggle should not be about rescuing it from anything other than these means of rule, as if the republic's existence could be secured in any other way than through the abolition of these means of rule.

But then the French socialists would have had to criticise the revolutionary tradition, to counter it with the new doctrine of class struggle based on the theoretical study of the modern production process and the resultant insight into the needs, powers and responsibilities of social development in general and the proletariat in particular. In other words: the doctrine of Marxism.

As far back as 1850, in his articles in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* and then in the *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx criticised the ‘traditional superstition of 1793’.³⁷³ In the First International, he then constantly strove to oppose this revolutionary tradition with the recognition of the proletarian class struggle. But back then this tradition was still too deeply rooted in France. Thanks to particularly favourable historical conditions, a modern proletarian movement became a mass movement in Germany earlier than in France. This movement was based on conscious class struggle and was independent from the traditions and slogans of the bourgeois revolution. Only when it had achieved great success there did the scientific explanation of the doctrine of class struggle and tactics based upon it become established in France.

Thus it was the German model that gave the new French social democracy its character. But it would be a mistake to see the doctrine of the class struggle itself as being of German origin. Insofar as we can name one nation in particular, we must deem *France* to be its country of origin. *French* historians were the first who observed the fact of the class struggle, *French* socialists were the first to recognise the proletarian class struggle and it was in *France* that Marx became acquainted with these observations and facts. But, of course, he was the first to transform these observations into a theory by deepening them through German philosophy and English political economy; the first to raise class-struggle socialism to a science by replacing its sentimental explanation of the difference between rich and poor, of exploiters and exploited, with an understanding of the capitalist production process and of the different roles and historic tasks of the classes taking part in that production – thereby transforming the socialist goal from a demand born out of a sense of an injustice or mere proletarian disgust into an outcome of scientific research.

This scientific socialism is international not only in character but also in origin: Marx was only able to establish it because he was as much at home in the social and political life of France as he was in that of Germany and England. The doctrine of the proletarian class struggle has found its origins in France, its theoretical justification in England and its most complete and extensive practical application in Germany, thanks to the peculiar circumstances in the latter country.

Among those who have contributed most to taking this doctrine from Germany and replanting it in France, and to basing the new French socialism on it are two men in particular: *Jules Guesde* and *Eduard Vaillant*.³⁷⁴ Guesde was one of the keenest and most talented of the young socialists who intervened in the French workers’ movement when it started to revive following the fall of the Commune. He gathered around him many French workers and also many foreigners in Paris, amongst them German comrades. Of these, it was *Karl Hirsch* who exerted the greatest influence on him. Previously, Hirsch had been the editor of the first socialist daily in Germany, *Bürger und Bauernfreund*,³⁷⁵ which first appeared in 1870. In 1876 he had moved to Paris, where he joined with Guesde and made him familiar with the views of Karl Marx and the tactics of German social democracy. Then, thanks to republican freedom, just like many other socialists before and after him he was of course deported from France in 1878 – such deportations still occurred under Millerand! But now Guesde had become acquainted with Lafargue, and through him with Marx and Engels themselves, and he became their trusted and valued friend. Guesde also came into contact with other German social democrats, such as Liebknecht. The workers’ party he founded in 1879 (*Parti Ouvrier Français*) was based on Marxism from the outset.

Initially, the Blanquists were only able to exercise little influence on the resurgent workers’ movement. Their leader had been in jail since 1871, the party’s other protagonists were in exile. The aged Blanqui was not pardoned until 1879 and was already dead in 1881. Meanwhile, however, the growing onslaught of the proletariat had wrung a general amnesty

³⁷³ Marx 1891 [1875]; Marx 1975–2004c.

³⁷⁴ Édouard Vaillant (1840–1913) was a deputy of the Paris Commune and member of the French Chamber of Deputies during the Third Republic.

³⁷⁵ One of the first social-democratic newspapers in Germany, founded by the head of the so-called ‘Red Postal Service’, Julius Motteler (1838–1907) and Wilhelm Stolle (1842–1918) in 1870.

from the bourgeois republicans, which allowed the fugitives from the Commune – and with them some of the more prominent Blanquists such as Eudes³⁷⁶ and Vaillant – to return to France. They continued the party that had recently been founded by Blanqui, the *Parti Socialiste Révolutionnaire*. It became a new party not only in name. The defeat of the Commune had shaken the old Blanquism down to its foundations, because the experience had clearly shown that the tactic of conquering Paris by a coup, and thereby ruling France, had become completely hopeless. Before thinking about the conquest of political power it was necessary to establish a firm footing in the whole of France, to organise the proletariat everywhere and to make it strong and mature. Increasingly the practice of the Blanquists drew closer to that of the Marxists, with whom they cooperated on all important questions. Soon they differed essentially only in their geographical distribution and their relations with neighbouring socialist tendencies. The Blanquists were centred in Paris, the Marxists in the industrial cities of the provinces, especially in the North. As with their behaviour towards the anarchists in the 1890s and later towards the ministerial socialists, the Marxists often proved much more brusque and dismissive towards neighbouring tendencies than did the Blanquists, who in their objective refutations were actually more conciliatory, only deciding on a split if all other possibilities of arriving at an agreement had been exhausted. This difference probably arose from the fact that originally the *Parti Ouvrier* was based on more of a consistent theory than the *Parti Socialiste Révolutionnaire* was.

Still, for all the minor differences, the goals and tactical methods of both organisations were for the most part the same as far back as two decades ago. Their formal merger as the *Parti Socialiste de France* at the Ivry congress on 8 November 1901 was for me the final confirmation of a factual agreement that had already occurred a long time ago.

Today we can only speak of *Blanquists* in the sense of Blanqui's *pupils*, not in the sense of continuators of the old tactics which Blanqui himself had abandoned at the end of his life. In the *Annuaire du Parti Socialiste Révolutionnaire*³⁷⁷ it says, for example:

*The tactics of our party ... consist of incessantly speeding up the progress of calling reforms into being, of promoting social development. Although we prefer to march rapidly towards our final goal, the social republic, and although the means that most quickly achieve this are those most welcome to us, we naturally prefer slow progress to stagnation or retrogression. We therefore rise up with all our might against all reactionary endeavours and work incessantly at winning every possible reform from bourgeois society, however small it may be.*³⁷⁸

In that you will find nothing of what is usually understood to be Blanquism. Of those who worked most to reform the Blanquist party along these lines, we should first and foremost mention Eduard Vaillant, who from 1866 studied medicine in Heidelberg, Tübingen and Vienna. But, especially in the latter city, he also studied German socialism, until the war summoned him to France, where he also played an active part in the Commune. The fall of the Commune drove him to England, where he entered into personal contact with German socialists. Among the French, he to this day remains one of the best connoisseurs of socialist literature from abroad.

But if Vaillant and Guesde, and through them their organisations, contributed much to making the class-warfare tactics of German social democracy at home in France, they did so not by slavishly imitating them but by adapting them in accordance with France's changed circumstances. Just like German social democracy, they counterposed the proletarian method of struggle to that of bourgeois *Kulturmampf*, which for all the noise it makes does not get anywhere. But when, alongside this, the French socialists also campaigned against republican superstitions, this was an activity in which German social democracy had not the slightest reason to engage. For the French socialists, fighting republican superstitions and the

³⁷⁶ Emil Eudes (1843–88).

³⁷⁷ Dubreuilh and Chaboseau (eds.) n.d., (Kautsky does not provide a page number).

³⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 59.

revolutionary tradition was from the outset a necessity imposed on them by surrounding conditions, and Guesde in particular always emphasised these aspects most sharply in his agitation – to the approval of all German socialists who knew anything about it.

The work of both socialist organisations was onerous. Only slowly did they succeed in rallying the masses around them: every time they took a great step forwards, a political situation arose which once again led large proletarian masses or organisations into an alliance with the bourgeois republicans. Thus the emergence of Boulangism³⁷⁹ drove the Possibilists into government. Already in 1882 a section of the *Parti Ouvrier* led by Brousse³⁸⁰ had taken a new direction opposed to that of Guesde, which led to a split in the workers' party. The Broussistes, or Possibilists, championed the autonomy of local organisations over organisational centralisation ('freedom of criticism'³⁸¹ – that is to say, the relaxation of party discipline) as well as the restriction of the party programme to what could be achieved for the time being. This opened the door to all kinds of wangling with the ruling parties, which eventually went so far that – when the emergence of Boulanger created the impression that the republic was in danger, and when the old call for the unity of all republicans could be heard with renewed vigour – the Possibilists allied with the bourgeois republicans in a 'bloc', even allowing their publications to be paid for by secret government funds.

At this point, both the Blanquists and the Guesdists opposed these goings-on in the strongest terms, with the full approval of German social democracy. In 1889, the hostility between both camps was such that they were not even able to get together for an international congress. The Possibilists held their own congress, and German social democracy, just like most socialist organisations from the other countries, met together with the Marxists and the Blanquists.

When Boulangism blew over, so too did the tactic of seeking blocs. The Possibilists drew closer to the tactics of the proletarian class struggle, but they also lost a tremendous amount of votes. The tactic of seeking blocs caused universal disgust among the proletariat and brought the main section of the Possibilists under the leadership of Allemane; in 1890 they separated from Brousse to form their own group, named after their leader.³⁸² This group fell into the opposite extreme by underestimating parliamentarism. Alongside them, the two other socialist organisations regained increasing influence. The number of their parliamentary deputies grew, and attracted by this new power, numerous radical deputies joined them; however, they did so as 'independent' socialists, without affiliating to a party organisation.

The strength of each of the parties is shown by the following, if only approximately correct, number of votes to the Chamber elections (according to Kritchevsky in *Die Neue Zeit*):³⁸³

³⁷⁹ A reference to the populist movement spearheaded by the French general, Georges Ernest Boulanger (1837–91), which gained a mass following among those alienated by the parliamentary corruption of the Third Republic and which, somewhat strangely given its *revanchist* nationalism, enthused socialists such as Paul Lafargue.

³⁸⁰ Paul Brousse (1844–1912) was initially an anarchist who later embraced the politics of municipal and reformist socialism which was based on an alliance with the Radicals. At the Saint-Étienne Congress of the *Parti Ouvrier* he was part of the majority that formed the Socialist Federation of Socialist Workers of France, otherwise known as the Possibilists.

³⁸¹ 'Freedom of criticism' [*Meinungsfreiheit*] was a watchword of reformist socialism in the Second International. Both Lenin and Kautsky struggled against it; cf., for one example, the chapter devoted to this matter in Lenin's *What is to be Done?* (cf. Lih 2008, pp. 681–99).

³⁸² The Revolutionary Socialist Workers' Party, founded by Jean Allemane (1843–1935).

³⁸³ Kritchevsky 1898, p. 469.

	1893	1898
Guesdists	247,742	382,426
Allemanists	72,241	42,145
Blanquists	30,000	60,906
Independent Socialists	87,000	354,411
Total	436,983	839,888

A glowing increase, but worrying in that the lion's share of the votes fell to the independent socialists. The latest swing in the vote is also said to come from them.

The colossal growth of proletarian socialism made 'duping the workers' urgently necessary for the bourgeois republicans – more than ever before. Once again they found themselves compelled to save the republic and to fight the priests: but they had already given up on formally winning the workers from socialism through these means and shackling the workers to their tatty banner. They were compromised too much and had lost all credibility amongst the proletariat. There was now only one way of exploiting the proletariat's power for bourgeois ends – to win the socialist parliamentary deputies to carry out those bourgeois policies which the bourgeois republicans had already become too weak to carry out by themselves. Since they could no longer kill off socialism, they sought to tame it and make it subservient to them.

The Dreyfus affair created favourable soil for this experiment, the independent socialists the most suitable material for forming the new alliance. The goodies and influence which accrued to the deputies of ministerial socialism as a result were so seductive that even many a deputy who had until then belonged to a party organisation was tempted into saying adieu to party discipline and leaving his old organisation. The *Parti Socialiste Française*, founded in 1900 and now known as the *Jaurèsistes*, then created an organisation which included the 'independent' socialists, but actually made the parliamentary fraction independent of the party and the individual parliamentary deputies, something that the last congress only marginally altered.

The tendencies of the new socialist school of thought created in this way were well characterised by Millerand in a speech he gave on 3 December 1902 in Paris. At this point, Millerand was not yet the office hunter and careerist who had been expelled from the party, but was universally acclaimed – including by German revisionism – as an advocate of the 'new method' that was supposed to regenerate socialism. Among other things, he said:

In his remarkable work Socialisme d' opposition, Socialisme du Gouvernement,³⁸⁴ my friend Josef Sarraute demonstrated with great clarity and vigour how the idea of class struggle in today's society is as wrong as it is dangerous if it is isolated from its completion, from the solidarity of the classes ...

No money, no reforms. For it is also the imperative duty of socialist deputies to examine all chapters of the budget with scrupulous vigilance. And I think they will find it a little childish if, after discussing and voting on all these details, you reject the budget in its entirety or abstain from voting on it under the pretence of orthodoxy.

The growth of the country's productive forces and wealth, the exploitation of its natural resources and of its colonial possessions are questions that are just as vital for the workers.

Yes, the French people, all of the French people, have the same interest in France being rich, in being strong – not merely through its alliances, its military and financial power, but also through the prestige acquired in the world by a great nation which is completely peaceful and determined to only use its power in the service of justice.³⁸⁵

³⁸⁴ Sarraute 1901.

³⁸⁵ (Kautsky's footnote): Reprinted in Millerand 1903, p. 54.

Thus the physiognomy of socialist democracy is clearly characterised – it differs from all other parties in its primal concern for the workers' movement and economic emancipation, and is connected to the revolutionary tradition, republican institutions and the other republican parties through its clear understanding of political needs, which are its living conditions. It thus strives to unite in a common course of action those democrats that are better informed about labour questions and those socialists that have arrived at better insight into the obligations of a great democracy that wants to be vibrant.

To shed further light on these remarks would take too long, and is also unnecessary. Only one point should be stressed, as it can easily be misunderstood – the reference to the united interest of all classes in their country being rich. True, all classes have such an interest – but at the same time they do not actually have the *same* interest, for everybody understands something different by *wealth*. The wealth of the worker consists of high wages and cheap food, but this forcefully collides with the wealth of the capitalist, which consists of high profits and low wages as well as of property with high rents and high food prices. Or do we not want to grasp wealth socially, but *materially* instead, in the quantity of products? Well, overproduction is the problem of the modern economy, and bourgeois economists praise the cartels because they restrict the production of products and thus the production of wealth. And for the vast majority of French politicians, an abundance of food in France is synonymous not with the country's wealth, but its poverty. As Destutt de Tracy³⁸⁶ said nearly a hundred years ago, the rich countries are those in which the people are poor, and *vice versa*. The bourgeoisie saw class antagonisms better than the socialist minister who wanted to convince the proletarians of the solidarity of the classes, which would oblige them to colonialism and militarism – albeit with the caveat that the sword would only be drawn 'in the service of justice'. As if the Tsar would not deploy this phrase as soon as he started a war!

Millerand spoke even more clearly in front of the capitalists than he did in front of the workers. On 22 June 1900, in front of 600 capitalists who were gathered at the banquet of the Republican Committee for Trade and Industry, he declared:

*From now on we will no longer be arming the people and the bourgeoisie against each other, the workers and the Republican industrialists, who have the same origins. If the government had achieved nothing other than to prove the necessity of the alliance between bourgeois and worker, then it would have not only done the republic a service of which it could be proud, but the country too.*³⁸⁷

This policy is equivalent to what Mr Levy was describing in the book we have cited above in praise of Millerand, where he enthused about the alliance between Waldeck-Rousseau the opportunist and Millerand the socialist, writing:

This agreement demonstrates the political spirit which animates the two great fractions of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie: it testifies to a new, and we hope definitive, direction in our country's politics.

*From now on an unbreakable bond ties the republican bourgeoisie, which believes that the best way of ensuring social peace is the timely provision of necessary reforms, to that faction of the socialist party – by far its most important one – which, guided by the ideal of its principles, endeavours to gain from the republic an act of kindness and fairness for the people on a daily basis.*³⁸⁸

Ministerial socialism's attempts to galvanise the traditions of the Great Revolution were in keeping with this. The socialist movement was portrayed as the consummator of the revolution's principles. The programme agreed upon by the new party at the Tours Congress of 1902 said: 'Historically, and since the French Revolution, the workers have understood that *the declaration of human rights* will remain illusory without a social transformation of property'. Back then, Gabriel Deville said: 'Our principles are the true realisation of human rights ... I pledge myself to derive our whole theory from human rights'.

³⁸⁶ Antoine Louis Claude Destutt, comte de Tracy (1754–1836) was a French philosopher.

³⁸⁷ Quoted in Vérecque 1904 (Kautsky does not provide a page reference).

³⁸⁸ Ibid., p. Xi.

In this way, this newest phase of socialism, beyond the ‘outdated’ Marx, was founded on the human rights of 1789, on the thought processes of nascent liberalism. We have already acquainted ourselves with enough examples of the practice based on these theories.

But the more that such a strong section of the socialist deputies and their hangers-on in the constituencies drew closer to bourgeois democracy and fell for ministerialism, the more the backlash of this could be felt among the mass of the fighting proletariat.

It is worth noting that every time the tactics of state socialism or the merger of socialists and bourgeois democrats comes about, it is followed by an anti-statist and anti-parliamentary current. We have seen how in France, after the battle of June, Proudhon came to the fore amongst the working masses in the place of Louis Blanc. The bloody week of May not only put a stop to the Commune, but also to Proudhonism (at least amongst the militant socialist proletariat); that is to say, it put a stop to the belief that the proletariat could be emancipated through small, peaceful means and establish a new form of society. After the Commune, the terrorist anarchism of Bakunin blossomed in place of peaceful anarchism amongst the socialists in the Romance countries. Initially, Bakuninism was prone to putsches, but when the hopelessness of these became more and more apparent, it preached the individualist propaganda of the deed. When the French Possibilists then formed a bloc with the bourgeois republicans against Boulangism, the propaganda of the deed thrived as its counterpart. The period between 1892 (Ravachol)³⁸⁹ and 1894 (Caserio)³⁹⁰ is the high point of violent anarchism in France.

The powerful growth of Marxism phased this anarchism out, but socialist ministerialism allowed a new form of anti-parliamentarism to emerge, albeit in a far higher and more sympathetic form than the propaganda of the deed: the propagation of the *general strike* – not as a means of pressure which, if all other means fail, can complement and support parliamentarism, but as a normal means of action to render superfluous the proletariat’s participation in parliamentary struggles. From the outset, Jules Guesde could be counted among those who opposed the general strike in this sense, whereas it was precisely the later *Jaurèsistes* who flirted with it. The extremes met.

The roots of anti-parliamentary general strike-ism [*Generalstreiklerei*] can be found first in the strengthening of the trade-union movement, but also in the growing disgust at parliamentary corruption and the attendant parliamentary cretinism, which loses all feeling and all interest for the masses in struggle and does not measure its actions by how they affect these struggles, but by the influence they can have on parliamentary scheming. The last Bourges Congress³⁹¹ clearly showed the extent to which the mass of organised workers are imbued with an interest in the general strike and in revolutionary, anti-parliamentary action. These tendencies of the French trade unionists are deeply rooted in the circumstances around them. Such tendencies had to become stronger to the extent that ministerialism grew amongst the socialist deputies, because the contradiction between the delusions of the latter concerning the solidarity of the classes in the republic, and the reality of sharpening class antagonisms, which became most evident especially in the republic, became all the more glaring.

But even if the anti-parliamentarism of the general strike-ists is understandable, it is nonetheless completely wrong. Certainly, the socialist deputies in the Chamber are powerless without the pressure of the working masses from outside, but it is just as certain that the power of these masses are in need of a tool within parliament if this pressure is to develop

³⁸⁹ Ravachol (François Claudio Koenigstein, 1859–92) was a French anarchist who was guillotined after having been convicted of the targeted bombing of members of the French judiciary in protest at their treatment of the Communards of 1871.

³⁹⁰ Refers to the Italian anarchist, Sante Geronimo Caserio (1873–94), who assassinated Marie François Sadi Carnot, then President of the French Third Republic.

³⁹¹ A reference to the 1904 Bourges Congress of the CGT trade-union federation, which saw clashes between the ‘reformist’ supporters of Jaurès and the syndicalist delegates.

into legislative action, and this tool can only reliably and purposefully be formed by a strong socialist fraction in parliament. On the other hand, it is certain that the parliamentary system is a bourgeois means of rule which has the tendency to transform all deputies – even the anti-bourgeois ones – from servants of the people into servants of the bourgeoisie. However, the less the proletariat concerns itself with the parliamentarians, the greater this danger becomes and the more the proletariat gives the parliamentarians free rein by turning its back on them in anger and contempt.

The press works like parliamentarism. The press is also a capitalist instrument of rule, and everywhere it also exhibits the tendency to make journalists masters of the people and servants of capital. There is an innate tendency in journalism to act in the same corrupting fashion as parliamentarianism. But, of course, the general strike-ists will not preach the rejection of the press because of this. The press is one of the bourgeoisie's instruments of rule, but it is also an instrument of power of the proletariat, without which it cannot conduct its class struggle. Possessing its own strong press is one of the preconditions of the proletariat's conquest of political power. Here, the task of the proletariat does not lie in empty outrage about the venality of the press, but in subjecting it to proletarian discipline. The same is true of parliamentarism. As obvious as its dangers are, parliamentarism is necessary, and parliamentary cretinism, parliamentary corruption and impotence cannot be fought by trite indignation – they too can only be fought by subjecting the deputies to the discipline of the organised proletariat.

The cancerous sore of the socialist movement in France is the ‘freedom of criticism’ of the socialist journalists and deputies, their independence from the proletarian organisations and the possibility that their policies clash with these organisations. Only this made ministerialism possible. And if the mass of the organised proletariat is once again to gain confidence in the socialist parliamentary deputies, then this indiscipline must be eliminated – as well as the bloc tactics. During the merger, the *Confédération du Travail* should just as much be taken into consideration as the two political parties – the *Parti Socialiste de France* and the *Parti Socialiste Française*. Winning the masses in the *Confédération du Travail* is at the very least as necessary as merging the two political organisations. And uniting the latter would cause more harm than good if this happened under conditions which repelled the majority of the workers organised in the trade unions, instead of imbuing them with renewed confidence in the reliability of their representatives in parliament and in the party press.

Just like in 1848, today we are dealing with not two but three tendencies in the French socialist movement which exhibit some affinity to those of Blanqui, Louis Blanc and Proudhon. Yet they are no longer as divided as those tendencies were, and have more in common. The spokesmen of all three parties invoke Marx. Of course, two of these only do so to some extent and seek to ‘amend’ Marx – the one tendency through the immortal principles of 1789 and 1793, the other by placing economics over politics and underestimating the significance of state power, completely in the Proudhonist fashion. The *Parti Socialiste de France* retains the goal of conquering political power that it took from Blanquism. But in doing so it overcame the bias of original Blanquism and assimilated activity in trade unions and cooperatives, as well as participation in the legislative process for purposes of social reform. Socialist ministerialism means the revival and modernisation of Louis Blanc’s practical standpoint, which was amalgamated with Marxism – just as the anti-parliamentarism of the general strike-ists represents the transformation of Proudhonism from a petty bourgeois standpoint to a proletarian one, from a peaceful one to a revolutionary one.

In the interests of French socialism it is urgently necessary to abolish the one-sidedness of both of these tendencies. This can only occur on the basis of Marxism, towards which the resolutions of the Amsterdam congress have pointed all over again.

This is the current situation of socialism in France. I had to write at some length to uncover its historical roots, but I hope that I have succeeded in doing this, and that I have been able to show that the splits in French socialism are not, as some critics have explained with an air of superiority, to be found in the intolerance and jealousy of one or other of the

leading comrades, but arise from conditions themselves – conditions which date back to the Great Revolution and which, therefore, could not always be easily overcome.

I have hopefully also succeeded in showing that Guesde's propaganda against republican superstitions and against the traditions of the revolution is nothing unprecedented; that this was a necessity from the inception of socialist propaganda after the fall of the Commune on; and that German socialism had approved of this from the outset, because it sprang from transferring German class-struggle tactics and making them correspond to French conditions.

Finally, we have seen that criticising republican superstitions by no means leads to indifference towards the state form. Rather, precisely because we attribute great importance to the state form for the class struggle of the proletariat, we have to fight against a state form such as the Third Republic, in which the class currently ruling is armed with all the centralised monarchy's instruments of rule. Smashing these to bits, not strengthening them, is one of the most important tasks of French social democracy. The Third Republic, as presently constituted, offers no ground for the emancipation of the proletariat, but only for its oppression. It is only when the French state is transformed along the lines of the constitution of the First Republic and the Commune that it can become that form of the republic, that form of government, for which the French proletariat has been working, fighting and shedding blood for over one hundred and ten years.³⁹²

Introduction to *The Republic and Social Democracy in France* (1905)

by Ben Lewis

The Republic makes a number of points. First, Kautsky describes the various socialist positions on republicanism expressed at the Amsterdam Congress of 1904 and outlines the various attitudes towards republicanism in the socialist movement. He then presents an overview of French revolutionary history from 1789 to 1848. This is followed by an analysis of the French Second Republic and the various socialist groups operating within it. After an investigation of the structures of the Paris Commune of 1871, the text concludes with Kautsky's subjecting the judicial, constitutional, military, electoral and economic foundations of the Third Republic to a thoroughgoing critique, comparing and contrasting them to those of the Paris Commune.

The republican content in this series of articles is clearly influenced by Engels's comments on the Erfurt programme. Just as Engels argues in that text that the French Third Republic amounts to an 'empire without the emperor' and contrasts it to a genuinely democratic republic³⁹³, Kautsky identifies two types of republicanism: a bourgeois variety embodied in the French Third Republic, and the kind of radical, proletarian republic along the lines of the Paris Commune. Depending on their particular content, republics can thus form the basis of what Kautsky terms 'the class rule' of the bourgeoisie or the proletariat:

*Thus, the same republic which forms the basis for the emancipation of the proletariat can at the same time become the basis for the class domination of the bourgeoisie. This is a contradiction, but one which is no stranger than the contradictory role played by the machine in capitalist society: the machine is both the indispensable precondition for the liberation of the proletariat and at the same time the means of its degradation and enslavement.*³⁹⁴

Following on from this, Kautsky underlines how republican agitation should not cease with the formal removal or abdication of a monarch. Fully in the spirit of Engels's republican critique of the Erfurt programme, Kautsky argues that

³⁹² Many thanks to Jacob Richter for helping me to scan the original German text.

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ Part Two, p. 159 of this volume.

Marxist republican agitation must continue until the conditions have been created for the working class to take power.³⁹⁵ Such conditions are a far throw from those in the *Troisième République* in France and, as we shall see, amount to a state form in which the political demands of the Erfurt programme have been realised.

Kautsky argues that while the Third Republic should be defended from an overthrow from the right, at the same time the monarchical ‘means of rule’ of the Third Republic should be exposed and replaced by more widespread democracy and control from below. *The Republic* is thus an extended polemic against the French socialists who believe that it is desirable for socialists to assume governmental responsibility for this republic on the basis that ‘the republic as such’ signifies ‘a mitigation of the class rule of the bourgeoisie’. Kautsky describes such a position as a ‘republican superstition’, the notion – prevalent in the French and American republics – that because monarchical rule no longer exists, the people as a whole possess political power and classes and class rule have become a thing of the past. While the French liberals in particular would be keen to promote such a message, Kautsky argues that the entertainment of such illusions by self-described socialists is unforgivable. After all: ‘The main task of our American [and French] comrades today is to destroy this republican superstition’.³⁹⁶

Further, argues Kautsky, just as there are bourgeois republics and proletarian republics, there are also bourgeois-republican and proletarian-republican historical traditions in France. Given the importance Kautsky places on history, he is particularly irked by the attempts of liberal historians (and their socialist outriders) to portray the French Third Republic as the contemporary incarnation of a republican ideal that had come into existence in 1793; he argues that it is ludicrous to act as if ‘today’s Third Republic is a realisation of the republican ideal that the proletarian masses have had in their heads since 1793’.³⁹⁷ This is where his historical overview comes in. He analyses the radical democratic republican content – ‘the ideal of the democratic republic’ – ushered in by the revolutionary regimes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in France and analyses how counterrevolution undermined these radical democratic forms in order to disempower the people and restore authoritarian rule. Just as monarchical ‘means of rule’ had undermined and replaced, for example, the radical republic of 1848, the Paris Commune of 1871 had been overthrown and supplanted by essentially monarchical forms of rule in state and society. The difference this time around, however, was that this transformation occurred in the name of the *republic*. Understanding this basic fact, argues Kautsky, should underline how erroneous it is to argue that the Third French Republic was a genuinely republican and revolutionary state form, that ‘because it shares the same name then its essence is the same too.’³⁹⁸

As we have seen above, it is often claimed that Kautsky’s political thought was unaffected by the ‘revolutionary spirit’ of the Paris Commune of 1871. In what follows, we shall therefore focus on the sections of *The Republic* in which Kautsky describes the defining features of the Commune and compares and contrasts them to the French Third Republic which was ushered in following the Commune’s defeat. What did Kautsky understand as the ‘ideal of the democratic republic’, which ‘the Parisian proletariat of 1871 would seek to form into an instrument of its emancipation’?³⁹⁹ And how similar or dissim-

³⁹⁵ hereby providing a further refutation of his grandson John Kautsky’s claim that his grandfather failed ‘to think systematically about the nature of the future socialist society and of the governmental measures that would be required to convert capitalism into socialism’ (Kautsky 1994, p. 16).

³⁹⁶ Part Two, p. 163 of this volume.

³⁹⁷ Part Two, p. 257 of this volume.

³⁹⁸ Ibid.

³⁹⁹ Part Two, p. 199 of this volume.

ilar are Kautsky's arguments to the views of Marx and Engels on the Paris Commune? These are the questions to which we must now turn.

After describing the course of events which led to the formation of the Paris Commune, Kautsky extensively quotes from Marx's *The Civil War in France* (1871) in order to highlight what he – following Marx – views as the political features of the Commune that distinguish it as a revolutionary government: the replacement of the standing army by a people's militia; universal suffrage; public servants working for an average worker's wage; the disestablishment of the Church and a secular state; the election of judges on short terms of service and self-government in the localities.⁷ In other words, there is clear reference to Marx's criteria for working-class government and the conclusion Marx drew from the experience of 1871 – that the existing state machinery must be completely overhauled, not given a socialist gloss. Kautsky is quite explicit on this matter and, paraphrasing Marx, pinpoints the central pillars of the state machinery which must be overhauled by working-class government:

*The conquest of state power by the proletariat therefore does not simply mean the conquest of the government ministries, which then, without further ado, administers the previous means of rule – an established state church, the bureaucracy and the officer corps – in a socialist manner. Rather, it means the dissolution of these institutions. As long as the proletariat is not strong enough to abolish these institutions of power, then taking over individual government departments and entire governments will be to no avail. A socialist ministry can at best exist temporarily. It will be worn down in the futile struggle against these institutions of power, without being able to create anything permanent.*⁴⁰⁰

The defeat and suppression of the Commune, argues Kautsky, entailed the overthrow of this (genuinely) republican form of rule, so that the republic became 'a tool of bourgeois class rule'.⁴⁰¹ It forced the bourgeoisie to reign over the proletariat itself – an unpleasant task, which the bourgeoisie had previously left to the monarchy.

Thus there could be no talk of an unbroken republican thread between 1789 and the establishment of the Third Republic. There was a radical break, embodied in the 'bloody week' (*la semaine sanglante*) of May 1871, in which thousands of Communards were killed, arrested or forced into exile.

Kautsky argues that here French history effectively repeated itself, with a kind of semi-monarchy rising from the ruins of a defeated revolutionary republic much like in 1814 and 1848. For although this time around the restoration was unsuccessful (something Kautsky ascribes to the petty squabbles between the pretenders to the French throne), and although there was no *de jure* restoration of the monarchy, the monarchical institutions and state forms were *de facto* retained in the new Third Republic. Its constitution had 'taken over all the institutions of the monarchy which the three great French revolutions attempted to destroy.'⁴⁰²

Not only does Kautsky's *The Republic* recapitulate Engels's ideas on the democratic republic as 'a means of the emancipation of the proletariat',⁴⁰³ Kautsky also explicitly uses the criteria for socialist government outlined in Marx's *The Civil War in France* as a foil with which to highlight the gulf between the Paris Commune and the Third Republic. What follows is a devastating critique of the Third Republic which, while more developed and thorough than anything Marx and Engels wrote on the subject, is fully in line with their arguments on the state form.

⁴⁰⁰ Marx 1871 (cited by Kautsky in Part Two, pp. 197–99 of this volume).

⁴⁰¹ Part Two, p. 177 of this volume.

⁴⁰² Part Two, p. 184 of this volume.

⁴⁰³ Part Two, p. 210 of this volume.

Marx and Engels placed great importance on the existence of universal male suffrage in the Commune (female suffrage was decreed but never achieved in the Commune's short life-span). Yet in the Third Republic, argues Kautsky, the distribution of elected delegates from the various French *départements* is skewed in favour of the agrarian and reactionary provinces at the expense of the industrial and revolutionary ones – a system which ensures that the masses of Paris ‘only have one-sixth of the franchise of those living in the Hautes Alpes.’⁴⁰⁴ Unlike in the Commune, therefore, suffrage is far from universal and moreover is designed to disenfranchise the revolutionary proletariat as much as possible. Another anti-democratic trait of the Third Republic is the fact that the President has at his disposal a wide variety of military, executive and fiscal powers which go far beyond even ‘those accepted by the reactionary chamber of 1843.’⁴⁰⁵ Moreover, during the Third Republic the President’s term of office was extended from four to seven years, further eroding collective democratic control from below.

What of the Commune’s secularism highlighted by Marx? Kautsky makes the case that the Third Republic has retained the Concordat concluded between Bonaparte and Pope Pius VII in 1801: the short-lived separation of Church and state in the Commune is abolished and the influence of the clergy thereby increased.⁴⁰⁶ Things are not much better in the judiciary or the state bureaucracy either: ‘There is no trace of professional judges being elected by the people. The Third Republic has made the Empire’s entire judicial equipment its own, including the position of state prosecutor, which dominates judicial proceedings’.⁴⁰⁷ Moreover, the President of the Third Republic is able to appoint all important civil servants: unlike in the Commune, there is no direct control from below.

Concluding, Kautsky then turns his attention to what he deems the most important of the features of class rule identified by Marx, the army.⁴⁰⁸ While the Third Republic passed legislation on the need for every able Frenchman to carry out compulsory military service, the organisation of the armed forces is far removed from the popular militia of the Commune. He who performs military service:

is not an armed citizen trained in the use of weapons. Just like the old professional soldier, he lives in barracks, cut off from the people. Outside of his working life in the military, he is subject to a particular discipline and jurisdiction enforced by a privileged caste of officers who are above.

⁴⁰⁴ Part Two, p. 161 of this volume.

⁴⁰⁵ Part Two, p. 203 of this volume.

⁴⁰⁶ Part Two, p. 201 of this volume.

⁴⁰⁷ Part Two, p. 171 of this volume.

⁴⁰⁸ The fate of the November Revolution also revolved around developments within the armed forces. See Haffner 2008 [1979], pp. 95–108 for an account of the impact of revolutionary developments within the army and navy.

Supplemental Readings

Section VI: Anti-Coalitionism in Liberal Constitutional Regimes

The Dreyfus Affair and the Millerand Case - Rosa Luxemburg (short)

A shorter work on the Dreyfus Affair, the Millerand debacle, and the French Third Republic in general. Social democrats must take advantage of all political crises to spread the good news of socialism and build towards taking power.

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1899/11/dreyfus-affair.htm>

The Socialist Crisis in France - Rosa Luxemburg (medium)

A longer work on the Dreyfus Affair, the Millerand debacle, and the French Third Republic in general. Lo and behold, the real threat to French democracy is the liberal constitutional order.

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1901/socialist-crisis-france/index.htm>

Section VII

Fraction Politics

Section VII: Fraction Politics

Summary

In this section, we cover the *principles* of revolutionary Social Democratic electoral strategy. First, we begin with the conceptual foundations. Then, we go into arguments of the abstentionist left and the reformist right. Lastly, we will look at historical examples, their tactics and missteps, as well as cases which are more ambiguous.

1. Principles

The party of the fighting proletariat is the only party capable of leading the fight for democracy for all people. As a party of the class, representatives of the party do not simply reflect the interests of their particular constituency, regardless of their class position—they represent the interests of the proletariat as a class for itself.

In order to represent the interests of the proletariat, the fraction of the proletarian party's representatives must consistently be opposed to a liberal-constitutional coalition since, as described in Section VI, liberal-constitutionalism is a form of political rule of the bourgeoisie. This means the party fraction must work against bourgeois legality while participating in parliamentary struggles.

The fraction and the proletarian party have a different relationship than that of bourgeois parties and their politicians. The bourgeois politician is subject to the discipline of elite cliques (capitalists, lobbyists, high-dollar donors, professionals, etc.). The revolutionary social democrat is disciplined by the whole mass of the fighting proletariat organized into the class party. The working class that is not organized into a political party cannot meaningfully elect or discipline politicians to effectively represent their class interests. It follows that the proletarian party requires unity of the fraction as the organized contingent involved in parliamentary work rather than aligned individual politicians. Despite having a tightly-disciplined parliamentary fraction, it should also allow and promote open criticism of individual representatives or the fraction as a whole. Since the party of the fighting proletariat fights for the democratization and common good of all society, and is not beholden to the control of small cliques, it is essential that the party criticizes and disciplines its representatives openly for all to see.

Demands put forward by a revolutionary parliamentary fraction followed strict guidelines. They must not put forward an economically impossible demand, rather they should demand economic measures that are *politically impossible* for the bourgeois government to oblige. However, when putting forward these proposals it is essential that they do not mislead the working class by claiming that economic reforms alone constitute movement towards socialism. If popular economic reforms are part of the working class movement's agenda, revolutionary social democrats must incorporate these "abridged" demands into a fuller program for working class rule.

2. The Development of Parliamentarianism and our General Strategy

In order to be an effective actor in parliament, there was requisite knowledge of law, history, and economics. This privileged those with access to education: the professional classes, the bourgeoisie, and landed nobility.

Meanwhile, the laboring classes in the countryside are consumed by the parochialism of town and village politics. The peasantry is bound to the land; the petit bourgeoisie work for themselves and are therefore direct competitors with each other. They must both produce and sell their goods, leaving little free time for politics. Often, these classes cannot organize beyond local associations. Major national events can disrupt this calm localism and incite loose national organization, but these are short-lived. The political demands of these classes are fundamentally reactionary, since they cannot be enacted without undoing the development of capitalism. So, the peasantry and petit bourgeoisie remain hangers-on of the parties of the bourgeoisie and landed nobility.

As the proletariat develops, it is uniquely suited to form a political party for its own class interests. Workers move from the villages and towns into industrial centers and perform cooperative labor. After the working day is done, the (largely male) working class has the free time to study their political conditions. Since capitalism has an international dimension, they associate with workers in other localities and nations through traveling between industrial centers. They develop economic class organization like trade unions, bringing them into the economic dimension of the class struggle – the inverse relationship to the petit bourgeoisie's necessary competition with each other, the proletariat's cooperation is inherent in their work *and* advances their class interests.

Through the proletariat's development of economic organization, they learn how to develop a political party. They learn the methods of organization, eloquence and persuasion of their fellow workers, and political education through both practical work and self-study. Through the discipline of self-organization and cooperative wage labor, the working class learns its own discipline. This is fundamentally different from the class discipline of the bourgeoisie, which relies on competition and market forces. The party of the fighting proletariat does not simply elect its representatives; it monitors them and expects them to follow discipline. Workers also receive legal training through navigating the legal regime of the state (along with its extralegal repressive elements.) Here, the working class learns "to exploit every little right that these laws contain."

But the working class is not content to simply exploit loopholes indefinitely. In order to genuinely represent their class interests, the party of the fighting proletariat must become a revolutionary party that seeks to overturn bourgeois domination. The mandate of a social democratic deputy is stronger than that of the bourgeoisie or landed nobility, since the socialist representative becomes a representative of all working and oppressed peoples. The party of the proletariat alone can be counted on to not give in to corruption and betrayal, and must win hegemony over all people as the vanguard fighter for democracy.

To contrast with the earliest forms of suffrage, as the working class developed an organized political form, the bourgeoisie now seeks to restrict suffrage through both legal and extralegal means. Despite the advantages the propertied classes have over the proletariat, the social democratic party seeks to use parliament in order to oppose the bourgeoisie in its own halls of power. The bourgeoisie relies on the weakness of the parliamentary system. The most important battles for the working class are freedom of association and the democratic rights of the class, including the fight for universal, equal, direct and secret suffrage using all necessary forms of struggle to achieve these rights.

3. Parliamentarianism of the "Left" and Right

While writing this Kautsky largely takes his model in a situation of relative social peace. This party would slowly build strength for the eventual seizure of power and implementation of socialism and questions of immediate seizure beyond the ballot box simply didn't arise.

For the Bolsheviks in 1905 the situation was different; they were faced with a situation, that of an ongoing revolution. Lenin argued that in a revolutionary situation, the organized party of the proletariat must lead the battle for democracy. If, in the midst of a revolutionary situation, a sham democracy is implemented the party of the fighting proletariat must actively boycott such a body and continue the fight for democracy to its end. Only then can we recall our members. But if this revolution is in a clear downturn, the party must enter the undemocratic parliament to continue its revolutionary agitation. When doing so, it is essential that the party fraction does not liquidate itself into a broad coalition of other classes.

Against Lenin, several trends on the "left" and the right were prominent in the RSDLP. The debates intensified in 1908 as the Third Duma elections took place.

Following the boycotts of the First Duma and the restriction of franchise after the Stolypin coup, some Bolsheviks argued that Russian Social Democrats should boycott the Third Duma. Bogdanov argued that the proletariat was still gaining strength and political consciousness, therefore participation in the Third Duma would signal that the revolutionary

period was over. Lenin countered that the revolutionary period had already been waning – strikes did not call for boycott or revolution, and the counterrevolutionary forces were growing. The Fourth Conference of the RSDLP settled this matter, and Lenin's position won out. The RSDLP would participate in the Third Duma.

After the Boycott proposal was defeated at the Fourth Conference, Boycottism transformed into Recallism (*Otzovism*, from "removing") led by a former Second Duma deputy, Aleksinskij. He recalled his experience in the Duma, unable to meaningfully affect the outcome of the liberals or Black Hundreds initiatives, and considered it a waste of effort. He went further: the RSDLP's participation in that ill-fated Duma led to a loss of mass support for the Social Democrats. Since the Third Duma deputies were already capitulating, his solution was clear. The RSDLP must send an ultimatum to the fraction, subordinating them to the Central Committee in their parliamentary and outside action. If they refused, they should be removed from the Duma immediately.

Another tendency, the Ultimatists, argued against Recallism. While Bogdanov supported presenting the fraction with an ultimatum, he disagreed with removing the deputies from the Duma. Recallism would split the party when it needed to exist when the revolutionary moment appeared. Recallists overestimated the importance and power of the Duma fraction and did not first attempt to influence and direct them.

In sharp contrast Menshevik position was that of "rational opposition": a democratic opposition of the whole people in a coalition of Trudoviks, Kadets, and Octobrists. In other words, the Mensheviks supported a liberal-constitutional coalition in order to oppose autocracy and the Black Hundreds. At the same time, Liquidationism, a tendency within the Mensheviks, was gaining influence within the Party. Liquidationists held that with the new parliamentary opportunities provided by the Duma, the party should dissolve illegal party organizations that had cropped up during 1905, up to and including the regular distribution of illegal agitation against the Tsar. Lenin supported Plekhanov's partyist Menshevik politics over the dominant Liquidationist tendency, believing that the victory of Plekhanov would lead to a return of Mensheviks to the RSDLP.

These debates came to a head at the Fifth Conference of the RSDLP in 1909 where Lenin won against both the Liquidationists and the *Forward* (*Vpered*) group, a motley group of Ultimatists, Recallists, Boycottists, and others. [Lenin presents his views on the Fifth Conference in "On the Road" and, in a response to Martov's view, "The Aim of the Proletarian Struggle in Our Revolution"] Despite the clear victory, the Duma fraction refused to participate in the Conference or follow the resolutions passed.

The plenary meeting of *Proletary* (one of the key Bolshevik publications) was another resounding defeat for the *Forward* group – Recallism and Ultimatism were condemned and a campaign was initiated to educate the Bolshevik rank-and-file away from those tendencies. Some of the Leninist supporters compromised on various resolutions in order to seek unity, but ultimately sought to remove these political tendencies from their faction. The Party necessarily needed to hold a wide variety of perspectives, but factions of a party had the right to reign in their members.

4. Growing Pains and the Problem of Constituency

To see how these theoretical positions worked out in practice we look at the history of the actual history of the SPD in period of rapid transition. The entirety of this passage occurs under the Anti-Socialist Law. In 1878, Bismarck's government enacted these laws which criminalized trade unions and Social Democratic organizations, newspapers, and the political party. Immediately, the Social Democrats dissolved their party organizations and moved their newspaper operations to exile. Since the law had a loophole which protected parliamentary speech, the Social Democrats, running as independents, used election campaigns and Reichstag speeches to continue their agitation. The national leadership of the underground Social Democratic party became the elected Reichstag fraction.

After a few years of heavier repression, the Bismarck government moved to a softer approach. As a part of this mild practice, outright repression of trade union organization was less common.

By 1883, the disbanded trade unions started to grow again into local craftsmen's associations (*Fachvereine*). The first of these associations had no connection to the Social Democrats, so there was hope by the government they would be politically neutral. Despite this neutrality, organized workers within *Fachvereine* gravitated to the SDAP. Despite forming national confederations, these were *local* organizations with independent policies in each association and uneven levels of Social Democratic influence across location and craft. There was also a generational gap between the *Fachvereine* and the SDAP leadership, meaning the newly-organized workers politically came into the world as Bismarck was sponsoring welfare legislation. Despite Bismarck's support for state-controlled welfare, mutual assistance funds were highly restricted to avoid the SDAP's potential influence.

In the lead-up to the 1884 elections, the Central Election Committee produced a document detailing the campaign strategy of Social Democrats in the 1884 election. This was meant to appeal to the broad spectrum within the party, intermingling ideas of the Marxist, Lassalleian and democratic traditions. It did not endorse vote trading, but did offer directives on supporting other candidates in the run-off. Non-socialist candidates and parties who were against extending the Anti-Socialist Law, restricting universal suffrage, and expanding the repressive apparatus of the state were acceptable. At this time, Bebel considered there was a change from the earlier analysis of all other parties acting as "one reactionary mass" against the handful of socialists ("On The Political Position of Social-Democracy") – especially as the new liberal Free Thought Party emerged and took on the fire of Bismarck, who considered the SDAP to be a lesser evil.

The position of Bismarck led to confusing positions on vote-trading, however. Conservatives, seeking working class support, endorsed SDAP candidates against radical liberals in the run-off elections. This allowed liberal parties to give a black eye to the SDAP, pointing to their Lassalleian past and calling their power a "gift to reactionaries." On the other side, some SDAP Moderates participated in vote-trading deals with National Liberal candidates. The justification here was both to reduce the impact of reactionaries within the Reichstag and win more seats for SDAP deputies.

Alongside the national Reichstag elections, the SDAP participated in municipal council and state diet elections. These were important to the grassroots of the party, especially during the illegal period. Where a strong working-class base did not exist, the SDAP appealed to the lower middle classes with democratic traditions to elect them. Once in office, local councilmembers felt the need to pursue "responsible" cooperation for local governance, leading to Fabian-esque policy.

Political independence of the class party, seeking to carry out the historic mission of the proletariat to its end. This is different from seeing the party as representative of particular constituencies, whether localities, fragments of the class, other classes or some combination thereof. The party of the fighting proletariat can appeal to members of other classes as the leaders in the fight for democracy and freedom for all people; however, this appeal is based on the fundamental class interests of the proletariat, not those of the peasantry or middle classes.

The (unsanctioned) vote-trading blurred the line of the anti-coalitional position of the class party and the specific actions of the electoral SDAP bringing together a coalition of constituents across class lines. This tension would rise as the SDAP began parliamentary work after the elections. Taking municipal offices also represented a fundamental shift, where the party of the fighting working class had responsibility for the constituency under its care which necessarily placed it in coalition with different class forces.

When the 1884 election results came out the SDAP won 24 deputies (about 550,000 votes, 9.71% of the vote share) up from 13 deputies in 1881. Now, given their larger delegation and the new Reichstag composition of liberals, monarchists, and Catholics, the SDAP could meaningfully influence the results of votes for the first time. This new stage influenced SDAP leaders to feel a responsibility for their electorate and consider a positive policy instead of their previous intransigent opposition.

5. Positive Parliamentary Policy and Steamship Subsidy Crisis

The 1884 Reichstag Fraktion was heavily dominated by the Moderate faction, with 18 deputies, over the 6 Radicals.

The Fraktion was large enough for its members to be placed on legislative committees, which required technical skill, patience, and quiet work. A Moderate deputy, Hasenclever, was even added to the committee that determined the legislative agenda and procedure.

The Moderates had a broad approach to positive policy. They would accept minor reforms for workers that were presented by other parties. If it supported German workers, the moderates did not care if it was non-socialist legislation. Another question was on reducing service since abolition of the military was impossible; deputies campaigned on abolition of the military, and abstention or voting no on military budgets.

The Radicals had a different approach. They did not put forward policy that would be economically impossible, but remained true to socialist principles. Reforms like 8-10 hour working day, factory legislation, and social insurance were acceptable bills. They did not expect these proposals to pass, and that was fine – the parliamentary role was still largely educational for the working class as a whole.

These differences in approach came to a head in 1884 when Bismarck introduced legislation to fund steamship lines into Africa, the Pacific, and Australia. This corresponded with the expansion of German colonialism into West Africa, New Guinea. Bismarck, however, claimed that the steamship subsidy was not directly connected to colonial policy.

The fraction was split in the committee hearing. Dietz was an outspoken supporter, accepting Bismarck's argument that this was not a part of the German colonial project and projecting hopes that the steamship subsidy would create good paying jobs in the shipyards. Bebel launched into a full critique in committee. Alongside Bebel's critique, the *Sozialdemokrat* published articles tying the steamship line to German colonial policy and letters from rank-and-file members expressing displeasure with the Moderates stance. The Moderates, including Auer, were angry at this public criticism – they disagreed that the fraction needed to present a unified and intransigent opposition to the government.

Engels put forward a proposal to divert funding to support public works in the underdeveloped countryside and workers cooperatives to perform the labor. He did not expect it to pass, which would allow the Moderates to maintain their pride, and thought it would *also* present principles for the gradual socialization of society. Bernstein, Bebel, and other Radicals rejected the proposal. Bernstein argued that voting against the steamship subsidy was a matter of principle to oppose colonialism and the fraction needed to clearly vote no.

The fraction ultimately decided to put forward an amendment mandating all steamship lines would use newly-constructed ships using German shipyards and disassociating the lines from the Samoan and African lines. This proposal also did not imply that its passage would in any way move Germany towards socialism. Arguments from deputies were mostly centred around high unemployment in shipyards, but Bismarck refused to build a new fleet of ships. The proposal had no way of passing and, when it failed, the entire fraction voted against the steamship subsidy.

6. Russian Social Insurance

Finally, we return to Russia in 1912 – just off the heels of the intra-Bolshevik debate and the Prague conference (described earlier in "a faction is not a party") – to see the RSDLP's intervention in the Law on Sickness Insurance.

The law was created in 1912, replacing the paltry 1903 accident insurance and in some ways responding to the demands of 1905 for full social insurance. The specific mechanism created was a joint worker-employer board (*kassa*, pl. *kassy*) that was elected at the factory level, with provincial level offices dominated by the government. Each *kassa* functioned according to their local charter, which was voted on as they came into being. The regime specifically wanted to "pour calm and confidence into the factory" through the reform, distracting from the revolutionary movement. Despite this, both the government and Social Democrats knew the law was an unprecedented expansion of democracy allowing for worker organization.

Both the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks agreed to participate in *kassy* elections, and agreed to particular deeply-felt campaign slogans: social insurance for all workers, compensation at full wage, self-administration of *kassy*, ending worker contributions to insurance, and replacing the factory-based *kassy* with geographic *kassy*.

The working class responded unevenly to the *kassy* elections. In general, apathy and the boycottist mood was dominant amongst the working class; workers refused to follow their employer's directive to choose representatives for elections. Simultaneously, employer and government interference in elections was common and worker representatives who were elected were often harassed or banned from meeting. Some craftsmen were more inclined to utilize the *kassy* to advance their fellow workers' interests, like the printers who won a craft-wide *kassa* through charter negotiations.

Mensheviks approached the *kassy* using a model of legality. The goal of participation was agitation in order to win further legal reforms, up to and including the campaign slogans. They did not see socialism as possible until the future, so they relied on demands that could be made under Tsarist law. In the immediate term, Mensheviks attempted to "squeeze" the law in order to win as many immediate demands as possible. This led to their support of craft-wide *kassy* as a stepping stone to the not-yet-possible territorial *kassy*. Initially, the Menshevik position was hegemonic among workers who participated in the *kassy* elections.

The Bolshevik rank-and-file was slower to move towards the faction's stated position, with many locals initially supporting the worker boycotts. Once they began to intervene. While the Mensheviks attempted to "squeeze" the law to win immediate demands, the Bolsheviks used the *kassy* to prove the insufficiency of Tsarist law itself. The indictment was especially clear after Bolsheviks added to the jointly-agreed slogans above; the "unabridged" demands including immediate territorial *kassy* and obligatory medical care provided at the employer's expense⁴⁰⁹.

The 1912 Lena massacre shifted popular consciousness against the Tsarist state yet again. Despite the slow start the Bolshevik position quickly grew to be hegemonic – even the printers and others demanding craft-wide *kassy* moved to demanding an all-Petrograd *kassa*.

As a result, the Bolsheviks were able to elect their candidates to the national *kassa* against the Mensheviks. Mensheviks wanted the national *kassa* representatives to be subordinated to the "collective of the sickness *kassy*", i.e. a constituency of a body of elected worker representatives. The Bolsheviks, on the other hand, directed the national representatives to follow "Marxist aims" – to follow discipline to the party of the proletariat. The national representatives then announced the Bolshevik's national *kassy* journal (*Voprosy strakovaniia*) would be the official press organ for the workers representatives in the national *kassa*.

Bolsheviks used participation in *kassy* elections to transform the spontaneous "still-not-banished boycottism" of the workers into an indictment of the rule of law of the Tsarist state.

Study Questions

*Independent Study questions are italicized

409 This was consistent with the Prague Conference's resolution on the RSDLP's attitude towards the *kassy*:

"(5) Should the Duma Bill become law in spite of the protest of the class-conscious proletariat, the Conference summons the comrades to make use of the new organisational forms which it provides (workers' sick benefit societies) to carry on energetic propaganda for Social-Democratic ideas in these organisational units and thus turn the new law, devised as a means of putting new chains and a new yoke upon the proletariat, into a means of developing its class-consciousness, strengthening its organisation and intensifying its struggle for full political liberty and for socialism." "The Party's Attitude To The Workers' State Insurance Duma Bill"

1. Why does Kautsky argue that the industrial proletariat is uniquely suited for parliamentary activity and a unified political party? How does he think parliamentarians are to be kept “under control”?
2. Kautsky argues against a strategy aimed at “eliminating the representative system.” What does he pose as an alternate strategic orientation toward representative democracy?
3. Liebknecht writes: “The stupid and cruel outrages perpetrated by the police politicians, the encroachments of the Anti-Socialist Law, the Draconian law, the law against parties that advocate revolution may evoke feelings of contempt and pity; but the enemy who proffers us his hand for an electoral agreement and worms his way into our ranks as a friend and brother is the enemy, the only enemy we have to fear.” Why is this true?
4. Why does Liebknecht claim that “the honestly liberal and democratic elements of the bourgeoisie gravitate more and more towards the side of the Social Democracy”? Is this relationship (and the broader historical context he presents) still relevant within the DSA?
5. What compromises does Liebknecht argue are inevitable and that to reject would be “unscientific folly”?
6. Why does Liebknecht argue that “The advocates of compromise tactics overestimate the value of parliamentary activity and parliamentary representation”?
7. What argument does Lenin make against boycotting participation in the parliamentary system, and under what circumstances?
8. What does Lenin argue is the correct approach for engaging with “a Cadet proposal for ‘extending the budgetary powers of the Duma’”? How is this advice relevant (or not)?
9. *During the Third Duma period, what does Lenin think is the relationship between electeds (intellectuals) and the Social-Democratic party? How is this relevant (or not) today?*
10. What does Lenin argue is the difference between a workers’ party and a group of intellectuals?
11. Summarize Lenin’s “Practical Instructions on Voting for the Budget by the Social Democratic Group in the Duma” and explain how it is relevant (or not) today.
12. *How should socialist parties operate within existing political institutions?*
13. *What purpose does a minimum-maximum program serve when operating within existing political institutions?*

Parliamentarianism and Democracy, Chapter 12: Parliamentarism and the Working Classes

by Karl Kautsky

When we maintain that parliamentarism and parliamentarism are two things and that the form of parliamentarism is a weapon that can serve – and has served – the most varied parties and classes, we do not actually want to say that the essence of parliamentarism favours certain layers of the population and puts others at a disadvantage.

We have seen that a parliament must fulfil functions which are not that straightforward. The office of a parliamentarian necessitates specific knowledge and skills, as does every position in the modern division of labour; it requires eloquence and broad horizons – an ability to understand relations of general significance nationally and internationally. Finally, it requires a certain degree of legal, economic and historical education – at least for those parliamentarians who want to be more than just voting fodder.

Parliamentarians are therefore primarily recruited from those classes whose occupations entail the achievement of the above-mentioned preconditions, such as lawyers, professors, journalists, officials and so on – or from those classes who have enough leisure time at their disposal for their members, if they so wish, to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills, such as large capitalists, large land owners and the like. In this respect, the view that parliamentarism is only a representation of the bourgeoisie – in the broadest sense of the term – thus had a certain justification.

It had a certain justification back when Rittinghausen was developing his ideas on direct legislation by the people. It no longer has this justification. For between then and now there was the period of the most tremendous upsurge of the proletariat.

As with the petty bourgeoisie and the peasantry, the preconditions for parliamentarians to emerge from amongst the ranks of the proletariat were absent. But this changed in the course of the labour movement.

We have seen how the individual village communities and the small towns became isolated from each other by economic relations. Each formed a community in itself. To a large extent, this isolation continues to this day. The development of the capitalist mode of production and the capitalist state, militarism, state taxes, railways and newspapers have indeed awakened a national consciousness and an interest in state affairs in the countryside and in the small towns. But nonetheless, local considerations are still predominant in the public life of the rural communities and small towns; only during particularly exciting developments such as general elections, the outbreak of a war and the like does a more lively political life develop, a merger into parties or a connection to one or other of the large state parties.

But aside from such moments, it is rare that this leads to permanent practical participation in politics or constant activity in continuous political organisations. In quiet times, politics in the village and the small town is restricted to pot casters in the pub.

Things are better when it comes to the petty bourgeoisie in the cities. They are in the flux of great political struggles. They cannot escape the influence of these struggles and are driven to participate in state politics constantly. However, they too find it difficult to join together in lasting political organisations. For they too are isolated from each other as a result of their work. Each works for himself on his own in a dwarf enterprise. But not only do they work with each other, they also work against each other; competition forces each of them to advance at the cost of his comrades. And everywhere, both in the town and in the country, there are limitless variations of property and income between them; the wealthier petty bourgeois looks down with contempt on the one in a worse situation and the latter looks up enviously at the former. All this provides significant difficulties when it comes to the unification of the entire petty bourgeoisie or the peasantry into a

united, large organisation. It is not easy for these classes to go beyond guild associations or local associations that serve their momentary interests.

By contrast, industry drives the wage workers into a few centres in their hundreds of thousands, where they work with each other in the same conditions. The vast majority of them cannot improve their situation at the expense of their comrades, but only in association with them. While the working conditions of the peasants and craftsmen work against their organisation, those of the waged workers virtually drive them towards joining together in large masses. Thus there is the contradiction, to which we have already alluded in this pamphlet, between the disjointedness of the peasants and the petty bourgeois, which is difficult to overcome, and the sense of solidarity and discipline of the waged workers.

However, activity in these organisations necessarily creates the qualities required by a parliamentarian: eloquence, broad horizons, an understanding of organisational and administrative matters and legal training. The workers active in their organisations must thank the authorities for this latter quality, who everywhere view the merger of workers with hostility and who deploy everything in their power within the law – and often outside of it too – in order to hinder and to suppress the workers' organisations. Here it becomes most clearly evident to the workers that a law not only revolves around its principles but also its wording; here they learn all the tricks of jurisprudence; there they will be driven to study the laws and their spirit, as well as to exploit every little right that these laws contain for them and to reject any notion of illegality that the law would wish to inflict upon them.

But the class position of the proletarian not only allows him to arrive at parliamentary capabilities more easily than the petty bourgeois, or the peasant in particular, it also makes it easier for him to acquire a general political education. The peasant is bound to the soil. He is unaware of the world beyond his immediate surroundings. The wage worker is detached from the soil; he wanders, becomes acquainted with foreign countries and even if he stays at home then he works together with foreigners.

This alone expands his horizons, frees him from many prejudices and teaches him important skills. But there is another factor of greater importance.

The craftsman and the peasant are not merely workers, but also merchants. When they clock off work, they are not yet free men: their business keeps them even then; they must use the little bit of brain energy that is left after work for careful calculations and considerations – and the worse things are for them, the more they must do so.

The wage worker – especially the male wage worker – is a free man after he has done his work, his thought can turn to the world as a whole. And the more he has understood the solidarity with his comrades, the more he realises that he is unable to improve his situation as an individual, the easier it is for him to take a lively interest in questions that concern his class as a whole and its position in society.

It is a fact recognised even by bourgeois writers that general political, but especially economic education, in worker circles is much more widespread not only than in peasant and petty bourgeois circles, but also in bourgeois circles. Through these educational circles, the labour movement trains orators and politicians who are quite capable of outperforming the bourgeois parliamentarians and of bringing to bear not only the interests of the workers but also the general interests of social development as a whole. The fighting proletariat stepped into the ranks of those classes from which the parliamentarians are recruited.

Wherever there is a developed labour movement and universal suffrage, practical participation in parliamentary work ceases to be a monopoly of the propertied classes.

But not only does the fighting proletariat produce parliamentarians. It also knows how to keep them under its control. And that is even more important than the first point. Nothing is more erroneous than the view that the interests of certain layers of the population can only be represented in parliament by representatives of those same layers, and that this kind of representation ensures the best guarantee of the interests at hand. Many a politician from a bourgeois background can

be counted among the best pioneers of the working class; and many a worker has betrayed his class. A class can only be sure that in parliament its interests are being constantly protected in the most decisive and, at any given moment in time, most appropriate manner if it is not content to elect those representatives to parliament but also monitors and influences their parliamentary activity constantly.

The petty bourgeois and small peasants do not find it easy to do this. Wherever they form the mass of voters, they are therefore mainly deceived – and the more powerful parliament is, the more that they will be deceived. Despite what all the Manchester men say, the contemporary state is an enormous economic operation and the state's influence on economic life as a whole is already today immense. In a centralised state ruled through parliament the whole of this economic power, decisions not only regarding class interests, but also directly regarding thousands of private interests, lies to a great extent in the hands of the parliamentarians. The temptations that exist when making these decisions and the small number of people who are able to resist them is clearly evident in a society where 'enrich yourselves' is the general watchword and where wealth makes it possible for somebody to forget any calumny.⁴¹⁰

But even when this personal corruption did not set in, in general the peasants and petty bourgeois were hitherto betrayed by their representatives. Because they are unable to form particular united parties, these classes have always lent on one or other fraction of the propertied classes, the capitalists or the landlords. Not only did they draw their representatives from these latter classes and the clergy, they also set them the task of protecting the interests of the propertied, both small and large, simultaneously.

This was, of course, impossible and with the emerging conflict between the interests on both sides, the deputies who had origins in the wealthy classes and who were under the constant influence of those classes decided this conflict in favour of the wealthy classes.

Finally, it should be considered that the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie are declining classes, whose class interests often contrast with social development in general. Precisely from the standpoint of the propertied classes, in many cases the peasants and the petty bourgeoisie arrive at demands which prove to be unrealisable.

The parliamentarians who are elected by the peasants and the petty bourgeoisie as representatives of their class interests, but who represent the standpoint of the propertied classes, can therefore achieve almost nothing for their voters, even if they are able to preserve their personal integrity and loyalty to political principle.

This is also true of the wage workers, wherever they have not yet been able to form a specific political party. But, sooner or later, the class struggle will lead to the formation of such a party everywhere.

Just as the proletariat's working conditions drive them to unite in powerful economic organisations according to their occupation, so they are eventually driven to overcome the barriers of their profession and to create a political organisation that will encompass the entire class in the state as a whole. And just as the formation of an independent political party is necessarily rooted in conditions, it is just as necessary that it will sooner or later assume a revolutionary character – where it does not already have such a character from the outset – in other words, that it will become social democracy.

This same unity, this same discipline, this same 'tyranny', which marks out the workers' economic organisations, is also characteristic of the workers' parties. And this discipline does not only apply to the masses, but also to those who represent the organisation in public, the leaders. Whatever the particular position of the worker may be, none of these leaders can undertake a political action against the will of his comrades, or even without their consent. As such, the socialist

⁴¹⁰ (Kautsky's footnote): Absolutist opponents of parliamentarism like to point to the corruption that parliament brings with it. They forget that abolishing parliamentarism will not eliminate capitalism's corrupting influence on the state. The focal point of corruption would then simply move from parliament to the bureaucracy, and it will proliferate all the more happily there, because – unless the whole system collapses – the bureaucracy is protected from exposure in a quite different way to parliament. Cf. Russia and Turkey.

parliamentary deputy is not – as blasphemous as this may sound – a free man, but merely the representative of his party. If his views stand opposed to those of the party then he must cease to be its representative.

Rittinghausen and Bucher both deplore the fact that the contemporary parliamentarian is no longer the mandated representative in the sense that a member of the estate assemblies was at the end of the Middle Ages.

It is impossible to restore the bound mandates in the old manner that they existed. Doing so would be contrary to the essence of the modern state, which would be dissolved into a mere association of more-or-less sovereign smaller municipalities (constituencies).

The contemporary parliamentarian is a mandatary in a different sense; he is not the mandated representative of his constituency, but – even if not in legal terms – actually the mandated representative of his party. But in no other party is he a mandatary of that party to such an extent as when that party is social democracy. And while, in the bourgeois parties, party discipline is in reality the discipline of small cliques who stand above the disjointed mass of voters, in social democracy it is the discipline of an organisation which encompasses the entire mass of the fighting, intelligent proletariat and which is increasingly expanding across the working classes.

The socialist deputy thus becomes what the elected rural deputy was a few centuries ago, a mandatary of the people; not the mandatary of a small community, but of a party that extends over the entire area of the state and that strives to encompass the entire working population within that state. Wherever the proletariat organises itself into a specific, conscious party that participates in the struggles in and for parliament, it ceases to count among the classes which must expect to be betrayed and cheated by their representatives in parliament when it comes to all important affairs. As with the press, there is a bulwark against corruption in the organisation and discipline of the fighting proletariat. There is no other party that has its deputies in its hand to such an extent that it can count on them as much as the social-democratic party.

But the opponent of parliamentarism might object that, while this may all be true, in one point the proletariat will always be at a disadvantage *vis-à-vis* the propertied classes: by virtue of its economic dependence, it will never be able to arrive at a position in contemporary society where it can freely choose its representatives. At every election, thousands upon thousands of people are driven, by the most various means of influencing, bribery, intimidation, direct force and so on, to vote not for the best representative of their interests, but even to cast their vote for their enemy. Thus, in the capitalist mode of production, the opponents of parliamentarism object, it is nonsense to expect any significant outcome from the proletariat's participation in parliamentary elections.⁴¹¹

Of course, we do not wish to deny that the economic dependence of the workers restricts them in their electoral struggles and makes it impossible for them to deploy their full strength. But we emphatically deny that this disadvantage merely inheres to election campaigns. Whichever path the proletariat may take in order to improve its positions and to achieve greater power in society, capital and the state will confront it on that path and deploy everything within its superior power in order to inhibit the progress of the proletariat.

Do Rittinghausen's supporters believe that a referendum on a draft law can be influenced less than an election? Or, to take a completely non-political activity of the working class, is the development of the trade-union movement not hindered at every step by reprimands, blacklists and so on? Were the objection to parliament justified, then this would mean a death

⁴¹¹ (Kautsky's footnote): The longer that parliamentarism endures in any given country, wrote Rittinghausen as late as 1869, the more it will 'bring growing dejectedness and calculating caution into the ranks of the democrats'. 'Under the rule of one and the same election law, each new legislative assembly must be worse than the previous one'. 'The individual worker knows that his vote for this or that candidate, or even the election of that candidate, has hardly any influence on the strength of the people's party in the assembly; he also knows that the disadvantages which – thanks to the political police and the witch-hunting of his employer or the church – can occur for him personally as a result of his vote are in no way proportionate to the advantages that can be achieved by a good vote for his party in his district. He therefore abstains from voting, particularly in the small towns, where the authorities closely watch over all, know everybody and know that they can keep them in check' (Rittinghausen 1869, p. 23).

sentence for the workers' movement as such – or at least for any of its effective forms. But we cannot say that during elections to a representative body the workers are subjected to greater pressure than in their other activities in the class struggle. On the contrary. At least when it comes to the decisive act in the electoral campaign, the casting of the vote, it is possible for the pressure to be as good as eliminated by the secret ballot. This exists in almost all parliamentary countries, albeit not in a completely effective form in some.

The secret ballot makes the worker more independent during the election than in any other form of the class struggle. Even in Germany, where the electoral process is much less effective in guaranteeing the secrecy of the vote than, for instance, in England, many who would not dare to join a trade union or even to subscribe to a social-democratic publication are able to vote for a social democrat.⁴¹²

In short, from whichever angle we consider the representative system, we cannot find that it disadvantages the proletariat in a way that would give it occasion to stay away from parliament, which is the focal point of our political life and must necessarily be so in contemporary society. For today the bourgeoisie is certainly no longer of the view of Rittinghausen and his disciples that the representative system in and of itself, in every form – even the democratic form – secures its rule.

Back when Rittinghausen was developing his idea of direct legislation, and even later, when Bismarck went along with universal suffrage (during the founding of the North German Confederation in 1867), the bourgeoisie could still think that universal suffrage was harmless.

The only modern European large state that had experience with universal suffrage at that point was France, and this experience was highly reassuring to the bourgeoisie. It is easy to explain why this was the case if we consider that the vast majority of the French electorate was made up of peasants. The workers were fragmented, subdued and dejected following the battle of June. A section of them despised the right to vote because, entangled in Jacobin traditions, they believed that it was much easier to attain political power through revolutionary street actions than through the ballot box, and because it believed that the use of the one excluded or actually impaired the other.

Another section rejected the political struggle altogether and wanted to dismantle the old society by purely economic means. By far the largest section of the workers who adhered to universal suffrage found themselves in the wake of the bourgeois democracy. In France, there was no specific workers' party which could have used the right to vote consciously and systematically as a weapon in the proletariat's struggle for emancipation. Accordingly, the right to vote was unable to develop into something that would transform the character of parliamentarism.⁴¹³

⁴¹² (Kautsky's footnote): A sign of Bucher's incomprehension of the proletarian aspect of parliamentarism can be seen in his disdain for the secret vote: 'The voters who only want to vote in secret for their candidate thereby let that candidate know that they are sending him into a struggle but that they cannot support him in that struggle' (Bucher 1881, p. 110). He forgets that, as individuals, the proletarians are nothing, but that united they are everything. The proletarian goes to the ballot box as an individual, but behind the representatives of the proletariat there is not a heap of disjointed individuals, but a well-organised, compact mass.

⁴¹³ (Kautsky's footnote): In France, the defeat of the Commune in Paris put an end to any labour movement at all for a long time. In that country there has only been an organised social-democratic workers' party, like the German party, since the Marseilles Congress of 1879. The Havre Congress of 1880 then adopted the minimum programme that Marx and Engels had drawn up in collaboration with Guesde and Lafargue. The programme declares that the transformation of laws 'must be pursued by all the means the proletariat has at its disposal including universal suffrage which will thus be transformed from the instrument of deception that it has been until now into an instrument of emancipation' (Marx and Guesde 1880). But splits and internal struggles, which are associated with the development of every young organisation, and of which German social democracy was not spared in the first decade of its existence either, prevented the rise of French social democracy to such an extent that it was unable to run an election campaign with some success until 1889. Only from that point onwards was it possible for the participation of the independent fighting proletariat to begin to influence the character of parliament in the country that, with a few interruptions, had possessed universal suffrage since 1848.

But neither was Bonapartist *faux* parliamentarism able to interest the workers particularly. Compared with the legislative body of the French Empire, especially the First Empire, even the competences of the German Reichstag looked respectable.⁴¹⁴

In 1867, therefore, the Second Empire's experience with universal suffrage did not need to deter either Bismarck or Disraeli from expanding the franchise. Even in 1869, the French experience made Liebknecht suspicious of what he called 'parliamentary experiments'.

But since then, the consequences of universal suffrage in various countries are precisely what has served to chasten the ruling classes. In England it has already made one of the two large parties, which until then took turns in ruling the country, completely dependent on the workers. In spite of its imperfections in Germany – poor protection of secrecy during elections, a high age limit on the right to vote and in particular the failure to re-divide the electoral constituencies, as a result of which the rapidly growing revolutionary cities are at a disadvantage *vis-à-vis* the backward, depopulated countryside – in spite of all these shortcomings, the universal suffrage that exists has made German social democracy the most powerful party in the country as far as the number of votes it receives is concerned, and it is only a matter of time before – even with the current configuration of the constituencies – it will also be the strongest party in the Reichstag in terms of parliamentary deputies. In fact, the hopes of the bourgeoisie in Germany no longer rest on parliamentarism. It no longer believes that this system can secure its rule under all circumstances; its hopes rest on the weakness of German parliamentarism, on the Reichstag being inhibited by particularism. In Prussia, this means the rule of the three-class suffrage system. Its hopes also rest on the fact that in Germany absolutism and militarism actually prevail.

Today no bourgeois government can grant universal and equal suffrage with a light heart. Any expansion of the suffrage must be fought by the bourgeoisie and it is only due to the bourgeoisie's fear of the proletariat that the right to vote has not been abolished in countries where it already exists. For if today the bourgeoisie has realised the dangers that are attached to universal suffrage, then everywhere today the proletariat knows what a powerful weapon it is. Were Rittinghausen and his friends correct, then it would be madness on the part of the proletariat even to raise a finger for universal suffrage, that is to say, for the right to participate in parliament.

Instead, wherever the proletariat does not yet possess universal, equal, direct and secret suffrage, it enters into the most energetic struggle for it, as in Prussia. Wherever it is deprived of suffrage, the proletariat does not shy away from the most extreme efforts and sacrifices in order to achieve it.

And any attempt to take or restrict the German workers' right to vote for representatives in the Reichstag would create the danger of a terrible catastrophe for the country. Today, only somebody who is politically blind can claim that the representative system ensures the rule of the bourgeoisie – even where there is universal suffrage – and that in order to overthrow the rule of the bourgeoisie, first of all the representative system must be eliminated. Now already, it is beginning to become apparent that a real parliamentary regime can be just as well an instrument for the dictatorship of the proletariat as it is an instrument for the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.

⁴¹⁴ (Kautsky's footnote): 'The legislative body had no right either to elect its presidents or to make initiatives for legislation. Nor did it have the power to receive petitions, nor the possibility of interpellating the government. It was only allowed to discuss the laws which came to it through the State Council. And if, after this, an individual member found it desirable to make amendments to the laws, he also needed the approval of the State Council before negotiations on the laws could take place. In the constitution there was no mention at all of the chamber's right to authorise the budget. Not until the decree of 22 March 1852 was it determined that the chamber should have the power of authorising the budget by chapter. This right could, as was previously the case, be taken from it or maimed. The fact that it was not possible for a report for the proceedings of a body composed in this way to be published, but merely an official protocol, could almost be called a blessing; but, of course, this also ensured that the last hope of drawing the opposition into the chamber, the hope of the effectiveness of energetic words spoken from the tribune, was cut off' (Bulle 1890, p. 20).

One of the most important tasks of the working class in its struggle for the achievement of political power is not to eliminate the representative system, but to break the power of government *vis-à-vis* the parliament, and at the same time to pave the broadest possible path for the proletariat to parliament through the equality of suffrage, protecting the secret ballot, short parliamentary terms, complete freedom of the press, meetings and associations, but especially through the expansion of the franchise to all state citizens aged twenty or above.

At best, ideas of direct legislation by the people in Rittinghausen's understanding would have the most crippling and confusing effects. Wherever democracy is already firmly established, Rittinghausen's ideas are a harmless hobby horse; however, the propagation of those ideas must be rejected wherever the proletariat is fighting for admission to parliament or wherever it has to fight for the rights of parliament *vis-à-vis* an all-powerful government.

The Outlawed Party, Chapter 7: Growth of Social Democracy Creates a Major Crisis for the Party

by Vernon Lidkte

By 1884 the whole of the German labor movement was making a healthy recovery from the destructive storm that had hit it in 1878. Everywhere there were unmistakable signs that the labor movement was once again on its feet: Electoral success within all representative bodies was becoming common with the Social Democrats; socialist-oriented newspapers were appearing in increasing numbers; and local craft unions once again were organizing workers and pressuring employers for higher wages and better working hours.

The expansion of Social Democracy encouraged every party member, but it also harbored unseen dangers. As the party increased its representation in the Reichstag, some socialist deputies still wanted to explore the possibilities of cooperation with the government of Bismarck. The antagonisms between moderates and radicals intensified, and a major crisis hit the party as a result of its growth.

Elements of Social Democratic Expansion: Urbanization, Trade Unions, Local Elections

After several years of severe repression, the government and the local authorities sensed that police measures were not always appropriate for countering the appeal of socialism to the workers. In conjunction with the passage of the insurance programs, the authorities had shifted therefore to a policy of "mild practice" around 1883, hoping in that way to offer more assurances to the workers that the government was their true friend. To a degree this shift in policy was an implicit admission that the Socialist Law was a practical and moral failure as a means to combat the "evils" of Social Democracy, a comment that appeared frequently in the newspapers of many parties by 1883.⁴¹⁵ It could thus be interpreted as the government's confession that the Social Democrats had always been correct when they warned that persecution would benefit their "spiritual" movement just as it had benefited early Christianity, by creating martyrs and heroic legends. But the policy of a "mild practice" failed to draw the German workers away from the Social Democratic movement. Ironically, many workers probably gave the Social Democrats as much credit as they gave the government for the welfare measures, because party agitators often quoted Bismarck's admission that except for the existence of the socialist movement the program would not have been initiated.⁴¹⁶ The heightened concern about the social question in government and academic circles was also an obvious recognition that the Social Democrats had raised genuine issues, and this too could not fail to improve the party's reputation in the eyes of many workers. In a sense, it appeared that no matter which course the government followed, repressive or progressive, the Social Democrats would receive the rewards.⁴¹⁷

Along with Bismarck's social welfare program, the general progress of German industrialization also created new opportunities for the growth of Social Democracy. Although economic historians sometimes interpret the years from 1873

⁴¹⁵Cf. the convenient collection of newspaper opinion in Friedrich Apitzsch, *Die deutsche Tagespresse unter dem Einfluss des Sozialistengesetzes*, published dissertation, Leipzig (1928) *passim*.

⁴¹⁶Bismarck in the Reichstag on November 26, 1884, SB, VI, i (1884/85), vol. I, p. 25

⁴¹⁷The German authorities were especially distraught by the ability of the Social Democrats to exploit the government's reform legislation for their own purposes. Police President Madai covered this frustrating development in two confidential reports on the Social Democrats on March 4, 1884, and November 4, 1884, in Hoehn, *Die vaterlandslosen Gesellen*, 1, pp. 191-94, 217-18.

to 1896 as a depression period, this in itself is misleading. Although the period had deflationary features, all indices indicate that German industrial production, except for a few minor dips, rose steadily during the whole epoch, especially in the eighties. At the same time, these decades were also characterized by the customary shorter periods of business expansion and contraction, the longest contraction coming between 1873 and 1878.⁴¹⁸ The upturns and downturns in general business prosperity tended to be reflected, some times with lags, in the wages and costs of living for the workers. Although it is not possible to demonstrate that the political fortunes of the Social Democrats necessarily depended on the good or bad conditions of the workers, some general observations are possible for the recovery of the party in the eighties. It is generally true, other things being equal, that the Social Democratic party tended to flourish as the demand for labor increased and wage rates rose. This correlation would be difficult to demonstrate for the seventies, however, since several other variables affected the fortunes of the movement. During the expansionist *Gründerjahre*, 1871-1873, the two socialist movements faced the intense hostility of nationalist Germans and their own internal difficulties, and thus their growth may have been limited by these factors. The growth of the party between 1876 and 1878 may have been the result of unification and better organization, so that the prevailing economic tendencies were of only peripheral significance. For the eighties, the picture is clearer.

Although the years between 1878 and 1881 were expansionist for German business, wage rates did not reflect this rise until the following years. Taking an index number of 100 for 1913, statistics of weekly earnings (real wages) for all industries show that after reaching a high of 84 in 1875, earnings dropped to a low of 70 during 1880 and 1881, and then rose again to 75 in 1882-1883, 80 in 1884, 83 in 1885, 85 in 1886, and 87 in 1887.⁴¹⁹ One may also assume, although specific statistical data on unemployment is almost entirely lacking for Germany before 1890, that employment opportunities also rose with the general improvement in the economy. According to a report of the Berlin Police President, the number of employed persons in Berlin shops and factories had dropped to 29,292 in 1878 from 66,892 in 1875 and then rose again to 73,652 by 1881.⁴²⁰ These figures give no indication of unemployment percentages since the total labor force available in Berlin is not known for these years, but they definitely suggest a marked rise in the demand for labor in the early eighties. Despite the lack of specific data, there is no reason to doubt that there was an increased demand for labor after 1881-1882. This in turn created the objective economic conditions which were more favorable for a revival of trade unions, a development also made possible by the government's shift to a "mild practice," as we shall see shortly.

The gradual rise in real wages after 1882 can not be interpreted to mean that henceforth the German worker was freed from social misery. On the contrary, little or nothing was done during the eighties to improve the conditions of work in shops and factories or to reduce the length of the working day. Equally important, the housing situation showed no improvement. As German industrialization proceeded at a steady pace, the population movement to the cities grew to large proportions in the 1880's; between 1880 and 1890, the number of cities with a population over one hundred thousand increased from fifteen to twenty-six. At the same time, the rural population continued to decline, not only in relation to the urban population but in absolute numbers as well.⁴²¹ There is no doubt that housing for farm laborers had often been deplorable, but in the eighties Germany faced an acute crisis in urban housing. Contemporary observers and scholars testified to the overcrowded and unsanitary living conditions of the German workers in towns and cities; in 1886 the *Verein fuer Sozialpolitik* published a two-volume study describing in detail the wretched housing facilities in numerous cities.⁴²² It was

⁴¹⁸Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Business Cycles* (New York and London, 1939), II, p. 467; Bry, *Wages in Germany*, pp. 19, 325.

⁴¹⁹Bry, *Wages in Germany*, p. 361

⁴²⁰Cited in Kuczynski, *Die Geschichte der Lage der Arbeiter unter dem Kapitalismus*, III, p. 256. On the lack of unemployment data, see Schumpeter, *Business Cycles*, II, p. 509.

⁴²¹Ludwig Elster, "Bevoelkerungswesen," *Handwoerterbuch der Staatswissenschaften* (4th edition), 11, p. 695.

⁴²²Die Wohnungsnoth der aermeren Klassen in deutschen Grossstaedten und Vorschlaege zu deren Abhuelfe, in *Schriften des Vereins fuer Sozialpolitik*, XXX and XXXI (Leipzig, 1886).

not unusual for whole families to live in one room, while beds in cellars and attics were often rented to workers in shifts. One researcher discovered that in Dresden 55 per cent of all living quarters consisted of only one room, while in Breslau it was 62 percent, and in Chemnitz it rose even to 70 percent.⁴²³ With miserable living quarters, rising rents, and uncertain employment, the new city worker found an opportunity for both friendship and social protest in the Social Democratic party. The large-city vote of the party grew substantially in the eighties; by 1887, the Social Democrats polled almost 37 percent of the vote in city districts.⁴²⁴ These were developments which the anti-socialist parties found impossible to curb.

Was it not possible, however, that the high rate of German emigration, which reached its peak in the early eighties, would offset the gains made by the Social Democrats through urbanization? Some German economists in fact believed that emigration was carrying off the political discontents from the lower classes. The pattern of emigration, however, does not bear this out, for emigration tended to be highest in rural areas among peasants, farm laborers, petty traders, and hand-craftsmen and not among the working classes in the large urban areas. In 1885, Karl Kautsky drew up some statistical tables which in fact showed that in almost all cases emigration was lowest from those districts with a high Social Democratic vote. The districts in which the conservative parties were strongest, it turned out, suffered the greatest loss of population through emigration abroad.⁴²⁵

Some Social Democratic workers emigrated to be sure, but the party discouraged it, and only those who were expelled from their homes or who wished to avoid imprisonment because of their intense political activity resorted to it as a last measure. During the period of the Socialist Law, the party lost very few of its experienced leaders through emigration, and some of those who did leave, such as Most and Hasselmann, were bid farewell with no regrets. Many of the socialist agitators who left Germany went no further than London or Zurich and from those places remained in close contact with the party at home. There is no evidence to indicate that the growth potential of the socialist movement was hampered to any degree by emigration. In addition to the general benefits the Social Democrats gained from urbanization, the improving economic condition of the workers after 1882 also contributed a new thrust for the formation of trade unions. Workers whose unions had been dissolved by the authorities in 1878-1879 were naturally eager to reestablish their organizations as soon as the chance offered itself. Fortunately for them, the rising demand for labor coincided with the government's shift to the policy of "mild practice," reducing slightly the legal restrictions against the formation of trade unions. Ironically, when the social welfare legislation was debated, government officials expressed the belief that, if given more freedom to organize, the workers would henceforth show more trust in Bismarck's government and less in the Social Democrats. As the police relaxed their repression, local associations of skilled craftsmen, known as *Fachvereine*, appeared in considerable numbers in 1883 and following; a few *Fachvereine* had already appeared in the previous years. Since the earliest *Fachvereine* had no connections with the Social Democrats, it seemed for a time that the government's hope for a politically neutral trade union movement was not beyond realization.⁴²⁶ In a few years, however, everyone recognized that although the *Fachvereine* disavowed all political associations, most organized workers drifted toward the Social Democrats. For example, in 1882 a Berlin gilder, Ferdinand Ewald, won the endorsement of the Christian Socials, some National Liberals and Conservatives for a plan to have a central committee of *Fachvereine* send a petition of workingmen's demands to the government. Such a petition was in the tradition of the downtrodden worker who looked upon the Monarch as a beneficent defender of the poor against the rich. The Social Democrats in Berlin were understandably suspicious of Ewald, but their

423H. Peus, Der Wohnungsjammer des Proletariats (Dessau, 1894), pp. 3ff., as cited in Kuczynski, Die Geschichte der Lage der Arbeiter unter dem Kapitalismus, III, p. 398.

424Max Schippel (ed.), Die Sozialdemokratie und der deutsche Reichstag, in the Berliner Arbeiterbibliothek, No. 10 (Berlin, 1889), p. 21.

425Sartorius von Waltershausen, "Auswanderung," Handwoerterbuch der Staatswissenschaften (4th edition), II, p. 96; "Die deutsche Auswanderung," Neue Zeit, III (1885), pp. 253-57.

The article is not signed, but it is ascribed to Kautsky by Werner Blumenberg, Karl Kautskys Literarisches Werk (The Hague, 1960), p. 36. The above observations are also supported by Mack Walker's recent study, Germany and the Emigration 1816-1885 (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), pp. 184-88.

426 Schmoele, Gewerkschaften, I, pp. 81-82.

members attended his meetings, and Ewald soon learned that if he wished to attract a mass following for his plan he could not pursue his middle-of-the-road policy. By February 1883, Ewald was moving toward the Social Democrats, and in 1884 he became one of the party's first elected deputies to the Berlin *Stadtverordnetenversammlung* (Municipal Council).⁴²⁷ The experience of the Ewald movement made it clear that a viable trade union movement could not exist in explicit opposition to Social Democracy, although an open political allegiance was equally impossible. The government authorities by their earlier indiscriminate use of the Socialist Law to abolish trade unions, had made it easy for the Social Democrats to identify their cause with the cause of all working men.

Increasing rapidly, the number of *Fachvereine* rose to 1,021 in 1885 with a collective membership of about 58,000. In some crafts the leaders looked beyond the local organization to national affiliations; by the end of 1884, the Berlin police noted that thirteen central associations of trade unions existed. Apart from occasional strikes for higher wages or lower working hours, both the local and national organizations directed much of their energy toward the establishment of mutual assistance funds, some of which affiliated with the national sickness insurance. In the summer of 1886, the Berlin police recorded that there were thirty-four central sickness and burial funds with 2,764 local affiliates and a total membership of 263,684. Realizing that such funds were especially dangerous, since they also served indirectly as instruments for the political purposes of the Social Democrats, the government had already tightened the regulations in 1884. At that time, the Social Democrats sought to counter these government moves, but without success.⁴²⁸ Even during the period of "mild practice" the police kept a sharp eye on the activities of all trade union organizations.

Under the circumstances, the trade union movement was fragmentized and localized, with none of the centralization and tendency toward uniformity which developed after 1890. Each *Fachvereine* had to adjust its activity to local conditions, legal as well as economic, and they formed policies independent of each other. Social Democratic influence, therefore, varied in degree from craft to craft and locale to locale because the relationship between party and the *Fachvereine* had to be vague and tenuous. In contrast with the party, there was a break in the composition of the trade union leadership before and after 1878. The new group of trade union leaders was generally separated by a full generation from the older Social Democratic leaders.⁴²⁹ The two groups had matured in entirely different political and economic environments, the party's leaders in the pre-1871 era and the new trade union leaders within the Bismarckian Reich. The new trade union leadership thus achieved its position in the years when Bismarck was sponsoring the welfare legislation, and this could not help but influence its social and political outlook to some degree. Despite all these variations and differences, and the fact that the trade unions could not openly offer the party organizational assistance, their emergence gave an undeniable impetus to the spread of Social Democratic tendencies among workingmen.

The growth of the Social Democratic movement was equally evident from the results of elections, not only for the Reichstag but also for the state diets and the municipal councils. One can hardly overestimate the significance of the fact that in the middle years of the Socialist Law the Social Democrats first achieved sufficient electoral strength to place a meaningful number of deputies in the Saxon Diet and in several municipal councils.

In the home territory of the Eisenachers, Saxony, the Social Democrats continued to make a respectable showing in the elections to the state diet. After the first Social Democrat, Otto Freytag, won election to the diet in 1877, the party increased its delegation in nearly every subsequent biennial election. In 1879, both Liebknecht and Puttrich won seats, and in July 1881 Bebel received his first mandate for the Saxon Diet, and the party as a whole won slightly over 7 percent of the total vote. This gave them four deputies in the diet, a small number (the assembly had ninety-one deputies), but they

⁴²⁷Ibid., pp. 81-90; Bernstein, *Berliner Arbeiterbewegung*, II, pp. 90-92, 97-102.

⁴²⁸ Statistics from Franz Rohleder's "Bureau für Arbeitsstatistik" (Munich), reprinted in Hellfaier, *Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie*, pp. 235-36, and from police reports in Fricke, Bismarcks Praetorianer, pp. 148-49 n. 256, and p. 202.

⁴²⁹The significance of this difference has been noted by Gerhard A. Ritter, *Die Arbeiterbewegung im Wilhelminischen Reich* (Berlin-Dahlem, 1959), p. 109.

were very active and vocal. In 1883, they did not add in number of deputies, although Vollmar replaced Freytag. But in 1885 they once again added one member, now totaling five.⁴³⁰

The Social Democrats had strength not only in the large industrial cities of Leipzig, Chemnitz, and Dresden but also in the smaller towns which had important industrial traditions, Glauchau-Meerane (an old Eisenacher stronghold), Zwickau (an important mining region), and Crimmitschau. However, due to the minimum tax requirement for voter qualification, the Social Democrats could not hope to pull the votes of the poor industrial worker. But Saxony still had a large artisan population which had supported the Saxon *Volkspartei* and the Eisenachers in the previous two decades, and much of the Social Democratic strength still rested with this stratum. For the grass roots revival of the Social Democrats, election campaigns for seats on municipal councils were also significant. These campaigns did not have much national propaganda value because the candidates were attuned almost exclusively to local issues rather than the great principles of the party. Although it is almost impossible to ascertain the exact number of municipal councils on which the Social Democrats had representatives, notable progress was also made during the Socialist Law. According to various sources, by 1881 the Social Democrats had elected deputies to the municipal councils in Brunswick, Bremen, Esslingen, Glauchau-Meerane, Lambrecht (Palatinate), and Mannheim.⁴³¹ But the big breakthrough came in 1883-1884, when they elected four more to the council in Bremen, and for the first time won no less than four seats on the Berlin council. That marked the beginning of an extremely active socialist participation in the local government of the Reich's capital city.⁴³²

The success of the Social Democrats in elections to the municipal councils, although admittedly rather limited, offers some suggestions about the composition of the Social Democratic electorate. In the first place, universal suffrage did not apply in any of these elections, and we must assume therefore that industrial workers could have made up only a segment of the total Social Democratic vote. Small towns, such as Esslingen and Lambrecht, had very limited industrial operations, and Social Democrats could win elections only by appealing to other strata of society. A recent local history of the Socialist movement in Brunswick makes it quite clear that in the early eighties the party leaders appealed directly for the support of the lower-middle class, the *Mittelstand*.⁴³³ If Brunswick was at all typical, and there is every reason to believe that it was, then in the towns the German Social Democrats worked in close cooperation with the "petty bourgeoisie," especially if the latter had a democratic political tradition. Even in the case of Berlin, the center of the most radical and intransigent socialist leaders, the party could hardly have won seats on the council without very significant assistance from the "petty bourgeoisie."

In the municipal councils, the Social Democrats had no choice but to work on a purely reformist basis, within the system of local government, not against it. The evidence all indicates, although it is admittedly spotty, that in the councils the Social Democrats applied themselves to detailed and limited reform measures. In the case of Berlin, the Social Democrats frequently advocated programs of municipalization, and except for the fact that they were also members of an outlawed party which called itself revolutionary one might easily mistake them for British Fabians.⁴³⁴ This may not be surprising, but it may also be far more significant for the origins of reformism and revisionism than scholars have hitherto realized.

430 Cf. Schulthess, 1879, p. 320, and 1881, p. 220. "Brief vom Kriegsschauplatz," SD, No. 30, July 21, 1881; "Sozialpolitische Rundschau," SD, No. 39, Sept. 24, 1885.

431 Mehring, Geschichte der deutschen Sozialdemokratie, IV, p. 172; Georg Eckert, Die Braunschweiger Arbeiterbewegung unter dem Sozialistengesetz. I. Teil (1878- 1884) (Brunswick, 1961), pp. 66ff.; Boettcher, Anfange und Entwicklung der Arbeiterbewegung in Bremen, pp. 124ff.; Hoehn, Die vaterlandslosen Gesellen, I, p. 11, citing a report by Police President Madai.

432 Paul Hirsch, 25 Jahre sozialdemokratischer Arbeit in der Gemeinde (Berlin, 1908), p. 2.

433 Eckert, Die Braunschweiger Arbeiterbewegung, pp. 30-31, 101-03.

434 Hirsch, 25 Jahre sozialdemokratischer Arbeit in der Gemeinde, passim. That the Social Democrats were naturally drawn into "responsible cooperation" in the municipal councils has also been noted by Hermann Heidigger, Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie und der nationale Staat 1810-1920 (Goettingen, 1956), p. 52.

Election Success in 1884: A Prelude to Crisis

The Reichstag elections in the fall of 1884 provided the most striking evidence of Social Democratic growth and government failure. When the balloting ended, the party had captured twenty-four Reichstag mandates, a popular vote of 549,990, and 9.71 percent of the total. It certainly marked a decisive turning point in the fortunes of the Social Democrats under the Socialist Law, for the setback of the 1881 election was completely reversed. Henceforth, the party showed steady increases at the polls.

The election stands as a turning point, not only for election increases, but also for the policies of the party in a deeper sense. The quantitative changes implied some qualitative changes. For the first time in the twenty-year life of the political labor movement, the party's deputies were in a position where they could possibly affect the outcome of Reichstag voting. This was true, not merely because of their twenty-four seats, but because the parties on which Bismarck could rely had again failed to achieve an absolute majority. The possibility emerged therefore that the Social Democrats could become a factor in the parliamentary bargaining for votes, especially when Bismarck's opposition needed support on close issues. In addition, with twenty-four deputies, the party leaders sensed a responsibility to their own electorate, to consider to what extent they were obligated to pursue a positive policy in the Reichstag rather than their usual intransigent opposition.

Social Democracy was thus going through the first stage of the metamorphosis from a largely protest movement—a sect—to a political party in the modern parliamentary sense, involving the possibilities of swapping votes in elections, parliamentary maneuverings, and compromises on legislation. To be sure, this was only the first stage, in some ways not much more than a hint that such a transformation of the party was possible, and the change was certainly not effected before 1890. Still, the essential factors for the transformation existed, and they led directly to the great crisis that threatened to split the party in 1885. The moderates joyfully embraced the chance to become a full-fledged modern parliamentary party, while the radicals, sporadically lured by the possibility, were more often troubled and angered by the "opportunism" encouraged by the new situation.

The election itself created opportunities for "politiking" by the Social Democrats. Bismarck was faced with a threat of increased strength by the liberal left. After a group of loyal Manchesterians (Secessionists) split from the National Liberals in 1881, they merged with the Progressives in March 1884, forming the new *Deutsch-Freisinnige Partei* (literally, German Free Thought party), dubbed the "Crown Prince's Party" because of its clear preference for the "liberal" views of Crown Prince Friedrich and his princess, Victoria, the daughter of the English Queen. Driven by the fear that, upon the death of Wilhelm I, he would be left to face a new Emperor with strong Reichstag support, Bismarck was more intent on destroying the *Freisinnige* party than the Social Democrats in 1884. On the national level, therefore, the campaign focused on the bitter antagonism between Bismarck and the *Freisinnige* party. In that situation, the conservative parties, and also the National Liberals, did not play up their hostility against the Social Democrats, but sometimes gave the impression that the socialists were a lesser evil than the *Freisinnige*.⁴³⁵ The ramifications of this did not emerge until the run-off balloting in November, when the chance of election deals became quite apparent.

The conditions under which the Social Democrats campaigned in 1884 were thus much less onerous than at any time since 1877. Still, they did not enjoy complete freedom. But many local conferences were called to nominate candidates, and in Saxony, for example, all the districts had chosen their candidates by July.⁴³⁶ The party's Reichstag *Fraktion*, meeting at Borsdorf near Leipzig on August 29-30, 1884, authorized a Central Election Committee of Auer, Bebel, Grillenberger,

⁴³⁵Eyck, Bismarck, III, pp. 377ff.; Nipperdey, Die Organisation der deutschen Parteien vor 1918, pp. 206ff.

⁴³⁶Berliner Volksblatt, No. 87, July 16, 1884, p. 2. In his summary account of Social Democratic activity during 1884, Police President Madai reported about meetings which had taken place in the "open air," but he does not provide any exact numbers and mentions only a few specific places. In Hoehn, Die vaterlandslosen Gesellen, 1, pp. 220ff.

Hasenclever, and Liebknecht "to draw up a plan of battle" for the election campaign.⁴³⁷ They drew up an *Aufruf der sozialdemokratischen Fraktion* (obviously written in great part by Bebel) and distributed it widely. Designed to appeal to as broad a spectrum of opinion as possible, the program was a mosaic intermingling the various ideas of the whole movement, Lassalleian, Marxist, and democratic. The campaign literature in general is a strong reminder of the strength of the traditional socialist ideas even with the increased penetration of Marxism. Throughout Germany, the Social Democrats campaigned with exuberance. "The election campaign is glorious," Liebknecht wrote to Kautsky: "But work, work, work! In the last six days I had nine meetings, one conference, and twenty-five hours of railroad and stage-coach travel."⁴³⁸

No serious possibility for making election deals between Social Democrats and other parties emerged for the first ballot on October 28, in which the party picked up nine Reichstag seats. But, given the big Bismarck push against the *Freisinnige* party, there was even a chance that when running against *Freisinnige* candidates Social Democrats would attract conservative votes in the run-off balloting. On the other side, because the anti-Bismarckian liberals were pressed to find support, they too might look to the Social Democrats for help. Aware of these possibilities, the Central Election Committee immediately issued directives that, in districts where no Social Democrat was in the run-off, support should only be given to those other candidates who declared that they were against the extension of the Socialist Law, the sharpening of the penal code, new restrictions on universal suffrage, the lengthening of the legislative periods, the introduction of "Labor Books," and new taxes on the necessities of life.⁴³⁹

The declaration laid the ground rules for the run-offs, but it did not eliminate the possibility that individual party members would become involved in deals. The conservative parties, following Bismarck's line, wanted to receive working-class support in return for endorsing Social Democratic candidates who were in contests with radical liberals. All of this created some embarrassment for the Social Democrats. Thus, when conservatives in Frankfurt am Main inquired of the Chancellor how they should vote in the run-off between the Social Democrat Sabor and the *Volkspartei* candidate Sonnemann, the word came back, "The Prince wants Sabor."⁴⁴⁰ When Sabor won the seat, the Social Democrats could not easily free themselves of the charge that it was a gift of the reactionaries!

Franz Mehring has even admitted that here and there the Social Democrats may have won through unsolicited conservative support. But Mehring seems to be in error when he asserts that the Social Democrats never "flirted" with the reactionaries. Bebel in fact learned that in Breslau an arrangement had been made so that the Free Conservative Prince Carolath would receive socialist support in one district in return for swinging his voters to Hasenclever in another district. Although Carolath had agreed to the first three conditions in the declaration of the Central Election Committee, Hasenclever was actually trading votes, a tactic which had never been endorsed. This deeply angered Bebel, but in the interest of the party, he kept it quiet.⁴⁴¹ Reviving old images of alleged Lassalleian corruption, Bebel wrote to Liebknecht on November 15, that "the *Schweizerei* is still deep in Hasenclever, he out-schweitzers [ueberschweitzert] even Schw[eitzer]."⁴⁴² And a few days later Bebel added that Hasenclever was completely controlled, "in heart and mind," by the "Spirit of Schweizer."⁴⁴³ Such bargains seemed to give credence to the frequent charge by radical liberals that Social Democrats and state-interventionist conservatives were really brothers, despite all appearances to the contrary.

⁴³⁷Bebel to Motteler, August 31, 1884, Bebel Archive, IISH.

⁴³⁸Aufruf der sozialdemokratischen Fraktion zur zweiten Reichstagswahl unter dem Sozialistengesetz, in August Bebel (ed.), Die Sozialdemokratie im deutschen Reichstag. Tätigkeitsberichte und Wahlaufrufe aus den Jahren 1871 bis 1893 (Berlin, 1909), pp. 218-47. Wilhelm Liebknecht to Karl Kautsky, Oct. 10, 1884, Kautsky Archive, IISH.

⁴³⁹Declaration by the Zentral-Wahlleitung, Oct. 30, 1884, quoted in Auer, Nach zehn Jahren, p. 135.

⁴⁴⁰There is considerable doubt that the contents of the telegram were specified by Bismarck himself, as indicated by H. Ritter von Poschinger, Fuerst Bismarck und die Parlamentarier (Breslau, 1896), III, p. 147. But there is no question that such a telegram was sent and that it created considerable discussion. The story is repeated by numerous authors; Cf. Bebel, Aus meinem Leben, III, p. 12; Rein, Die Revolution in der Politik Bismarcks, p. 289.

⁴⁴¹Mehring, Geschichte der deutschen Sozialdemokratie, IV, p. 249. Bebel to Liebknecht, Nov. 10, 1884, Liebknecht Archive, IISH.

⁴⁴²Bebel to Liebknecht, Nov. 15, and Nov. 17, 1884, Liebknecht Archive, IISH.

Although furious about compromises with conservatives, Bebel could see the necessity for offering Social Democratic support to the anti-Bismarckian Liberals. During the campaign, he observed in a letter to Engels that the parties to the right of the socialists no longer formed "one reactionary mass" as previously, a situation certainly favorable to his party.⁴⁴³ Therefore, the Social Democrats commonly supported the candidates of the *Freisinnige* party in most run-off votes. But Bebel grew somewhat suspicious about an agreement in Munich by which Vollmar traded votes with the National Liberals who were willing to support Social Democrats rather than the party of the Catholic Church. This arrangement made Vollmar's victory possible, and thus the Social Democrats won their first mandate from the Bavarian capital after several previous attempts. Few realized it at the time, but this also marked the beginning of Vollmar's shift away from his radicalism of the early eighties.⁴⁴⁴

No city was so important for intraparty developments as Berlin, and here too Bebel fell into conflicts with the influence of the old Lassalleans. Hasenclever campaigned for a seat not only in Breslau but also in Berlin's sixth district, where he also won because it was one of the strongholds of the Social Democrats. Determined to exclude as many of his intraparty foes as possible from Berlin, Bebel demanded privately that Hasenclever take the seat from Breslau. As Hasenclever related to Auer, Bebel threatened to have the party executive call a congress to deal with the whole matter. "Such threats," Hasenclever remarked with apparent humor, "leave me completely cold. . . ."⁴⁴⁵ Auer likewise expressed unhappiness that Bebel treated Hasenclever so harshly. With his typically easy-going manner, Auer quickly overlooked the weaknesses in his comrades when they showed bad judgment as he believed Hasenclever had. He complained to Liebknecht that "in Bebel there is not a drop of diplomatic blood and therefore he must curb his desire to play the Party Diviner [*Parteivorsehung spielen*]."⁴⁴⁶ But in such matters Bebel had little patience or kindness, and Hasenclever dutifully took the Breslau seat. One bothersome person at least would find his influence diminished in Berlin. But Bebel's problem remained, for he had few completely trustworthy associates in Berlin. "With the exception of Singer," Bebel wrote to Liebknecht, "I trust *no one* in Berlin, and Singer is weak; he believes in the honor of people and permits himself to be misused."⁴⁴⁷ Of course, the residue of Lassallean influence in Berlin bothered Bebel, and he wanted to destroy it completely.

The returns in the run-offs, during the middle of November, added fifteen seats to the nine won on the first ballot of October 28, giving the Social Democrats a total of twenty-four deputies. Although this victory rested on some support from non-socialists, most party members received it with great joy and high expectations. But not all the radicals were so pleased. Of the twenty-four deputies, no less than eighteen leaned heavily toward the moderate view of Social Democratic politics. Many of the moderates were in an optimistic mood, because with the relaxed police pressures they had a hope of influencing legislation. The maneuverings of the campaign were therefore only a prelude to what followed.⁴⁴⁸

The strength of the moderates in the new *Fraktion* troubled Bebel, Bernstein, and Engels. During the campaign, Bernstein had surveyed the party's candidates and concluded that in some cases defeat rather than victory would benefit Social

⁴⁴³Bebel to Engels, Oct. 3, 1884, in Bebel, *Briefwechsel*, p. 185.

⁴⁴⁴Bebel to Liebknecht, Nov. 15, and Nov. 17, 1884, Liebknecht Archive, IISH. Cf. Mehring, *Geschichte der deutschen Sozialdemokratie*, IV, pp. 248-49; Jansen, Georg von Vollmar, p. 32.

⁴⁴⁵Hasenclever to Auer, Nov. 13, 1884, Liebknecht Archive, IISH.

⁴⁴⁶Auer to Liebknecht, Nov. 15, 1884, Liebknecht Archive, IISH. Bebel had already rebuked Auer personally for taking such a light-hearted approach to the Hasenclever affair. Bebel to Auer, Nov. 14, 1884, Liebknecht Archive, IISH.

⁴⁴⁷Bebel to Liebknecht, Nov. 17, 1884, Liebknecht Archive, IISH. Bebel maintained that Hasenclever was in large part responsible for the choice of Social Democratic candidates in Berlin and for the position which the "highly questionable Ewald" had on the business staff of the *Berliner Volksblatt*. Bebel to Liebknecht, Nov. 10, 1884, Liebknecht Archive, IISH. Bebel also complained to Motteler about Hasenclever's influence in Berlin. Bebel to Motteler, Nov. 17, 1884, Bebel Archive, IISH.

⁴⁴⁸The elected Social Democrats were: Auer (Glauchau), Bebel (Hamburg I), Blos (Brunswick), Bock (Gotha), Dietz (Hamburg II), Frohme (Altona), Geiser (Chemnitz), Grillenberger (Nuremberg), Harm (Elberfeld), Hasenclever (Breslau-East), Heine (Magdeburg), Kayser (Auerbach), Kraecker (Breslau-West), Liebknecht (Offenbach), Meister (Hannover), Pfankuch (Berlin VI), Roediger (Reuss, younger Line), Sabor (Frankfurt am M.), Schumacher (Solingen), Singer (Berlin IV), Stolle (Zwickau), Viereck (Leipzig-Land), Vollmar (Munich II), Wiemer (Reuss, older Line). In 1886, Geyer won a seat in Stollberg which increased the *Fraktion* to twenty-five. Neumann-Hofer, *Die Entwicklung der Sozialdemokratie*, p. 46.

Democracy. He had misgivings about Viereck, as he told Engels, ". . . I spoke yesterday with an expelled worker from Leipzig, an excellent comrade, concerning the election in Leipzig-Land. As I mentioned to him that Viereck was campaigning there, he was much upset and was of the opinion that he [Viereck] would not come through for he is too unpopular with the comrades. You are wrong, I told him, the comrades themselves chose him; I fear, he will win." Bernstein's fear was justified, Viereck did win. But even when he looked at others, Bernstein saw no reason to be encouraged. "Viereck, Heine, Singer—" he continued in the same letter, "that is no improvement. Singer is certainly a thoroughly good fellow, but a frightful philistine. The only good thing is that he personally puts much value on Bebel."⁴⁴⁹ Engels too felt discouraged, but he believed immediately after the initial ballot on October 28 that since the "worst" Social Democrats had already been elected the run-offs would improve the quality of the *Fraktion*.⁴⁵⁰ But that proved to be an illusion, the representation of the radicals on the *Fraktion* was only slightly strengthened in the run-offs. With a *Fraktion* of this nature, everything depended on Bebel's ability to hold them in line if, in the minds of the radicals, the principles of Social Democracy were not to be compromised.

The Radicals View a Positive Parliamentary Role for the Party

The election results impelled the radicals to reexamine their conception of the parliamentary role of the party. They recognized that with twenty-four deputies the party had new possibilities, and some new dangers. As the new Reichstag was about to convene on November 20, Bebel, Bernstein, and Engels were all giving careful consideration to the new circumstances. They had to recognize that the Social Democrats now were numerous enough to enjoy all the privileges of an independent *Fraktion*, giving them the opportunity to place their deputies on the legislative committees. Since committee work was done quietly, the long hours it consumed did not have the direct agitational benefits that one could expect from speaking in the plenary sessions of the Reichstag. Routine committee work required patience, knowledge, and parliamentary skill; it assumed that the members were engaged in a process of positive legislative activity. In addition to participation on the committees, the socialists were also able to put one of their members, Hasenclever, on the Reichstag's Council of Senior Members (*Seniorenkonvent*), which made decisions on the legislative agenda and other matters concerning parliamentary procedure. With members on the committees and the Council of Senior Members, the Social Democrats had an obligation to probe the possibilities of a more positive approach to parliamentary work.⁴⁵¹

Taking the first steps toward becoming a modern parliamentary party was tortuous for a radical such as Bebel, although he, like Bernstein and Engels, agreed that it would be necessary to concentrate on a "positive" policy. The three men concluded that the Social Democrats would have to introduce legislation that was both fitted to existing circumstances and consistent with their principles. Bernstein thus publicly proclaimed, "We will not be so lacking in taste as to bother the Reichstag with measures which are unfeasible under present circumstances; certainly not . . . ; rather we will proceed with complete political realism [***ganz realpolitisch vorgehen***], as ***realpolitisch*** as one can scarcely desire."⁴⁵² At the same time Engels privately suggested numerous practical reforms which could be introduced by the Social Democrats, including the "normal working day (ten hours, gradually dropping to around eight), domestic and international factory legislation

⁴⁴⁹Bernstein to Engels, Oct. 24, 1884, Marx/Engels Archive, IISH.

⁴⁵⁰Engels to Bernstein, Nov. 11, 1884, in Engels, Briefe an Eduard Bernstein, p. 159.

⁴⁵¹The chief socialist committee members were the following in the 1884/85 session: Liebknecht and Vollmar on the election review committee; Kayser and Viereck on the committee for petitions; Kayser on the accident and sickness insurance committee; Stolle on the postal savings committee; Singer on the committee on tariffs; Sabor and Vollmar on a committee on court constitutions; and Bebel and Dietz on the committee for the steamship subsidy. Cf. SB, vi, i (1884/ 85), vol. VI, Anlagen, passim.

⁴⁵²"Was aus unserem Wahlsieg folgt," SD, No. 46, Nov. 14, 1884. Cf. "Was Nun?" SD, No. 47, Nov. 21, 1884.

(whereby the domestic can go further than the international), radical transformation of the liability obligation, accident and sickness legislation, workman's disability, etc. . . ."⁴⁵³

Since Engels agreed with them, Bernstein and Bebel were perplexed when liberals in Germany interpreted Bernstein's public statement as a decisive turn in Social Democratic thinking toward reformism, as a "Damascus." As Bebel saw it, Bernstein had merely made explicit what had always been understood. The legislative proposals of the party would all follow directly from their principles, and Bebel even wrote optimistically that legislation for a normal working day might be passed since the Center party had already made such proposals. On the whole, however, Bebel did not expect that any socialist proposals would be accepted and he had no regrets if the parliamentary role of the party should remain chiefly educational.⁴⁵⁴

The moderates were willing to interpret a positive parliamentary policy in a much broader sense, accepting minor reforms or benefits for the workers and society at large which had been presented by other parties. If some legislation promised to improve working conditions or create jobs in areas of unemployment, they were always tempted to give their approval. In this they contrasted to the conception of Bebel.

Bernstein's reflections on a proper parliamentary policy reveal some of his doubts about the radical position. He agreed that protective labor legislation should be introduced, but this covered only a small portion of the reform possibilities which arose in the Reichstag. In a letter of November 15, 1884, he showed an acute perception of the complexities involved in a responsible parliamentary policy.

*The actual economic question bothers me less than the political. According to my view, our negative position can not be followed in many of these questions, since twenty-two or twenty-three votes can often be of importance [iris Qewicht fallen]. Take, for example, the military question. It is certainly good to declare that we are opponents of standing armies and therefore to vote against the military budget. But that in itself does not get us around the necessity to take a stand on important particular questions, even though we have relinquished the right to put forward independent proposals aiming at the abolition of especially oppressive practices. I would very much like to hear your view on this, for our customary authority on military questions—Liebknecht—seems to me on this matter to be inadequate. In the election campaign, for some time, our people have diverged from the program so far as to be satisfied with a "reduction of the length of service."*⁴⁵⁵

Bernstein had touched upon a fundamental question for the radicals. Was it not implicit in a positive approach that the party's *Fraktion* commit itself to encourage numerous minor reforms in systems which they opposed in principle? Could the party take the blame for the failure of a piece of reform legislation in the Reichstag if their votes could swing the balance? This question had not arisen, at least not seriously, when the few Social Democratic votes could make no difference. In effect, Bernstein was asking, although he might not have recognized it at the time: Are not the moderates justified when they suggest that the Social Democrats should endorse reforms, regardless of who introduces them? Bernstein showed an awareness that the party was going through a change, that it was necessarily becoming a modern parliamentary party which could not avoid involvement in all aspects of the legislative process.

Steamship Subsidy Crisis

The difficulties of a positive parliamentary approach became apparent to the Social Democrats almost immediately after the new Reichstag convened on November 20, 1884. All the members of the *Fraktion* agreed that protective labor legislation should be introduced, and during the Christmas holidays Bebel drafted a Workmen's Protection Bill which the

453Engels to Bernstein, Nov. 11, 1884, in Engels, Briefe an Eduard Bernstein, p. 159.

454Bebel to Engels, Nov. 24, 1884, in Bebel, Briefwechsel, pp. 196-98.

455Bernstein to Engels, Nov. 15, 1884, Marx/Engels Archive, IIISH.

Reichstag debated in 1885. In such matters, the Social Democratic deputies reached agreement readily. But to the majority of the deputies a positive policy also implied a willingness to support non socialist legislation if it gave some promise of rewards for the German workingmen. In these matters there was no easy agreement, and the difficulties raised in 1885 nearly split the party.

The crisis that rocked the party in 1885 was actually a fundamental conflict that had been building up for some time. Essentially, it was once again a struggle between the moderates and the radicals, but with features that distinguished it from earlier quarrels. For one thing, the earlier disputes took place at a time when the Social Democrats were hard pressed by the police, necessitating party solidarity even when fundamental differences existed. In 1885, however, the intraparty antagonists felt fewer restraints and were willing to push their points of view with more vigor, even at the risk of revealing serious dissension publicly. For another thing, the moderates were proportionately stronger in 1885 than in earlier years, and they were confident of widespread support from the rank-and-file. They were thus encouraged to enter into the spirit of parliamentarizing, even when accused of opportunism.

An aspect of Germany's budding colonialism in 1884 sparked the crisis in German Social Democracy and revealed the complex difficulties in defining the limits of a positive parliamentary policy. Although the colonial question had never been debated at a party congress, Social Democrats generally agreed that they were opposed to such expansion in principle. The authors of the campaign *Aufruf* of 1884 gave the problem only a passing comment, declaring that the party was not "unfriendly" to efforts to increase Germany's export trade, but that "modern over-production" could not be relieved by a "palliative means" that sought an export trade in colonies. The Social Democrats did not support the argument that colonialism could serve the purposes of social and economic reform. Using Marx's *Capital*, the *Sozialdemokrat* attacked such a defense by analyzing colonialism as merely another form for the accumulation of capital. Even the *Berliner Volksblatt*, although controlled by the moderates, demolished the argument that colonialism would provide markets for German production.⁴⁵⁶

Only one associate of the Social Democrats, Karl Hoechberg, argued privately for the advantages of colonialism. But even he focused more on the benefits for Germany as a great power than on possible social and economic gains. He saw no less than "1000 reasons for colonies,"⁴⁵⁷ and outstanding among these was the chance that German colonies would be a means to fight the "English world power."⁴⁵⁸ As he admitted to Bernstein, he also presented his arguments to Auer, who would pass them on to Singer, in an effort to encourage pro-colonial views among the Social Democrats. Hoechberg failed, however, for he was already too far removed from the mainstream of the party to exert any great influence.

The party crisis was precipitated by the question of whether or not subsidy for steamship lines, proposed by Bismarck, was to be considered as an integral part of German colonialism. On April 23, 1884, one day before he declared the protectorate over Southwest Africa, Bismarck sent the Bundesrat a scheme for the establishment of German postal steamship lines with an Imperial subsidy of not over four million marks. The measure, which reached the Reichstag in May, called for two main lines connecting Hamburg and Bremerhaven with ports in the Far East and Australia. The *Freisinnige* party so vigorously opposed the whole steamship project that Bismarck felt obligated to attend a meeting of the committee, an unusual step for the Chancellor. He stressed that there were no necessary connections between the steamship lines and the new colonial policy. Then, before any further progress could be made on the bill, the Reichstag session closed on June 28,

456Cf. *Aufruf* (1884), in Bebel (ed.), *Die Sozialdemokratie im deutschen Reichstag*, p. 243; "Marx ueber das Kolonialsystem," SD, No. 28, July 10, 1884; *Berliner Volksblatt*, No. III,

August 13, 1884, p. I.

457Hoechberg to Bernstein, June 21, 1884, Bernstein Archive, IISH.

458Hoechberg to Bernstein, Oct. 28, 1884, Bernstein Archive, IISH.

and the measure had to be introduced again after the new Reichstag met on November 20, 1884. The social Democrats had not entered into any phase of the debate on the steamship subsidy in the session that closed in June.⁴⁵⁹

The new steamship bill, debated first on December 1, 1884, added an African line to Bismarck's original scheme and raised the subsidy from 4,000,000 to 5,400,000 marks annually. The addition of the African line certainly hinted at a connection with colonialism. In other respects the plan was the same.⁴⁶⁰

The Social Democrats still maintained their public silence in November, but behind the scenes a serious dispute had developed within the party's Reichstag delegation. A number of the deputies, conscious of the unemployment in German shipyards, believed that the creation of the steamship lines would provide new jobs. In addition, to defend their sympathy for a measure of the hated Chancellor, they accepted Bismarck's explanation of a clear distinction between the establishment of the postal lines and colonialism.⁴⁶¹

Within the Social Democratic *Fraktion*, no unity could be achieved on the steamship subsidy. In their first public statement, which appeared on December 11, 1884, the deputies declared that many of them considered the steamship issue merely a "question of practicality and not of principle. . . ." Therefore, the question of how the *Fraktion* would vote was left open. But they also implied that if the government could show that the steamship lines would promote industry and trade and would be under the control of the Reichstag, then they might vote for the measure.⁴⁶² This statement merely side-stepped the real issue and postponed the final decision for a later date.

In the middle of December, the Social Democratic deputies were involved in heated debates among themselves on the steamship subsidy. For three days, Bebel wrote on December 15, they had been fighting without getting near an agreement. The moderates were pushing hard for approval. Auer, Dietz, Grillenberger, Hasenclever, and Viereck were the most vocal advocates of the subsidy in the *Fraktion*. On the other side, Bebel carried the burden, although he had support from Liebknecht and Vollmar. "Auer gave a speech," Bebel wrote in disgust, "which one would have believed to be by a fanatical Nat[ional] Lib[eral]."⁴⁶³ In this fight, Bebel's best tactic was to prove that the steamship subsidy was an integral part of Bismarck's colonial policy. To do this he needed assistance, and so he urged Motteler in Zurich to make sure that the *Sozialdemokrat* would explain the direct relationship between colonialism and the steamship subsidy.⁴⁶⁴

When the differences between the supporters and opponents of the steamship subsidy could not be resolved, the Social Democrats concluded before the end of December that each deputy should vote according to his own view. However, in order to avoid a public display of the dispute, they also agreed that no one would speak in the Reichstag on the issue. That was at least a tactical victory for the radicals, who were in the minority. Of the twenty-four deputies, only Bebel, Liebknecht, Harm, Roediger, Stolle, and Vollmar were definitely opposed to the subsidy.⁴⁶⁵ Not even Paul Singer, for whom Bebel had considerable admiration, could be drawn away from support for the subsidy.

Bebel complained that the whole matter could not be cleared up because the Socialist Law prohibited a widespread socialist press attack on the steamship subsidy. "The *Sozial D[emokrat]* is not sufficient," he admitted dejectedly.⁴⁶⁶ The comment would have been more accurate had Bebel noted that the moderate socialist press had no interest in making much of an attack on the subsidy. But the absence of press criticism of the subsidy posed only one problem for the radicals.

459SB, V, iv (1884), vol. IV, Anlagen, No. III, pp. 826-30; Schulthess, 1884, pp. 71-74.

460SB, VI, i (1884/85), vol. V, Anlagen, No. 16, pp. 70-73.

461Blos, Denkwuerdigkeiten, II, p. 126.

462"Sozialpolitische Rundschau," SD, No. 50, Dec. 11, 1884.

463Bebel to Schlueter, Dec. 15, 1884, Bebel Archive, IISH.

464Bebel to Motteler, Dec. 21, 1884, Bebel Archive, IISH.

465Bebel to Engels, Dec. 28, 1884, in Bebel, Briefwechsel, p. 207. The text mentions a "Heim," apparently a printing error, since no such name existed and Blumenberg's footnote refers to Harm.

466Ibid., p. 207.

Equally disturbing, the Social Democrats had two representatives on the Reichstag committee which deliberated the steamship subsidy, one was Bebel, the other Dietz, one of the most outspoken socialist supporters of the subsidy. Consequently, had Bebel chosen to present a full critique of the subsidy in committee, he might well have been contradicted by Dietz on numerous points. Dietz would have been supported by the other socialist deputies.⁴⁶⁷

Pressure on the moderates had to be applied from outside the *Fraktion*, thereby enlarging the dispute to the party as a whole. To assert such pressure, only one instrument was available to the radicals, the *Sozialdemokrat*. In an effort to bring popular socialist opinion against the moderates, Bernstein printed numerous letters from rank-and-file Social Democrats opposed to the subsidy. Many of these critical letters came from socialists living abroad, in Zurich, Paris, London, and Brussels, but some were also from within Germany, Munich, Koenigsberg, Rostock, and several other places. They were unanimous in condemning the stand of the moderate deputies. Although this kind of pressure might be effective, it also fired the wrath of the moderates who believed that they should be free from such blatant criticism in the party organ over which they had technical control.⁴⁶⁸

In their defense, the moderates spelled out ideas that reveal the spirit in which they approached parliamentary politics. Seeking to calm the troubled waters, Auer explained in a long letter in the *Sozialdemokrat* that the steamship subsidy had no relationship with colonialism and that it would benefit German workingmen. "I harbor a sympathy for the steamship subsidy," he explained, "because in this I see a means to promote the exchange of goods among the peoples of the various parts of the world, to increase trade and thereby to strengthen the work of peace." In addition to economic gains for German workers, the new lines would make cultural and humanitarian contributions for the whole world. Auer viewed the steamship lines as "transmitters of culture [*Kulturtraeger*]" and the Social Democrats had every reason to endorse these progressive steps.⁴⁶⁹

Auer also had some pertinent comments on the nature of the Social Democratic party. He could not understand why some Social Democrats insisted that the party should always take a unified and intransigent opposition to the government. Nor could he comprehend why intraparty differences were always considered harmful by some comrades when such disputes were obviously the sign of a healthy movement. Clinching his argument, he added significantly, "The Socialist Workers party is not a sect in which the members are sworn to the letter, but a political party in which there is room, as there must be, for different opinions on subordinate points."⁴⁷⁰ That touched the fundamental issue of the whole crisis, involving more than the steamship subsidy itself. Were the Social Democrats willing to recognize the full implications of the fact that their movement was changing from a single-minded protest movement to a modern parliamentary political party? Auer and the other moderates were prepared to follow these implications. For the radicals, however, it was a painful transformation, because they could not overcome their ambivalent attitude toward parliamentarism.

In London, Engels fretted about the deep cleavage of opinion within the socialist Reichstag *Fraktion* which threatened to split the party. Hoping to avoid such a disaster, Engels decided to give his associates in Germany some advice. The result was a curious proposal that ultimately left Engels in a rather compromising position in the eyes of Bernstein and Bebel. Although essentially opposed to socialist support for the steamship subsidy, Engels sought a tactic by which the majority could be persuaded not to vote for the subsidy without at the same time forcing them to back down in disgrace. He thus accepted the view that the subsidy question did not involve matters of principle, but could be treated tactically.

⁴⁶⁷Unfortunately the reports of the committee hearings do not identify the speakers; it is therefore impossible to determine whether disagreements between Dietz and Bebel were heard in committee. For the committee report, see SB, VI, i (1884/85), vol. VI, Anlagen, No. 208, pp. 803-30.

⁴⁶⁸These letters were reprinted under the heading "Sprechsaal" in numerous issues of the SD, in 1885; see, No. 4, Jan. 22; No. 5, Jan. 29; No. 6, Feb. 5; No. 7, Feb. 12; No. 8, Feb. 19; and No. 21, March 12. In addition, ten other protests which were not published in the *Sozialdemokrat* have been edited by Rudolf Rothe, in "Zum Streit um die Dampfersubvention," *Archiv fuer Sozialgeschichte*, I (1961), pp. 109-18.

⁴⁶⁹"In Sachen der Dampfersubvention," SD, No. 5, Jan. 29, 1885. Auer's letter is published as part of the article.

⁴⁷⁰Ibid. This whole crisis was one of the most disturbing episodes of Auer's party life, according to Eduard Bernstein, Ignaz Auer. Eine Gedenkschrift (Berlin, 1907), p. 49.

Bebel, however, did not agree; to him it was clearly a matter of principle. But, significantly, working through Liebknecht, not Bebel, Engels suggested that the Social Democrats present Bismarck with a kind of give-and-take proposition.⁴⁷¹ Liebknecht followed Engels' suggestion to the letter. Writing in the *Sozialdemokrat* on January 8, 1885, Liebknecht said that he had received a plan from a friend living abroad, without actually identifying Engels. Liebknecht then suggested that the Social Democrats should approach the government with the following proposition: "If you [the government] give us four to five million [Marks] annually for workers' cooperatives (not loans, but donations, as for the ship owners), then we will talk it over. If you give us guarantees that the domains in Prussia, instead of going to the large lease-holders or the farmers who are unable to exist without day wage-labor, shall be leased out to workers' cooperatives, that public works shall be contracted to workers' cooperatives instead of to capitalists, good, we will act differently."⁴⁷² The proposition came word for word from Engels' letter to Liebknecht.

Knowing that Bebel's approval was essential if the suggestion were to be followed, Engels immediately wrote him a letter of explanation. Engels recognized, as he told Bebel, that the government would never accept a proposal whereby the domain could be leased out to workers' cooperatives. Therefore, if the moderates made this a prerequisite to their support of the steamship subsidy, they would have a way, "with respectability and without compulsion" to vote against the subsidy plan.⁴⁷³

Engels then spelled out his plan in more detail, revealing that he believed that it also embodied sound socialist principles for the socialization of society. Workers' cooperatives would be set up with state-help in factories in which work had stopped during a period of crisis. The crisis-ridden factories would be purchased and reorganized on a co-operative basis. Domains or estates would be taken in lease and built upon the cooperative principle. It would be necessary, Engels continued, to demand that the cooperatives be given preference over the capitalists in all matters of public contract. In addition, the socialists should demand freedom for the trade unions with recognized rights as jurisdictional persons. With the guarantee of trade union rights and the establishment of the cooperative system as he suggested it, Engels believed that this would "lead gradually to a transition of the total production into cooperative [production]."⁴⁷⁴

It is impossible to avoid the observation that this was indeed a curious proposal for Engels to make. It seemed to suggest two ways in which Engels stood closer to the moderates than to the radicals. First, he was willing to bargain with Bismarck, something which Bebel found personally repulsive and tactically detrimental for the cause. In effect, it was Engels' own way of saying that Social Democracy was no longer a sect but a political party. Second, Engels' suggestion seemed to have certain Lassallean ideas about how the capitalist society could be transformed—and, note, "gradually"—into a cooperative system of production. Although he had not suggested that this would mean the achievement of a truly socialist society, he had committed himself to the idea that it indicated a sound road toward a socialist society.

Engels found no sympathizers for his proposal among the radicals, except for Liebknecht, whose judgment he himself always questioned! Eduard Bernstein was perplexed and disturbed, and he did not keep this a secret from Engels. The moderates and compromisers, he wrote to Engels on January 15, 1885, would receive encouragement from the proposal. The steamship subsidy, Bernstein argued, had become a test case for the political stand of the party, "hence, [I] am not in agreement with the settlement proposal which is ascribed to you and which Liebknecht made in the previous number [of the *Sozialdemokrat*]. Our people must once and for all avow their principles [*Farbe bekennen*]. . . ." The slightest willingness to support the steamship subsidy, Bernstein believed, would imply some kind of approval of colonialism, since the

⁴⁷¹Engels to Liebknecht, Dec. 29, 1884, in Liebknecht, *Briefwechsel mit Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels*, pp. 284-85. This is a fragment of the whole letter, but it contains the complete statement of Engels' proposal.

⁴⁷²W. L., "Zur Dampfersubvention," SD, No. 2, Jan. 8, 1885.

⁴⁷³Engels to Bebel, Dec. 30, 1884, in Bebel, *Briefwechsel*, p. 210.

⁴⁷⁴Ibid., pp. 211-12.

two could no longer be isolated from each other. Bernstein preferred to see the socialist deputies vote against the subsidy; but he would be satisfied if they abstained from voting, if in doing so they also made a "blunt rejection" of colonialism.⁴⁷⁵

Bernstein built his uncompromising rejection of the subsidy on political grounds, whereas Engels offered his "settlement proposal" with specific attention to a possible economic gain. Later, Engels in fact said to Bebel, "You are above all an economic party," and then chided the Social Democrats for an inability to handle economic questions to their advantage.⁴⁷⁶ Obviously, Engels thought his proposal would teach the Social Democrats how to approach an economic problem to their benefit. But the danger of Engels' position, Bernstein believed, was that it threatened to sacrifice the political effectiveness of the Social Democrats without the countervailing assurance that real economic gains would be made. In fact, as Engels himself admitted to Bebel, no one could anticipate that the government would even consider the bargain.

Bebel was no less unhappy than Bernstein with Engels' "settlement proposal," but he waited until December 1885 before he laid out his objections. First, Bebel said, the Empire had nothing to do with domain lands which were controlled by the individual states. Therefore, the proposal for agricultural cooperatives would have to be presented to a state like Prussia, rather than to the Empire. Second, Bebel thought it would be "wrongheaded" (*verkehrt*) for the Social Democrats to take a "kind of trading or chess player's standpoint in politics. . . ." To pursue such tactics served only to "obscure" the "standpoint on principle. . . ." Then he concluded that

*We can only present demands, which, with a good conscience, we can say may be realized if one wants them. With this kind of subsidization of agricultural cooperatives—at one time believed a possible [means to bring] the collapse of bourgeois society—we would arrive at the most unhappy experiment. These cooperatives would collapse as those founded on Schulze's Self-Help. And then with this proposal you make a regrettable concession to Lassalleanism. On principle I was against the subsidy, because it means bourgeois subsidization and because with State-Help we cannot artificially lengthen the life of bankrupt bourgeois society.*⁴⁷⁷

Certainly Bebel and Bernstein were on solid ground when they argued that Engels' proposal involved measures which were impractical and therefore could not bring real economic benefits. When they objected, however, that Social Democrats would be tarnished if they bargained with Bismarck, they merely revealed their reluctance to enter into the spirit of the parliamentary political system. The fear that socialist principles would be betrayed by such bargaining never crossed Engels' mind, and for that he was a political realist, recognizing that the Social Democrats had achieved sufficient strength to exploit all parliamentary possibilities without seriously endangering their ultimate principles. But in their relations with Bismarck's Reich, the radicals preferred to shun all bargaining, seeing in this only a replay of the unprincipled machinations of Lassalle and the much hated Schweitzer.

It is clear that no one, not even Liebknecht, tried to pursue the suggestion that Engels had given the party. The *Sozialdemokrat* even received letters expressing scorn for the whole idea. Heinrich Rackow, a German Social Democrat living in London, said that he "was rather perplexed to hear such proposals presented in seriousness by a comrade."⁴⁷⁸ How much more bewildered might he have been had he known that the suggestion came from his London neighbor, Engels! The

475 Bernstein to Engels, Jan. 15, 1885, Marx/Engels Archive, IISH.

476 Engels to Bebel, Dec. 30, 1884, in Bebel, Briefwechsel, p. 211.

477 Bebel to Engels, Dec. 7, 1885, in ibid., p. 248

478 H. R., "Kolonialpolitik und Dampfersubvention," SD, No. 7, Feb. 12, 1885.

65 Social Democratic historiography has never made much out of this dispute with Engels, although it was taken to be extremely important in 1885. None of the radicals agreed with

Engels, but they did not emphasize this in their later writings, apparently to shield Engels from criticism. In his own memoirs, Bernstein mentioned Engels' proposal on cooperatives, but failed to point out that he had severely criticized the whole idea. Sozialdemokratische Lehrjahre, p. 158. Likewise, in his biography of Friedrich Engels, II, pp. 367-68, Gustav Mayer gives the proposal as Engels presented it, but without any mention of the criticisms of Bebel and Bernstein. Mayer had access to these letters by Bebel and Bernstein. Mehring, Geschichte der deutschen Sozialdemokratie, IV, pp. 266-73, does not say anything about Engels' proposal in connection with his discussion of the steamship subsidy. But even more interesting, a recent author who actually cites Bernstein's letter of January 15, 1885, in another connection, completely overlooks the fact that Engels was criticized. Cf. Engelberg, Revolutionäre Politik, pp. 97-99. One might safely conclude that Engels has had his protectors.

"settlement proposal" died almost before it had been presented.⁴⁷⁹ The Social Democratic *Fraktion* arrived at its own set of conditions which they presented as prerequisites for their approval of the steamship subsidy. The chief condition was that all ships for the new lines were to be new and built in German shipyards, a direct reflection of their interest in the unemployment problem. In addition, to disassociate themselves from colonialism, they were unwilling to endorse the African line and a Samoan branch line, the two which made the connections with Germany's new empire. These conditions were embodied in a Social Democratic bill of amendments which also reduced the amount of the steamship subsidy from the government's 5,400,000 to 3,700,000 marks in accordance with the reduction in the number of lines. Their bill also specified that provisions were to be made so that the ships would be built by German labor.⁴⁸⁰

To a limited degree, therefore, the radicals had also recognized that it was in the interest of the party's unity to present a kind of bargain to the government. Their bargain, however, differed from Engels' proposal in two significant respects. First, it presented conditions that were sufficiently practical to appeal directly to unemployed workingmen in German shipyards, whereas Engels' proposal had shifted much of the emphasis to depressed agricultural areas. Second, the radicals in no way implied, as Engels did, that acceptance of their conditions would mean a step toward socialism. The radicals were also sure that the Reichstag majority would not accept their conditions, and therefore the whole *Fraktion* would be obligated to vote against the steamship subsidy. In the debate on the steamship subsidy (March 12 and 16, 1885), Dietz explained that the socialists hoped that the measure would reduce the high unemployment in German shipyards. For that reason they insisted that all ships for the lines had to be new and built by German labor. In commenting on the Social Democratic amendment, Bismarck agreed that any new ships should be built in German shipyards by German labor, but he could not accept the condition that the lines be outfitted exclusively with all new ships. Such a condition, the Chancellor argued, would put an unreasonable limitation on the whole plan.⁴⁸¹

The conditions laid down by the Social Democrats were of course unacceptable to a majority in the Reichstag, and the whole *Fraktion* voted against the steamship subsidy in March. With that, the dispute on the subsidy issue itself ended, but the fundamental issues it had raised for party tactics and principles persisted. The steamship quarrel had opened up a wide range of problems on which moderates and radicals held differing points of view.

⁴⁷⁹"Sozialpolitische Rundschau," SD, No. 9, Feb. 26, 1885; SB, vi, i ((884/85), vol. vi, Anlagen, No. 244, pp. 1093-94.

⁴⁸⁰SB, vi, i (1884/85), vol. III, pp. 1773-74, 1778, 1846.

⁴⁸¹Bernstein, Sozialdemokratische Lehrjahre, pp. 158-59.

Lenin and Bogdanov: Protagonists in the 'Bolshevik Center' (excerpts)

by Avraham Yassour

The Bolsheviks arrived at the Third Conference of the RSDP (which was actually the second 'all-Russian Conference'), which took place in Kotek (in Finland) at the beginning of August 1907, divided among themselves as to the tactics to adopt.

The Bolsheviks were split and divided: Lenin recommended participating in the election to the third Duma, a motion which had been adopted and even published a week earlier by the St. Petersburg Party branch. The second motion was Bogdanov's, supporting the boycott of the elections. After the conference it too was made public. A controversy over the two motions developed quickly and bitterly.

Nevertheless, an agreement was reached at a separate meeting of the Bolshevik faction in which the Polish-Latvian delegates participated. The agreement stipulated that the Menshevik proposals at the Conference were to be rejected (there was as yet no controversy over the evaluation of the actual general political situation). Furthermore, the majority of the Bolsheviks decided to submit Lenin's proposals to the ratification of the Conference. These proposals were later adopted by the entire conference by 15 to 11 votes.

The agreement was adopted because all the members of the Bolshevik faction voted for Lenin's proposal, even though most of them were in favour of the boycott tactics. This was expressed in their special announcement consequent to the rejection of their proposed Boycottism. In this announcement they explained their support for Lenin's resolution as being the lesser evil.

IN THE STEPS OF THE REVOLUTION

From notes that Lenin made during the Kotek Conference of 1907 we know that A. Bogdanov (A. A. Malinovsky) claimed that the principal aims of the revolution had yet to be realized, and that the sources of inspiration of the revolutionary movement in Russia had not been eradicated. Bogdanov believed that the proletariat was still in the process of gathering strength, both in the

economic and in the political-ideological sense; indeed, favouring the boycott reflected the revolutionary spirit and the correct evaluation of the Duma's role. Bogdanov therefore concluded, when formulating his draft resolution, that abandoning the boycott policy would be interpreted by the masses as "an end to the Revolution and a desire to turn to prosaic affairs in the coming year".

In fact, Lenin's basic assumptions were not intrinsically different; but there was in his opinion a change after the second Duma. The old boycott tactics were feasible no more, the mood of boycott was no longer active. Moreover, a boycott could become positively harmful by confusing the state of affairs. In an article, 'Against Boycott' following the Kotek, Stockholm and London Party Congresses, Lenin compared the resolutions of the Stockholm Congress (the fourth one, April 1906, with its Menshevik majority), with the resolutions of the London Congress (the fifth, May 1907, with the Bolshevik majority). He concluded that no ground existed to declare a boycott of the Duma as long as the counter-revolutionary forces were increasing their strength and no renewed revolutionary activity was in evidence. The growing number of strikes in the textile industry (which soon showed themselves to be ephemeral) did not call for slogans recommending boycott or an armed insurrection as long as they had not gained in strength from the political revolutionary perspective. When proceeding to the polls, the masses had to be shown the connection between the 3rd of June plot and the December defeat, namely the treachery of the bourgeoisie. He concluded that participation in the elections was desirable 'while intensifying the struggle

both against the reactionaries and against the liberals. By the same logic, Lenin proposed participating in the Trade Unions Conference in order to conduct propaganda in the spirit of the London Congress. This proposal was submitted, however, to the Central Committee for further deliberation.

The Third Duma first convened on November 14, 1907. The new electoral system which elected the Duma had made its mark: it was an Octoberist Duma. The Cadets collaborated with the Octoberists in legislating on agrarian and workers' issues and on foreign policy. The Trudovik faction was much diminished. The nineteen social-democrat delegates who had been elected to the Duma were mainly Mensheviks and organized themselves as a parliamentary faction only after the conference. A paradoxical situation was created which could only lead to division and confrontation. The Central Committee of the Russian Social Democratic Party had a Bolshevik majority. Yet the nineteen social-democrat delegates elected to the third Duma, the parliamentary faction, were mainly Menshevik.

The difficult conditions under which the parliamentary faction functioned and was constituted brought about a number of errors at the very start. At the first meeting, some Menshevik delegates demanded that the social democrat group in the Duma be declared an 'autonomous group' rather than a definite Party parliamentarian faction. Their basic premise was that 'constructive work' had to be undertaken in the Duma: they had to lead a democratic opposition capable of furthering the workers' interests. The parliamentary faction's declarations after the government statement were criticised by the Central Committee. The faction established its own committee on policy and tactics. This clashed with the powers of the Central Committee, which consequently imposed a total ban on it. The participation of the parliamentary faction in conferences of opposition parties was condemned on the basis of the London Congress. The reluctance of the delegates to collaborate more closely within the framework of the various activities of the Party occasioned much anger. The relations between the Duma-faction and the St. Petersburg Party-branch, with its strong "boycott" tendencies deteriorated daily.

TACTICS OR STRATEGY

On the other hand, the supporters of the boycott among the Bolsheviks had not been totally silenced. Although, as Bogdanov's autobiography reveals, he remained loyal to the decisions which followed upon the fundamental resolution of the Kotek-conference (July 21-23 (Aug. 3-5) 1907), the election results and the faction's mistakes reactivated the argument in a more bitter tone.

At the end of 1907 Alexinskij, a Bolshevik delegate to the second Duma, lectured in Geneva on the faction's activities (in the Duma), and claimed that instead of conducting a class-proletarian policy it was contributing to the general detestation of the Party. He suggested that the Central Committee serve an ultimatum to the faction, demanding a consistent policy subordinate to the decisions of the authorised Party organs. A failure to comply with this stipulation should entail 'removing' the faction from the Duma ('removing' is the source of the term 'Otzovism'). Bogdanov supported the ultimatum (following Lenin, many confuse Ultimatism, Otzovism and Boycottism). This is obvious from a remark of his a few years later, when he claimed that Ultimatism was justified in the light of the activities of the mainly Menshevik faction, which put the Party to shame. This viewpoint was adopted, he thought, in the Fifth Conference (Jan. 1910). However, in an article entitled 'With or Against the Party' (in *Proletarij*) an account was given of Bogdanov's reservations as to the activities of the Recallists in St. Petersburg. The article went so far as to state that he probably did not believe that practical factional conclusions would be drawn from his opinions. This testimony is very valuable in connection with the 'badge of dishonour' Bogdanov had been made to wear, despite its being a distortion of the truth.

Alexinskij persisted in his attitude and put two ultimative demands: subordination of the faction to the Central Committee and conduct of the activities of the delegates outside the Duma. His article in *Proletarij* was accompanied by an

expression of dissent on the part of the editors. Another member of the editorial staff, Sancer-Marat, wrote similar articles in the journal.

But let us return to the end of 1907. Already during Alexinskij's lecture another Bolshevik, Innokenti, had taken up cudgels with him. This was one of the first appearances of a member of the 'Bolshevik Center' directed against those Bolsheviks who backed Ultimatism-Otzovism. He conceded the legitimacy of party criticism directed against the weaknesses and errors of the faction, but denied Ultimatism any role whose practical meaning would be Ozovism, e.g. leaving the Duma.

The Boycott and passive tendencies and mood were no doubt to the disadvantage of social-democratic participation in the elections. This was no secret, as was noted in the St. Petersburg Party-branch meeting at Terioki (September 23 (October 6) 1907). That meeting also witnessed heavy criticism of the Central Committee's actions and a demand for a new general Party conference. The Boycott mood was very pronounced.

All parties in the controversy were united in criticizing the errors of the SD members in the third Duma (as expressed in the circular of the Central Committee early in February). But, the conclusions drawn from these errors were diverse, both among the Bolshevik leaders and among the local branch members. Displeasure was especially pronounced in Moscow (though in St. Petersburg as well), and at a Party-convention (end of May 1908) it was even explicitly suggested to demand the removal of the faction from the Duma. Though this proposal remained a minority one, it attracted almost half of the votes. Details of the discussions and the resolutions were reported in Proletarij. There was no further escape from an open debate in the Bolshevik newspapers.

Indeed, in the very same number (No. 31) Bogdanov's article 'Boycottists and Recallists' appeared over the signature of Maximov. This article reveals his totally formulated attitude: the correct debate over the activities of the faction in the Duma did not seem to him to be the continuation of the old argument between the Boycottists and the non-Boycottists. To boycott the Duma and not to establish a faction in it was an entirely different matter from requesting the existing parliamentarians to leave it. The errors of the parliamentary faction justified the various predictions of the Boycottists as expressed in the July Conference (the Third Conference, Kotek 1907). The criticism embodied in the resolutions of the Moscow branch was correct. However, Bogdanov claimed, it was a severe mistake to demand at this moment that the faction leave the Duma.

Moreover, even the Boycottists recognized the need to utilize the Duma as a podium for revolutionary propaganda. The faction, however, was not doing so. Therefore, the arguments against the Recallists were not convincing. There was, though, one decisive argument in favour of retaining the faction in the Duma: when the Party had decided to establish a Social-Democratic faction in the Duma, the Boycottists bowed to their wishes, and now responsibility for the actions of the factions rested on all. To insist that the faction leave the Duma was a revolutionary act which had no place outside the context of a general revolutionary upsurge. This was not the case now and therefore the faction in the Duma, established on the basis of the law of the 3rd of June, was not capable of creating such a situation, perhaps not even to prepare the conditions for its deterioration. Both Soviet and Western historiography have ignored this interesting reasoning.

Bogdanov supplied a further argument in favour of his position: at present Ozovism would cause a split in the Party, perhaps even in its left (Bolshevik) wing. Therefore he wrote: "the remedy the Recallists offer is worse than the disease itself. It was precisely the cohesion of the Party and of its left wing that were essential when the anticipated new revolutionary tide appeared. The assumptions of the Recallists exaggerated the importance of the parliamentary faction. The faction was so weak that it was not even capable of enhancing the 'Constitutional illusions' which the Moscow members feared, wrote Bogdanov. But one must stress the section in the majority proposal which related to increasing the influence of the Party over the faction. As long as these possibilities had not been exhausted there was no place for the extreme tactics

suggested by the Recallists. It was important that the party influence the faction and direct its activities even if the principal struggle was not in that field.

The end of the article is extremely interesting: Bogdanov stated that Alexinskij, a delegate to the second Duma, backed him on this issue and he hoped that most of the ex-Boycottists would take a similar stand. A controversy among the Bolsheviks was now unavoidable, but now as in the past they would find ways to overcome it by means of extensive debates, democratic voting and party discipline. Next to his signature, as a footnote to the article, he added: "He who was the lecturer appointed by the Boycottists of the July-Conference!"

FACTION AND PARTY

The remark attached by the editor to this article is no less instructive. Maximov (Bogdanov), he wrote, adopts a basis common to us all when he presents the question of the continued activities of the faction in the Duma in connection with the revolutionary upsurge. On the boycott issue there existed party resolutions and the matter did not have to be detailed. The main thing is the complete solidarity concerning the Otzovism issue, that is, concerning the problems of practical policy.

Both groups could still see a possibility of common action: Bogdanov who openly supported Boycottism gave vent here to his reservations about Otzovism. Though this position was to develop into what was later called Ultimatism, the Bolshevik-faction was still relatively united and disciplined at the next plenary session of the Party's Central Committee, whose resolutions were adopted.

The plenary session of the Central Committee (assembled in Geneva August 24-26, 1908) was convened to consider the approaching Fifth Pan-Russian Conference. Already prior to convening the plenary session, the so-called Liquidators, the new grouping inside the RSD which had developed mainly inside the Menshevik faction, had started to apply pressure. Plekhanov and his circle also disassociated themselves from this development which could sow the seeds for the final liquidation of the Party. This conflict was reflected in the acrimonious controversy over the reorganization of the Committee's activities and those of the Committee for external operations. There was also a dispute over financing due to the problems resulting from the Schmidt inheritance and the Tiflis expropriation. The plenary session concluded with the adoption of a series of motions proposed by the Bolsheviks, who were however obviously in the process of disintegration, organizationally as well as otherwise.

The tactical controversy crystallized in two different directions: the Bolshevik-'Leninist' as opposed to the Recallist one (the latter joined up with the Ultimatists, among them Bogdanov, Ljadow, Lunacharskij, Alexinskij, Shanzer, Krasin, Desnickij, Pokrowskij, Volsky, Rozkov and others). Alexinskij published an article in No. 34 of *Proletarij* which summarized the resolutions adopted in the local branches in Russia. He mentioned that the faction in the Duma as presently constituted caused more harm than good and should therefore be confronted with two ultimative demands, complete subordination to the Party organs and conduct of the activity of the delegates in Party organizations outside the Duma as well. This position was called 'Revolutionary Ultimatism'. It was manifestly different from the Recallist position despite its entering history as 'timid Otzovism' - an epithet Lenin had coined.

In the period before the meeting of the Fifth Pan-Russian Conference, *Proletarij* became the public forum for the debates between the opposing groups. The standpoint of the Ultimatists was sharply expressed by one of the Bolsheviks leaders, Sancer-Marat. In his article 'Concerning the Problems of the Social-Democratic Faction in the Duma', he enumerated all the errors of the faction, its continuous efforts to compromise and its opportunism which brought it to the brink of 'parliamentary cretinism'. His conclusion was to serve the Duma-faction with an ultimatum: either accept the Party directives or expel the deviants. There was also the possibility of insisting that the faction leave the Duma altogether. Lenin and

Dubrovinski, as members of the editorial board of 'Proletarij', published material to the contrary - reservations and polemics. A climax of the debate was the publication of 'A Worker's Letter', reprinted from the Moscow Bolshevik newspaper 'Rabotchaja Znamia' (The Worker's Flag). This letter had apparently been written by Stanislav Volski, and it contained an extremist summary of the points put by the Recallists. Its argument served as a starting point for Lenin's article 'In the Wake of Two Articles'.

The article compared the 'letter' with another letter that had appeared in the paper's columns (by M. Tomsky of St. Petersburg) in order to emphasize the controversy between "the two trends among the conscious workers". This proved that "our Party was in the throes not only of an organizational crisis but an ideological-political crisis as well; this was a fact and it was foolish to obliterate it". Lenin warned against extreme conclusions; he accepted the assumption that many had joined during the revolution and that now was the time for a purge, for strengthening the fortifications. He rejected the conclusions of the Moscow Recallist letter which called for increased readiness in view of the approaching revolutionary wave. He claimed the very existence of a parliamentary faction which interfered with the revolutionary nature of the Party could only damage such a wave. The correspondent demanded a rectification of the 'error' attached to the Party's participation in the elections. The faction had to resign. This would highlight the Party's attitude to a reactionary Duma and would open new vistas for illegal revolutionary action.

Lenin went on to survey the various slogans which had been voiced during the diverse stages of the revolution's development, its flow and ebb. He accused the Recallists of exaggerating, as did the Mensheviks in the reverse direction, the importance of the faction in the Duma. The Duma-faction had to be regarded as an executive arm of the Party. The struggle over mending the Party's ways and preventing its mistakes was only beginning. To call on the faction to resign from the Duma, as an act stressing the vitality of the revolution, means only the burial of those 'revolutionaries' who were capable of such a policy. This 'revolutionism' merely expressed helplessness and loss of wits in the face of its hard day-by-day work dictated by the objective conditions which could not be ignored. A correct assessment of reality would destroy the arguments of the Recallists. Lenin could still state in his article: "The practice recommended by the Recallist comrade in his letter surpasses his theory".

Notwithstanding, the split in the Bolshevik faction widened by the end of 1908. Gorki's efforts to pacify both parties by trying to convene a 'mini conference' in Capri, failed. There followed various reservations in the purely ideological field (the Karl Marx collection of articles, Dubrovinski's questions during Bogdanov's public lecture, etc.). Lenin's letter at the time demonstrates vividly the feeling of an impending disaster.

The disputes within the Bolshevik Center became more frequent. Their reverberations even came to the attention of police agents. Bogdanov resigned from 'Proletarij', although he later went back on his resignation. He demanded complete expression for all views, even those which he did not accept. He might have intended to form a common front against Lenin and his supporters. This was the situation within the faction and the Party - described by Lenin as attempts of 'liquidation left and right' - which first gave birth to the tactics of 'two-front struggle'. These tactics were to evolve into the strategy and ideology of the Communist parties of the future.

THE END OF THE BOLSHEVIK CENTER

The two factions in the Russian SD Party arrived at the London Congress well organized and ready to accept discipline, and during the Conference itself factional consultations were held. Yet only in the last edition of the report on this Congress did the editors state specifically that the Bolshevik delegates used to meet separately and that they even elected their own organized center - i.e. the Bolshevik Center. Its role, after the Congress, was to undertake the direction of Bolshevik activ-

ties in the common institutions and the local branches. The Fifth Congress was in fact host to a schism and at all events the last Congress of the entire RSDP, that is, of the Bolshevik and the Menshevik factions all together.

After the plenary session of the Central Committee (Geneva, August 1908) the organizational breakdown of the Bolshevik faction, in addition to the ideological and tactical splits that had already existed, became a fact.

The controversy intensified in discussions on the pages of *Proletarij*. In Russia itself some of the central branches were split. In the Moscow Party branch the Recallists had the upper hand. In St. Petersburg they came out with their own programme (which included the demand 'down with the Duma' and direct revolutionary action), and they were strong enough to secure one place among the two delegates from the capital's branch. In Odessa, and even in distant branches in the Urals, the Recallist influence was felt.

In order to understand the constellation of forces at the Fifth Conference we must realize that the Mensheviks, too, closed their factional ranks. Parallel to the 'liquidationist' majority, a group loyal to the SD traditions emerged, known therefore as the 'Party loyalist Mensheviks'. The crystallization of this group began towards the end of 1908, when Plekhanov ceased his participation in the editorial board of the History of the Social Movement in Russia and quarrelled with the editorial board of the *Golos Sozialdemokrata*. His group had many sympathizers in St. Petersburg and in other Russian cities, and among the emigres. Lenin viewed the development of Plekhanov's group favourably. It stood a good chance of reassociating in the future with the SD and this served him as a guideline for the intra-Party tactics in the years 1909?1911. These tactics evidently intensified the struggle within the Bolshevik faction and quickened the schism. Lenin moved to Paris, then the center of Russian emigration, in the middle of December 1908, taking the editorial board of *Proletarij* with him. It was in Paris that the disputes and events which determined the fate of the Bolshevik faction took place.

During the first week of January 1909 the Fifth All-Russian Conference of the SD Party convened. The Bolsheviks were in the majority, and the Recallist-Ultimatist group was well-represented, and this fact weighed considerably in determining the tactics of the Bolsheviks. Extensive debates took place on questions of finance and organization of the Party abroad. The reports from Russia reflected the depth of the general crisis now besetting the Party. The Duma faction refused to participate in the Conference (only N.C. Poletaev, the Bolshevik Duma-delegate arrived) and the Liquidationists applied strong pressure. However, the conference still succeeded in preserving a united front of all Bolsheviks, and this enabled their proposals to be adopted. It was the last conference attended by all the Russian SD factions.

The problems preceding the conference anticipated the difficulties which the debates ran into. The plenary session of the Central Committee assembled in Paris after numerous postponements (on January 3, 1909) and finally confirmed the agenda of the conference. On the same evening the Fifth Conference opened. Few delegates arrived from Russia itself: Dubrovinsky was arrested on the eve of his departure at the St. Petersburg railway station. The controversy reached its climax among the members abroad.

The deliberations over the election of the delegates saw the Recallists and the Ultimatists adopt a separate platform, and they obtained a number of delegates. The Recallist demand for a separate Bolshevik conference was now added to the complications preceding the conference and the increased activity of the Liquidationists. They no doubt hoped for a decision in their favour within the faction itself. Despite their various shades of opinion, they all united around Bogdanov. They did not attend most of the separate meetings of the Bolshevik faction during the Paris Conference. They evidently held separate consultations, thus widening the split.

The Paris Conference proved that the unity of the Bolshevik faction still stood the test of the struggle against the Menshevik faction particularly the 'Liquidators' group; Zhitomirskij-Otzov (the agent-provocateur) was right in his report to the Tzarist Okhrana, that only Lenin's great influence prevented a struggle among the Bolsheviks themselves. Lenin managed to reduce the number of Bolshevik delegates who tended to Otzovism (Alexinskij and others) to a minimum. He also succeeded in agreeing with them on most of the issues being debated.

The moderation and loyalty of Lenin's opponents was due among others to the fact that they too differed among themselves. There were among them nuances of anarchistic Boycottonism such as Volskij's, Ljadov-type Recallism, Bogdanov-type Ultimatism - to judge by the political tactics controversy alone. To this must be added the philosophical controversy: various Marxisms, 'Seekers of God', etc. The organizational consolidation of Lenin's opponents was only beginning; in the meantime it was possible to vote against the Mensheviks on the basis of principles established at the Fifth Conference in London.

Lenin was now an avowed enemy of Boycottonism and any form of Otzovism. Despite that, his opponents put no separate proposals to the vote, not even on questions concerning the activities of the SD in the Duma. Only two delegates voted against the section on the utilization of the Duma in the general resolution on "current tasks of the party". On organizational questions all the Bolsheviks voted in one body and even obtained approval of the Bund representatives.

It seems probable that the Recallists were satisfied with resolutions criticizing the activities of the faction, with the veto-right given the Central Committee over the faction's operations, and with the demand made of the faction to cement its links with the Party and to accept the guiding political doctrines, including the secret resolutions adopted at the conference. The struggle broke out in all fury after the conference, when both sides began interpreting its resolutions, and after the Duma faction had rejected the resolutions, as Goldenberg reported to the Central Committee elect, meeting at the end of February 1909.

Lenin valued highly the work of the conference and his victory was complete. The obligatory framework of the Bolshevik Center was not retained for long. In his article 'Pointing the Way' he wrote that the conference was a turning point in the development of the Russian workers' movement following the victory of the counter-revolution. Lenin stressed that all those active in the Party knew for sure what its policy would be. He hoped that the crisis the Party was undergoing was now at an end. The article appeared in the second number of Social Democrat, the general newspaper of the RSDP, which was now being published in Paris and served as a forum for attacks against the Liquidators. In the next number Martov noted his own conclusions about the work of the 5th Conference. His article 'What to Fight for?' attracted an angry reply from Lenin in a large article entitled 'The Purpose of the Struggle of the Proletariat in our Revolution' (in two installments, Social Democrat, Nos. 3 and 4).

Concurrently, the 'second front' had already been opened - an internal front that was to lead to an unavoidable split, as Lenin himself had predicted in his letter to Vorovskij. Lenin strongly attacked Otzovism in his articles in Proletarij, especially in the article 'A Caricature of Bolshevism'. Lenin's argument was that the controversy over the boycott of the third Duma (1907) was instigated following practical errors of the Boycottists. Now, however, the Recallists and Ultimatists were those who 'deviated' from Marxist principles. Hand in hand with the SR Party they were inventing a 'revolutionary tide', claiming thereby that there was no possibility of 'utilizing the Duma'.

Lenin, however, thought that despite the difficulties in the Duma-faction's path, which had been aggravated in the third as compared with the previous two Dumas, it had proved that it was possible to utilize the Duma as a forum for explaining Social Democratic affairs. The 'reactionary nature' of the Duma, which Lenin did not deny, expressed in his opinion the real relations between the autocratic government and the ruling classes. This was the reason for the diminishing 'constitutional illusions' which was to the good of the revolution.

Plekhanov's growing struggle against the Liquidationists furthered the convergence between his group in Russia and abroad and the 'Leninist' Bolsheviks. During 1909, Plekhanov's opposition to his former friends grew monthly. Though he had not changed his opinion about the revolution and its consequences, he too was searching for an understanding with the Bolsheviks concerning Party reorganization and for that purpose he renewed publication of his 'private' journal, The Diary of a Social-Democrat.

Bogdanov did not ignore this development as can be seen from a letter that he sent to Proletarij in the middle of May. He accused the 'Leninist' Bolsheviks of founding a 'centrist faction' and of marching 'two steps back wards' through a policy of drawing near to Menshevism, be it even of the Plekhanov variety.¹⁰⁴ Recurring cases of factional activity and insubordination in Russia and abroad heralded the approaching split. When a group of Bolsheviks in Paris invited Bogdanov to give a series of lectures he demanded a fee which, as he stated, was to serve for purposes of factional organization. The preparations for the school for Party functionaries in Capri had entered a practical stage and the friction among the editorial board of Proletarij was unbearable, as the incessant flow of letters among them demonstrates.

7. THE CONFERENCE OF THE EDITORIAL BOARD OF 'PROLETARIJ'

In the face of these developments, a decisive meeting of the Center - i.e., the plenary board of Proletarij - was unavoidable. It took place in Paris, June 21?30, 1909. Nine members of the Center elected at the Fifth Congress participated (four of them members of the editorial board and five of the Central Committee). Apart from these there were three representatives from Russia: M. Tomskij of St. Petersburg, Donat (M. V. Shuljatikov) of Moscow and Scur (M.D. Skrupnik) from Ural. True, no split was declared at this conference either. But Bogdanov's viewpoint, together with his and Marat's statements (the two constituted a permanent minority on almost all matters) signify the demise of the Bolshevik Center as the unifying body that determined the policy of the Bolshevik faction between the Third and the Fifth Congresses. Although the plenary session of the editorial board merely spoke of the 'reorganization of the Bolshevik Center', the two sides exchanged accusations about organized factionalism (within the faction!) and abandoning the principles for which the Bolshevik faction had existed within the framework of the RSDP. From the seventh meeting (25 June) onwards Bogdanov stopped participating in the conference. His final resignation was received with regret

The deliberations of the conference constituted the final victory of Lenin's policy: Recallism was resolutely condemned as empty revolutionary phraseology which could split the party, and Ultimatism was regarded as a 'camouflage of Recallism'. A general demand was issued for an active campaign against this deviation from Menshevism. The struggle against the 'Seekers of God' was confirmed by rejecting Bogdanov's protests against the publication of Kamenev's article. No split was announced and Recallism-Ultimatism was not mentioned as a special trend worthy of a separate existence in the Party branches.

We have come full circle - we opened at the establishment of the BKB which prepared the Third (Bolshevik) Congress and after incessant intra Party struggle, arguments and schisms, Lenin had no alternative but to organize the ROK and convene the Conference in Prague.

But history does not repeat itself. At first Lenin and his Bolshevik supporters had to carry on a struggle on one front, against only the Mensheviks. At the end of this period we find Lenin engaged in bitter conflict 'on two fronts': against those Mensheviks who became Liquidationists, and against those Bolsheviks who set up the Vpered-group.

The Russian Social Insurance Movement, 1912-1914: An Ideological Analysis

by Sally Ewing

Social historians have argued for three decades that the Russian Revolution was preeminently a workers' revolution. Leopold Haimson was the first to propose, in an influential 1964 article, that workers themselves, and not, as the prevailing wisdom then held, Lenin and the Bolshevik party, prepared the way for the October Revolution.⁴⁸² In this article, however, I will argue that in some instances ideological institutions had shaped the workers' expectations.

Haimson suggested that workers were becoming increasingly radical before World War I apart from Bolshevik ideological campaigns and that they supported the Bolsheviks as the party that best articulated their own revolutionary aspirations. To support this position he notes that, from the time of the Lena goldfield massacre in the spring of 1912 until the outbreak of the war, Russian workers went on strike in numbers surpassed only during the 1905 Revolution.⁴⁸³ During this same period the Mensheviks, who had worked diligently, and with some success, to organize a legal labor movement after the 1905 Revolution, lost one political battle after another to the Bolsheviks. Workers elected Bolsheviks to run unions and social insurance organs, reformist and legally sanctioned workers' organizations that the Mensheviks had previously dominated. Haimson concluded that the Bolshevik victory in October had its roots in this prewar period when Russian workers had already rejected the reformist labor movement championed by the Mensheviks in favor of Bolshevik revolutionary tactics, a conclusion that other social historians have since substantiated and modified.⁴⁸⁴

Haimson and others have repeatedly emphasized that workers made these radical choices, and ultimately a revolution, on their own initiative and not as the malleable objects of the Bolsheviks' ideological and organizational strategy. As Haimson puts it: "Indeed, it bears repeating that the political threat of Bolshevism in 1914 stemmed primarily not from the solidarity of its organizations nor from the success of its efforts at ideological indoctrination, but from the workers' own elemental mood of revolt."⁴⁸⁵ While specifying a domain where workers had their own experiences, Haimson does not feel compelled to account for the striking similarity between workers' conceptions of those experiences and prevailing Bolshevik articulations. He simply notes a correspondence between the Bolshevik platform and the workers' own conceptions of their interests, a correspondence that ultimately brought the Bolsheviks to power. "Given this correspondence of mood, given the even more precise correspondence between the image of state and society that the Bolsheviks advanced and the instinctive outlook of the laboring masses, the Bolshevik party cadres were now able to play a significant catalytic role."⁴⁸⁶

Other historians have also observed that the workers' own actions and articulations corresponded with those of the Bolshevik party, without further elaborating on what is surely a very complex relationship.⁴⁸⁷ Correspondence suggests

⁴⁸² Leopold Haimson, "The Problem of Social Stability in Urban Russia, 1905-1917," part 1, *Slavic Review* 23 (1964): 619-642.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, 626.

⁴⁸⁴ For the prewar period, see especially Victoria Bonnell, *Roots of Rebellion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), G. R. Swain, "Bolsheviks and Metal Workers on the Eve of the First World War," *Journal of Contemporary History* 16 (1981), 273-291, and G. R. Swain, *Russian Social Democracy and the Legal Labour Movement, 1906-14* (London: Macmillan, 1983). For the later period, see Diane Koenker, *Moscow Workers and the 1917 Revolution* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981), David Mandel, *The Petrograd Workers and the Fall of the Old Regime* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), and David Mandel, *The Petrograd Workers and the Soviet Seizure of Power* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984).

⁴⁸⁵ Haimson, "The Problem of Social Stability," 639.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 638.

⁴⁸⁷ Mandel argues, for example, "that the workers' participation in the revolution was fundamentally a response to their own experience both in the factory and in the broader social setting. . . . The growth of support in the working class

either an accidental coming together of workers' ideas and Bolshevik strategies or perhaps the deliberate co-optation of those ideas by the Bolsheviks. The concept, in either case, is clearly meant to preserve an autonomous realm for working-class initiative, and, by implication, to exclude the possibility that Bolshevik ideology actually shaped that initiative to a significant extent. I will argue here that in some instances at least what workers expected and what the Bolsheviks demanded corresponded precisely because the workers' experiences had taken shape within institutions whose discursive practices were inseparable from the ideological struggles of factional politics. This process is well-illustrated in the case of the social insurance organs established by the 1912 Insurance Law. By tracing the evolution of this institution from the first legislative projects at the turn of the century to the sweeping Bolshevik electoral victories in 1914, one can see how workers came to expect from the social insurance system just what the Bolsheviks defined as essential. One cannot separate the workers' experiences in the nascent social insurance organs of tsarist Russia from the ideological practices of the Bolshevik party.

The tsarist government knew it was taking a chance when it passed a law on mandatory social insurance in 1912. The intention of the law was to force reluctant owners and skeptical workers into a cooperative insurance venture which, in the words of the finance minister Kokovtsev, "should pour that calm and confidence into the factory-plant environment, without which its development is impossible."⁴⁸⁸ Everyone involved in the legislative project realized, however, that mandatory social insurance would have to include some form of democratic working-class participation in social insurance institutions,⁴⁸⁹ an unsettling prospect for even the most enthusiastic government officials.

Tsarist officials set out to co-opt the working class with this democratic experiment, but such a plan could succeed only if the provisions of the law went some way toward meeting workers' social insurance demands.⁴⁹⁰ The first legislative project, introduced in 1904, was the most promising in this regard. Responding directly to the growing pressure of working-class unrest, the government produced a fairly comprehensive scheme to insure two million workers in factories under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Trade and Industry against sickness, accident, and invalidism or old age. After a period of reaction, workers' demands weighed less heavily, and with each duma session the scope of the law contracted. In the end, as B. G. Danskii, a leading Bolshevik insurance activist, would note, "a mountain gave birth to a mouse."⁴⁹¹ By the Third Duma in 1908 all the other labor legislation introduced in 1904 under the pressure of working-class unrest had come to nothing, and the insurance project, the sole survivor, now covered just two risks, sickness and accident. Several duma representatives were determined to scale back even this skeletal insurance legislation, but once again the government was confronted, as in 1904, with the troublesome demands of a reviving working class. If there was ever a time to test the plan

for the Bolsheviks was, thus, not the result of the party's successful tapping of the workers' irrational impulses but rather an expression of the growing correspondence between the latter's aspirations and the party's programme and strategy" (Mandel, Fall of the Old Regime, 3; my emphases). Koenker conceptualizes the process in similar terms: "The process by which the majority of workers identified their interests with the bolshevik party programwas a product of rational, logical choices that corresponded to the changing political and economic nexus" (Koenker, Moscow Workers, 362; my emphasis).

⁴⁸⁸ I. Chistiakov, *Strakhovanie rabochikh v Rossii* (Moscow, 1912), 293.

⁴⁸⁹ The Russians were working from the European model of the sickness kassa, where workers shared the responsibility for both financing and administering their kassy

⁴⁹⁰ During the 1905 Revolution, social insurance demands figured prominently on workers' petitions to the government and in contract negotiations with owners. See Chistiakov, *Strakhovanie rabochikh*, for a detailed analysis of those demands.

⁴⁹¹ B. G. Danskii, "Ob izdanii i provedenii strakhovikh zakonov 23 iunia 1912 g.," in B. G. Danskii and B. T. Miliutin, *Materialy po istorii sotsial'nogo strakhovaniia* (Moscow: Istoricheskii Kommitet Tsusstrakha NKT SSSR, 1928), 6.

to "pour calm and confidence into the factory," 1912 was the year. And indeed, the insurance bill moved with remarkable speed from the duma to the senate, becoming law in June 1912, just two months after the Lena goldfield massacre.⁴⁹²

Insurance benefits were meager in the final version of the legislation, and accident insurance was placed under the jurisdiction of insurance associations run exclusively by owners. Indeed the only evidence of the government's continued resolve to impose a new regime of cooperation on owners and workers was the provision for creating a network of insurance institutions in which workers and owners would jointly administer sickness benefits and, in some instances, medical care. The law required that every factory with more than two hundred workers establish a sickness kassa, and that smaller factories create joint kassy. Workers would contribute from 1 percent to 2 percent of their wages to the kassa and owners would pay a tax from 0.33 percent to 0.66 percent of the workers' wages. Workers would elect representatives to work with owner representatives on a kassa charter, and, once the charter was approved, worker representatives would have a majority of three-fifths of the members in the general kassa meeting and would have one more vote than owners on the kassa executive board.⁴⁹³

The insurance law also established insurance offices at the provincial level, a special City Insurance Office in Petersburg, and a national Insurance Council also based in Petersburg. These central organs would control the activities of the factory-based sickness kassy, confirming (or more often rejecting) charters submitted by owners and workers, excusing some factories from insurance altogether, resolving disputes, and so forth. Here too, the principle of working-class representation prevailed, although one could hardly accuse the government of a reckless expansion of the franchise. Out of the fifteen members in a provincial office, two were worker representatives elected by kassa board members, the others were government officials, representatives from the local zemstvo and duma, and owner representatives. In the Central Insurance Council five worker representatives served along with fourteen powerful government officials (with the minister of trade and industry acting as chairman), two zemstvo and two duma representatives, and five owner representatives.⁴⁹⁴

Whatever the limitations, the structure of these democratic insurance organs was unlike anything workers had yet experienced in tsarist Russia. The Menshevik insurance press described the implications of this reform in the following terms: "One must now acknowledge that, in publishing the insurance laws, the government took a big risk. It played a dangerous game. One stroke of the pen created throughout Russia several thousand worker organizations which necessarily included not only the leading, more conscious workers, but all workers without exception wherever the laws applied."⁴⁹⁵ Certainly government officials also recognized that they were taking a considerable risk in order to achieve their goal of mandatory cooperation in the factory. A confidential letter from the minister of internal affairs Maklakov, the least enthusiastic participant in this insurance experiment, to his governors in September 1912 reveals this recognition:

*This legislation has no precedent and it can be used by the revolutionaries. This is the best moment to distract workers from the revolutionary movement. At the same time, these measures create strong worker organizations with large sums of money, which will make workers aware of their professional interests. Therefore, we must be very careful.*⁴⁹⁶

Maklakov's assessment was quite accurate—by participating in these new insurance organizations, workers would enter into new relations with fellow workers, with factory owners, and with government officials, and those relations would

⁴⁹² Ibid.; Chistiakov, Strakhovanie, 288. On determination to scale back insurance see Ruth Amende Roosa, "Workers' Insurance Legislation and the Role of the Industrialists in the Period of the Third State Duma," Russian Review 34 (October 1975). Pravda 166 (1912) in Bol'shevistskaia pechat', vyp. III (Moscow: Vysshaia partiinaia shkola pri TsK KPSS, 1961), 261.

⁴⁹³ A. I. Vishnevetskii, Razvitie zakonodatel'stva o sotsial'nom strakhovanii v Rossii, 2nd ed. (Moscow, 1926), 27-28.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 35-37.

⁴⁹⁵ Strakhovanie rabochikh 2 (1913): 2.

⁴⁹⁶ Korbut, "Strakhovaia kampaniia po materialam departamenta politsii," in Danskii and Miliutin, Materialy, 1 19.

add an important dimension to working-class professional interests. Much as Maklakov feared, Social Democrats who managed to infiltrate the sickness kassy would increasingly define the significance of those relations in the context of factional politics.

At first factional politics did not appear critical to the Social Democratic response to the 1912 law. When the law appeared, party insurance activists initiated a workers' campaign to make the best of what all agreed was a very disappointing piece of legislation. Both Mensheviks and Bolsheviks agreed to support the sickness kassy, to organize workers through a central insurance congress, and to try to place their own members on kassa boards and in the central insurance organs. Finally, and most importantly as it turned out, they decided to draw up a workers' kassa charter in response to the government's model charter.

The two factions also agreed on the campaign slogans—social insurance for all workers covering all risks, compensation at full wage, kassa self-administration, an end to worker contributions, replacing factory-based kassy with territorial kassy, and the transfer of medical care to the kassa at the owner's expense.⁴⁹⁷ If they espoused the same slogans, however, they had very different conceptions of what those slogans should signify. Although both factions advocated participation in the democratic insurance organs, the Mensheviks defined this legal activity as a process of meaningful legal reform that would lead to the eventual realization of the campaign slogans. In contrast, the Bolsheviks instructed workers to demand nothing less than the complete and immediate realization of those slogans, a tactic calculated to demonstrate that such revolutionary goals could not be attained under existing conditions and, thus, that all legal reform was futile. This disagreement over both the legitimacy and the meaning of legal activities had already torn the party in many directions on countless occasions, and that same dispute would quickly come to define working-class choices and experiences at every level of the insurance campaign.

Why this seemingly rarified dispute of factional politics should become so important in a working-class campaign with such a broad base of participation is the question that this article seeks to answer. One could say, as the Mensheviks did time and again, that a perverse fratricidal streak ran through the Bolshevik party, driving them to inject factional discord into the insurance organs when the workers themselves wanted a unified campaign. Or one could argue, with Lenin, that the dispute about legality revealed a fundamental ideological divide within the party, a divide that was more significant than the common commitment to socialism.

For Lenin the ideological front was critical to the revolutionary struggle and bourgeois legality was the most formidable enemy on that front. In 1909 Lenin had described German social democracy as divided into "two worlds of ideas," a characterization that could as easily apply to Russian social democracy at this time. One world consisted of those who "regard this bourgeois legality as something eternal, who think that socialism can be fitted inside the framework of this legality" and the other of those who recognized that "the era of utilizing" the legality created by the bourgeoisie is giving way to an era of tremendous revolutionary battles, and these battles, in effect, will be the destruction of all bourgeois legality.⁴⁹⁸ The history of the workers' insurance movement from 1912 to 1914 lends some support to Lenin's insistence that ideology, and especially legal ideology, had become a critically contested terrain in the revolutionary struggle. To understand the real significance of the disagreement between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks over legality in the revolution, one must look to the institutions in which this ideological tension came to inform the daily struggles and practical choices of the working class, such as the kassa charter in the realm of social insurance. The most radical provision of the 1912 law was that it left considerable scope for local initiative by decreeing that a kassa would operate according to a

⁴⁹⁷ Strakhovanie rabochikh 1 (1912): 3.

⁴⁹⁸ Lenin, "Two Worlds," in Collected Works (Moscow, 1963) 16:307. Lenin identified the ideological front as central to the revolutionary struggle in *What is to be Done*. See The Lenin Anthology, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: Norton, 1975), 23-31. His characterization of German social democracy is on *ibid.*, 31 1.

charter drawn up by worker and owner representatives. The charter included important rules about representation in the general meetings and control on the board, provisions for dues and benefits, and guidelines for the organization of medical care, for the cooperation of several kassy, and for public meetings and educational lectures.

This legal document became the focus, first, of strenuous government efforts to limit the significance of these new workers' organizations and, then, of competing Bolshevik and Menshevik attempts to shape the workers' experiences and expectations in those same organizations. The government's plan was clear. Every effort, legal and illegal, was made to keep workers from participating in drawing up their kassa charters. First a committee of the Central Insurance Council, acting without elected worker representatives, drew up a model charter in December 1912 to serve as an example for individual sickness kassy. This charter, which had been circulated among owners' societies for suggestions, narrowed the scope of the original legislation to the obvious advantage of the owners.⁴⁹⁹ Although the model charter was not legally binding, it could be automatically approved by a factory inspector, while any changes in the model charter had to be approved by the regional insurance office or the Insurance Council.

Second, to make sure that neither the offices nor the council would respond favorably to charter changes proposed by workers, the government postponed the elections of worker representatives to these central bodies and decreed that Petersburg elections to the provincial and the city insurance offices and to the Central Insurance Council would be held only after eight kassy had been established. Kassa openings were orchestrated so that Petersburg lagged behind all other areas. The Ministry of Trade and Industry mobilized skeptical governors, reluctant owners, and often enthusiastic factory inspectors in a concerted campaign to open kassy in certain outlying areas quickly in order to establish the model charter as a precedent in many factories before Petersburg workers got the idea, on their own or with Social Democratic encouragement, that they could legally revise the kassa charter.⁵⁰⁰

These official manipulations of the charter negotiations provided the background to the Social Democratic insurance campaign. Mensheviks and Bolsheviks each produced their own workers' charters that reflected their conceptions of how workers should respond to the law.⁵⁰¹ Workers who chose to participate in the campaign relied on these workers' charters to formulate their demands for changes in the model charter, and it soon became obvious that the choice between the two Social Democratic charters was in fact, to use Lenin's expression, a choice between "two worlds of ideas." The workers had to decide whether the charter should be a proper legal document, faithful to the spirit of the tsarist legislation, or whether it should become a symbol of revolutionary working-class demands.

These two Social Democratic charters reflected quite explicitly the contrasting interpretations of the meaning of the campaign insurance slogans. Since Menshevik insurance activists defined the insurance slogans, much like the ultimate goal of socialism, as distant aims that could not be realized under existing conditions, their charter did not incorporate the campaign slogans. To take an example, both factions, and even certain government officials, acknowledged that the territorial kassa was both more efficient, and more favorable to the workers, than the factory-based kassa of the tsarist legislation. The Menshevik Ezhov noted early in the campaign that the workers were antagonistic toward the kassa because it was factory based, and, thus, under the eye of the owner. He concluded that the law should be changed to allow for territorial

⁴⁹⁹ B. G. Danskii, *Rabochii ustav bol'nichntoi kassy* (St. Petersburg, 1913), 7.

⁵⁰⁰ St-akhovanie rabochikh 5 (1913): 19. Korbut, "Strakhovaia kampaniia," 121. The Ministry of Trade and Industry also supported several owners' societies when they produced their own, still more advantageous, owners' charters (see Danskii, *Rabochii ustav*, 8-9).

⁵⁰¹ Solomon Schwarz, *Sotsial'noe strakhovanie v Rossii v 1917-1919 godakh* (New York: Russian Institute, Columbia University, 1968), 31. Later in the campaign, the Bolsheviks published the workers' charter of the Putilov Plant as an actual charter that should serve as the example for all other workers' charters. *Pravda truda* 19 (1913), in *Bolshevikskaia pechat'*, 365.

kassy but added that "this is only music of the future; now we can only speak of realizing the law."⁵⁰² Thus, although the Mensheviks included the demand for a territorial kassa among their campaign slogans, their charter restricted itself to making the most of the factory-based kassa.

The Menshevik charter was, thus, a carefully formulated legal document that attempted to exploit every possible opportunity presented by the 1912 law. Solomon Schwarz, a leading Menshevik insurance activist and one of the authors of the Menshevik charter, would later describe how they wrote the charter:

The Menshevik project, with exhaustive thoroughness, article for article, compared the workers' charter to the model charter, attempting to the maximum degree to "squeeze" from the law everything that could be of use to the insured, and presenting exact and accessible arguments to defend the corrections to the model charter.⁵⁰³

In contrast, the Bolsheviks endorsed neither the sickness kassa as an institution nor the general structure of the insurance system introduced by the government. Indeed, the Bolshevik resolution at the Prague Party Conference in January 1912 had explicitly warned workers that the insurance bill was "a means of putting new chains and a new yoke on the proletariat" and urged the proletariat to join the proposed kassy in order to transform them into a weapon in the class struggle, into "a means of developing its class-consciousness, strengthening its organization and intensifying its struggle for full political liberty and for socialism."⁵⁰⁴

The campaign slogans were an essential part of this struggle, and the Bolsheviks made an emphatic distinction between their own "unabridged" slogans and the "abridged" slogans advocated by the Mensheviks under the guise of realism and expediency. The demand for a territorial kassa was included, along with the obligatory transfer of medical care to the kassa, in the unabridged campaign slogans in the Bolshevik charter. Where Schwarz had boasted that his charter adhered ever so closely to the model charter, Danskii, the author of the Bolshevik charter, brashly declared that "whatever is not against the law can be included." Where the Menshevik charter stood as a model of legality, the Bolshevik charter was an indictment of the law. Schwarz said about the Bolshevik charter: "The Bolshevik project had basically agitational aims, and did not concern itself particularly with the insurance law, proposing corrections which could not possibly be grounded in the law, and not even carefully exploiting all the loopholes that existed in the law for improving the charter."⁵⁰⁵ Schwarz objected to the fact that the Bolsheviks refused to play by the existing rules, but that was just the point. The rules were tsarist, or at best bourgeois, and the Bolsheviks rejected their premises. The Mensheviks continued to hope for party unity in spite of everything, but the Bolsheviks were already operating from another world, a world beyond the rules of bourgeois legality.

To understand the role the workers themselves played in this new institution and to understand why certain key groups went along with Bolshevik choices, the claim that workers had "their own" experiences, made "their own choices" and that all this corresponded to Bolshevik formulations and strategies is not sufficient. Rather, as workers, willingly or otherwise, began to participate in this institution, first with their local kassa charters and then in elections to the central organs, their initial, unorganized responses to the 1912 legislation were transformed by the Social Democratic choices articulated in the insurance campaign. If at first workers debated whether or not to pay their kassa dues, eventually they found themselves choosing between two profoundly different stances toward legal reform. As the workers' insurance campaign took hold, one could say that most significant insurance practices unfolded within the stormy ideological framework of partisan politics.

⁵⁰² Strakhovaznie rabochikh 1 (1912): 13.

⁵⁰³ Schwarz, Sotsial'noe, 31.

⁵⁰⁴ Lenin, Collected Works 17:478-479.

⁵⁰⁵ Strakhovanie rabochikh 1 112 (1913): 18; Danskii, Rabochii ustav, 1 1; Schwarz, Sotsial'noe, 31.

At first, though, workers were on their own when they were confronted with the model charter for the proposed sickness kassy. In the early months, before the Social Democrats had made their mark on charter negotiations, workers in various provinces were instructed, by owners or by factory inspectors, to elect representatives who would then work with owner representatives to propose changes in the model charter. The response to this unprecedented democratic opportunity was apparently quite consistent—workers refused to have anything to do with the factory-based kassy. The better-informed workers were outraged that some of the expense for medical care had been transferred from owners to workers, and it was also common knowledge that factory-based kassy worked to the owners' advantage while territorial kassy would have favored workers. The majority of workers, who had only the most rudimentary grasp of the provisions of the new law, focused their outrage on the monthly subtraction of 2 percent from their meager wages. This deduction was enough to set off strikes in some factories, and at the very least boycotts were widespread, especially among the more "backward" workers, like textile workers, weavers, and mill workers. Where workers lacked the organization for this type of action, a resounding apathy was the typical response. They failed to show up for elections or, as was a common practice, they submitted blank or invalid ballots.⁵⁰⁶

Such resistance from the supposed beneficiaries of the new law would be expected to slow its implementation, but the working-class response actually facilitated the government's plan to postpone kassa elections where workers were the most organized, and to open as many kassy as possible among apathetic workers in outlying areas under the model charter. The Ministry of Trade and Industry instructed its factory inspectors to proceed with or without the workers' participation, and in many factories owners simply appointed worker representatives, while in others elections were held with only a handful of workers. Thus, although working-class resistance and apathy was strongest among the least-organized workers in the outlying provinces, more kassy were established in these areas during the first half of 1913 than were in places like Petersburg and Moscow. Although many workers who boycotted the kassa elections believed that in so doing they could avoid paying their kassa contributions, the actual result was that throughout these areas the sickness kassy simply opened under the model charter with no input from workers.⁵⁰⁷

In some cases workers did organize early to introduce changes in the charter. While workers in the supposedly backward professions were most likely to boycott kassa elections, certain workers, especially printers, participated in charter negotiations and were able to win concessions from the owners in order to establish craftwide kassy.⁵⁰⁸

The Social Democrats launched their workers' insurance campaign in the face of this widespread working-class antipathy toward the new legislation. For many Bolsheviks the workers' skepticism reinforced their own deep-rooted hostility toward legal activity, and some Bolsheviks openly defied party instructions by lending their support to workers who boy-

⁵⁰⁶ Strakhovanie rabochikh? 1 (1912): 11; 5 (1913): 23; Voprosy strakhovaniia 9 (1913), 8. For an account of strikes in Tver' and Zaverets, in Petrokov province, see Schwarz, Sotsial'nioe, 39–40, and Strakhovanie rabochikh 6 (1913): 1. See also Korbut, "Strakhovye zakony 1912 goda i ikh provedenie v Peterburge," part 2, Krasnaia letopis' 2 (1928): 108. Boycotts were common in many cities, like Ekaterinburg, Smolensk, and Moscow. See, for example, Strakhovanie rabochikh 5 (1913): 21–27; Voprosy strakhovaniia 7 (1913): 1. For boycotts among weavers and other "backward" professions, see Strakhovanie r abochikh 11 12 (1913): 40; Voprosy strakhovaniia 9 (1913): 8. When they were not boycotting, Moscow workers seem to have been especially apathetic, in part because the owners were so firmly in control, but their apathy also reinforced the owners' initial advantage. See Strakhovanie rabochikh 5 (1913): 25; Voprosy strakhovaniia 1 (1913), in Bol'shevistskaia pechlat', 557; Voprosy strakhovaniia 7 (1913): 5. Blank or invalid ballots are in Strakhovanie rc,bochikh 7 (1913): 27.

⁵⁰⁷ Korbut, "Strakhovaia kampaniia," 121. Strakhovanie rabochikh 7 (1913): 29. As of September 1, the number of kassy being organized or already organized for some important regions were Petersburg district, 220 kassy (37.2%); Moscow district, 205 kassy (21.6%); Warsaw district, 201 kassy (38.1%); Kiev district, 298 kassy (61.3%); Povolzhe district, 140 kassy (48.6%); Kliar'kov district, 230 kassy (43.0%). Strakhovanie Rabochikh 10 (1913): 30–31. Strakhovanie rabochikh 8 (1913): 26.

⁵⁰⁸ Strakhovanie rabochikh 8 (1913): 25, and 1 (1914): 8.

cotted kassa elections. The Mensheviks, in contrast, had no such reservations, and their initial enthusiasm about the kassy translated into an early advantage in setting the tone for the campaign. They launched a special insurance journal, *Strakhovanie rabochikh*, in December 1912, while the Bolshevik equivalent, *Voprosy strakhovaniia*, appeared only in October 1913. Menshevik activists organized insurance circles, read lectures on the new law, and apparently managed, in Petersburg and elsewhere, to place their representatives on kassa boards.⁵⁰⁹

Thus, despite the refrain repeated in *Strakhovanie rabochikh* that workers retained their "boycott mood," in the early months of 1913 Menshevik strategies appeared to be taking hold. In some areas—the places referred to most often were Warsaw, Revel, Khar'kov, Ekaterina, Saratov, Orle, Tula, Rostov, Saratov, and Riga—elected representatives began to propose changes in the model charter. In keeping with Menshevik tactics, the changes proposed were modest, and, much as the Bolsheviks predicted, the results were disappointing. Often worker representatives were harassed and their meetings disrupted or forbidden. When they managed to submit their revised charters to owners, the changes were usually rejected by the owner or by the insurance office and the kassa would open with the model charter. The only concession owners made with some regularity was that they gave up their right to chair the kassa board meetings. Such disappointing results often brought the campaign full circle, with workers more discouraged and frustrated than ever and leaning, once again, toward boycotts.⁵¹⁰

This pattern of working-class responses did not encourage the Mensheviks in their campaign to revise the charter, but the most important test of their tactics came in Petersburg. Workers in the capital city were well organized and vocal, and their actions were an example to workers in outlying areas.⁵¹¹ In addition, Petersburg kassa members would eventually elect representatives to the two most important insurance organs, the Petersburg Insurance Office and the Central Insurance Council. For all these reasons, Petersburg became the center of the insurance campaign, and the locus of the most decisive confrontation between the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks.

At the same time, as the direct result of the government's strategy of postponing elections where workers were the most radical and well organized, the Petersburg campaign did not really get started until the latter half of 1913. As it turned out, this strategy backfired because the Bolsheviks, who were also slow to take up the insurance cause, entered the campaign in earnest just when the Petersburg metalworking industry began to hold kassa elections. This explosive combination altered the course of the faltering, and predominantly Menshevik, insurance campaign.

Early in 1913, before either the metalworkers or the Bolsheviks became involved, Petersburg workers responded to the insurance campaign in much the same way as their counterparts in other regions had. Here too the printers were the best organized and the most enthusiastic from the outset. At a general meeting at the end of 1912 they issued a resolution on the need for a kassa that would unite all workers in the printing industry, and by May of 1913 they had petitioned the Petersburg Insurance Office for permission to open such a kassa. As was typical of the government's delaying tactics in the capital city, the office voted to postpone the decision on craftwide kassy, even though printers in other regions were allowed

⁵⁰⁹ G. I. Osipov, "Strakhovaiia kampaniia v Peterburge: rabota v pravleniakh bol'nichnykh kass," in Danskii and Miliutin, Materialy, 78-81; A. Pireiko, "Strakhovaiia kampaniia v Rige," in Danskii and Miliutin, Materialy, 150.

⁵¹⁰ Some of most common changes proposed by elected representatives were that the owners give up their rights, as stipulated in the model charter, to chair the kassa board meetings and that the kassa be allowed to hold general meetings for educational and other cultural activities, as well as to invite outside speakers to lecture to the insured.

Strakhovanie rabochikh 6 (1913): 31-32; 11-12 (1913): 45; 8 (1913): 26. Korbut describes the insurance campaign in various regions as characterized by a sudden surge of activity, followed by a falling off of interest ("Strakhovaiia kampaniia," 139). For similar descriptions of the campaign, see *Voprosy strakhovaniia* 7 (1913): 1; *Strakhovanie *abochikh* 11-12 (1913): 39; *Strakhovanie rabochikh* 2 (1914): 14; and *St'akhovanie rabochikh* 1 (1915): 2-6.

⁵¹¹ For descriptions of how workers looked to Petersburg, see *Strakliovanie rabochikh* 5 (1913): 23, and 7 (1913): 25.

to unite in this type of kassa. In September the Petersburg printers held another meeting, with the enthusiastic support of the Mensheviks, to promote the craftwide kassa, and apparently the owners were responsive.⁵¹²

Unlike those in the craft trades, Petersburg manufacturing workers were antagonistic toward the new kassy. Textile workers, who were among the first to have a chance to elect representatives, were poorly informed about the law and often had little idea about what they were supposed to vote for. However disorganized their response, their message was clear. Most workers apparently chose to boycott the elections; others submitted ballots that were invalid, blank, or, more pointedly, filled in with censored words. Some workers who were elected feared reprisals from the boycotters. The owners, well organized in their opposition to working-class revisions of the charter, postponed and disrupted meetings and, as the Menshevik press characterized it, generally "turned working-class participation in writing the charter into a comedy."⁵¹³

In the textile industry, as in the leather industry and elsewhere, whenever worker representatives actually tried to propose changes in the charter either the owners refused outright or the local insurance office rejected the changes. In July of 1913 Schwarz decided to review the results of the Petersburg campaign on the grounds that "in the struggle for corrections in the charter of the sickness kassa, worker representatives must know which corrections their comrades have managed to accomplish in other factories. . . . This makes it easier to insist on these corrections."⁵¹⁴ He found that, of the first six published charters, five were drawn up by the Petersburg Owners' Society and one was the model charter.

If the workers' insurance campaign could claim only an occasional success in the outlying provinces, the situation was worse in Petersburg. For those workers who chose to participate in the campaign, and they were few enough, the blatant violation of their newfound legal rights was an important lesson in tsarist legal procedure. Schwarz, a firm believer in the absolute power of the law, tried to encourage them with the following analysis of one rejected workers' charter: "If the decree of the Office [rejecting the Stearin Works charter] is based on the law, then the struggle for these corrections is hopeless. But if the decree of the Office is illegal, then with perseverance the workers can still introduce these corrections into the charter."⁵¹⁵ After a careful analysis he concluded, predictably, that the Petersburg office had acted illegally in rejecting the Stearin Works charter proposed by the workers. This illegal action was, according to Schwarz, reason enough to carry on.

The Mensheviks' unshakable belief in legal reform prevented them from seeing what was becoming quite obvious to many workers--that the legal struggle, under the shifting terms dictated by the tsarist government, was hopeless. The Menshevik version of the workers' insurance campaign would probably have simply faded away as workers became more apathetic and more cynical and owners gained firm control of this allegedly democratic workers' organ, but the radical tactics introduced by the Bolsheviks in the latter half of 1913 changed this. If workers chose, both as their initial response to the insurance legislation and then in the wake of repeated failures in their efforts to revise the charter, to reject the kassa in one way or another, the Bolshevik campaign endorsed that rejection in principle even as it called on workers to join the kassa for explicitly revolutionary purposes. In so doing, the Bolsheviks were able to transform working-class practices that had resulted, for the most part, in model charters and alienated workers into a revolutionary stance. By calling on workers to join a legally sanctioned institution with the explicit purpose of destroying its legitimacy, the Bolsheviks translated the

⁵¹² Strakhovanie rabochikh 7 (1913): 19. Silversmiths and goldsmiths were also well organized but less so than the printers; see Strakhovanie rabochikh 10 (1913): 27. The printers' resolution and petition are in Strakhovanie rabochikh 11-12 (1913): 22, and 7 (1913): 19. The decision to postpone is also in Strakhovanie rabochikh 7 (1913): 19, and the same article claims that the government also postponed opening general kassy for factories with fewer than two hundred workers to avoid encouraging other workers to insist on territorial kassy. The September meeting and owners' response are in Strokhovanie rabochikh 10 (1913): 26, and 11 -12 (1913): 22.

⁵¹³ Strakhovanie rabochikh 7 (1913): 19; 8 (1913): 22; 9 (1913): 30; 10 (1913): 26; 6 (1913): 31.

⁵¹⁴ Strakhovanie rabochikh 8 (1913): 10.

⁵¹⁵ Strakhovaoe *abochikhl 7 (1913): 8.

workers' skepticism toward legal reform into the language of a powerful revolutionary ideology. To borrow a formulation from Antonio Gramsci, the Bolshevik party "elaborated and made coherent the principles and problems which [the] masses posed by their practical activity."⁵¹⁶

At first, though, many Petersburg Bolsheviks were more inclined to reinforce than to try to transform working-class responses. Although the party decreed, at the Prague conference in January 1912, that Bolsheviks should establish illegal party cells in every sort of legal organization, including the projected sickness kassy, some Petersburg Bolsheviks felt compelled to support workers who boycotted kassa elections—the ideological rationale for participating was not convincing enough to overcome their suspicion of any legal trappings that might legitimize the sickness kassa in the eyes of the workers. As the first elections approached, these Bolsheviks insisted that owners should allow workers to hold open meetings to discuss the law. When all such meetings were disrupted, Bolsheviks called for a strike on 14 December. By 19 December more than twenty thousand workers had joined. Whole factories refused to participate in kassa elections under the conditions declared by the government, and on 15 December a *Pravda* article seemed to support this tactic: "It is obvious that such 'elections' in no way correspond to the interests of workers. The aim of these 'elections' is obvious—to introduce the charter that the owner wants. Needless to say, workers will not agree to such 'blind' elections."⁵¹⁷

Despite *Pravda*'s apparent endorsement of the workers' boycott, Lenin's voice prevailed at the Krakow party meeting at the end of December. The Prague resolution was reconfirmed and the boycott of kassa elections was rejected as "harmful and inexpedient."⁵¹⁸ Instead of supporting the workers' initial response to the insurance law, Petersburg Bolsheviks would have the more difficult task of mobilizing that response in order to transform the reformist sickness kassa into a revolutionary vehicle directed by an illegal party cell. Metalworkers became the perfect agents for such a strategy when they joined the campaign in the summer of 1913. By that time the Bolshevik tactic of taking over legal workers' groups was bearing fruit in other institutions, and the Mensheviks were losing control of their most prized constituency, the unions. In August, just when the insurance campaign reached the metalworking industry, the Bolsheviks won control of the board of the metalworkers union. Thus, already bolstered by the disappointing results of the Menshevik insurance tactics, the Bolsheviks were able to exploit their union position to guide metalworkers in charter negotiations with the owners.⁵¹⁹ Bolshevik ascendancy in the metalworking ranks transformed the workers' insurance campaign in Petersburg. Although five of the first eight Petersburg factories to open kassy earlier in the year had also been metalworking plants, those factories were small and the workers had confined their efforts to the minor revisions advised by the Mensheviks. When the campaign reached the larger metalworking plants in the fall of 1913, workers were less compliant and far more organized. At this stage 35,000 metalworkers were scheduled to join kassy, and by October twelve factories had already enlisted their 25,000 workers to create a Petersburg insurance center.⁵²⁰ The worker representatives from those factories united behind the Bolshevik demand for an all-city, or territorial, kassa and they urged all workers to join their campaign. Within a few weeks the call for an all-city kassa, a slogan that the Mensheviks had labeled "the music of the future," was transformed into the pivotal demand of the insurance campaign. Just as the Bolsheviks had anticipated, with this transformation the charter negotiations that had proceeded as exercises in legal reform now acquired a distinctly revolutionary dimension. The clearest

⁵¹⁶ Antonio Gramsci, "The Study of Philosophy and Historical Materialism," in *The Modern Prince and Other Writings* (New York: International, 1957), 64.

⁵¹⁷ Korbut, "Strakhovye zakony 1912 goda i ikh provedenie v Peterburge," part 1, *Krasnaia letopis'* 1 (1928): 157159. The refusal of factories to participate can also be found in *Pravda*, 29 December 1912, as quoted in Schwarz, *Sotsial'noe*, 29. The quotation is also in Schwarz, *Sotsial'noe*, 28.

⁵¹⁸ Schwarz, *Sotsial'noe*, 28.

⁵¹⁹ Swain reports that "by August and September the union was being flooded with requests for advice, and the advice the union gave in return was always the same—campaign for a general city fund" (Swain, *Russian Social Democracy*, 173).

⁵²⁰ *Metallist* 9 (1913): 10, 11-12.

indication that insurance politics had entered a new phase came when representatives from ten metalworking plants met to create the Petersburg insurance center and to decide on campaign tactics. When four of these ten factories indicated that they would unite to form a general kassa, the others ruled against the proposal on the grounds that workers should settle for nothing short of an all-city kassa embracing all factories. With the Bolshevik-leaning representatives from the important Putilov plant leading the way, this nascent insurance center rejected the "abridged" slogans that had dominated the campaign and urged workers to demand the self-administered all-city kassa that the government had so scrupulously excluded from its insurance legislation.⁵²¹

Much to the dismay of the Menshevik insurance activists, workers enthusiastically responded to this Bolshevik strategy. As one such activist noted in the December issue of *Strakhovanie rabochikh*, "During the last two months, only one task-the struggle for a city kassa-has artificially become the single issue."⁵²² The Mensheviks looked on with increasing frustration as trades that had been working toward establishing craftwide kassy now rejected the notion that such a kassa represented a step toward the ultimate goal of an all-city kassa. First the goldsmiths and silversmiths, who had been organizing a craftwide kassa with enthusiastic Menshevik support, began to join the center, and, finally, in the greatest defeat for the Menshevik cause, even the printers' union, which had already voted in favor of a craftwide kassa and undertaken negotiations with owners, suddenly voted to join the insurance center and support its demand for the all-city kassa. By November 1913 the Petersburg insurance center included fifty eight factories and extended well beyond the metalworking profession. Even the textile workers from several factories, who were indifferent when Mensheviks urged them to improve their factory charters and appear for voting, enthusiastically supported a resolution calling for an all-city kassa.⁵²³

The Mensheviks tried to explain their obvious failure by attacking the Bolsheviks for appealing to "the aroused mood of the masses, their still-not-banished boycottism in relation to the insurance law, their faith in spontaneous action, their distrust in their own ability for daily organized insistence on their interests and rights."⁵²⁴ In fact the Bolsheviks were successful precisely because they were able to translate the "still-not-banished boycottism" of the workers into a fundamental attack on legal institutions. The Bolsheviks, with their relentless ideological campaign, had undermined both the factory-based sickness kassa and craftwide kassy and had promoted a very specific, and revolutionary, alternative, the self-administered all-city kassa. Many Petersburg workers would now accept nothing less.

The Mensheviks criticized the extremism that led to wasted opportunities in charter negotiations and regretted their loss of control in the Petersburg campaign, but most of all they condemned the Bolsheviks for injecting factionalism into this broadly based workers' movement. They could not comprehend the Bolsheviks' reckless disregard for the revolutionary opportunities presented by such a united movement.

*The sickness kassy organize the masses to a greater extent than they have ever been organized before. And in the face of these organized masses, who are clashing with the organized forces of their opponent, factional strife should automatically be silenced. Divisiveness and fratricidal struggle among leading workers in the campaign is far worse, more senseless, than in political organizations embracing only the vanguard.*⁵²⁵

The Mensheviks seemed eager to set aside their tactical differences and support the Bolshevik victors in Petersburg if only the latter would acknowledge the mass character of the movement and agree to work with all factions and parties in a

⁵²¹ *Strakhovanie rabochikh* 10 (1913): 29, and 1 112 (1913): 18. In November 1913 Bolsheviks were elected to the Putilov kassa board (Bonnell, Roots, 405).

⁵²² *Strakhovanie rabochikh* 11 -12 (1913): 17.

⁵²³ *Metallist* 10 (1913): 10. By November 1913 eight of the thirty goldsmith and silversmith factories had joined the center (*Voprosy strakhovaniia* 6 [1913]: 9). *Strakhovanie rabochikh* 11 12 (1913): 22. 20.

⁵²⁴ *Strakhovanie r abochikh* 11 12 (1912): 19.

⁵²⁵ *Ibid.* 7 (1914): 3.

unified insurance campaign. They looked to the upcoming central elections as an opportunity to join forces in a national movement.

The Bolsheviks, however, were not committed to a mass movement of this kind and were as eager to inject factional discord into the central elections as the Mensheviks were to eliminate it. Unfortunately for the Mensheviks, the law stipulated that only worker representatives from Petersburg kassa boards, and not from other regions, were qualified to vote for Insurance Council representatives, a condition that inadvertently favored the Bolsheviks once they had gained control of the Petersburg movement. When Petersburg kassa representatives met in December of 1913 to draw up guidelines for these national representatives, they rejected the Menshevik proposal that the representatives subordinate themselves to the "collective of the sickness kassy" and voted instead for the Bolshevik formula of subordination to "Marxist aims."⁵²⁶ In effect, they instructed their representatives to follow the instructions of the Bolsheviks.

The Mensheviks still hoped to overcome this divisive tactic during the March 1914 elections when, as they envisioned it, kassa representatives would choose a list of candidates from all parts of the workers' movement. Here again, they were outmaneuvered by the Bolsheviks, who printed a list of Bolshevik candidates in *Pravda* on the day of the election. These candidates won the council elections, as did the Bolshevik candidates who stood for the elections to the Petersburg insurance offices.⁵²⁷

The new council representatives, who called themselves the Workers' Insurance Group, made no secret of their intention to follow the Bolshevik line as articulated in *Voprosy strakhovaniia*. The workers' group met regularly in the editorial office of that journal,⁵²⁸ and the April issue led off with a greeting "to all comrade-workers of Russia from the workers' insurance representatives." Each subsequent issue bore the announcement: "The journal is issued with the closest participation of the members of the Workers' Insurance Group of the Insurance Council."⁵²⁹ The workers' group published their first statement in an open letter distributed to various party and union press organs, but they deliberately neglected to send a copy to *Strakhovanie rabochikh*. Finally, the letter itself underscored the partisan comments of these national representatives. The Bolshevik demand for a workers' charter that would establish self-administered territorial kassy was reiterated, and *Voprosy strakhovaniia* was named as the group's official press organ.⁵³⁰

The final rift in this prewar social democratic campaign centered on this tension between unity and factionalism. Throughout the campaign the Mensheviks claimed that factional differences were merely strategic while the Bolsheviks insisted that those same differences were so fundamental that no underlying principles could unite these two Social Democratic factions. As the campaign progressed, it became clear that the Mensheviks operated within the framework of bourgeois legality while the Bolsheviks promoted a radical attack on that same form. These "two worlds of ideas" translated into very different approaches to the sickness kassa charter negotiations. As the Bolsheviks gained control of the campaign, first with their Petersburg kassa victories and then with their control of the Workers' Insurance Group, they changed the terms of the insurance debate, and with those new terms they transformed workers' experiences in an institution that was, as all sides agreed, an important innovation in the political life of the working class. If workers came to accept the territorial kassa as the sine qua non of the insurance campaign, then surely Bolshevik ideological practices contributed significantly to this correspondence between workers' demands and the demands articulated in the Bolshevik party's insurance platform.

⁵²⁶ Schwarz, *Sotsial'nzoe*, 34. This debate continued, with various revisions of the proposal's wording, but the main difference was that between subordination to "organized Marxists," by which was meant Pravdists, and the "kassa collective." For a discussion of the debate, see Schwarz, *Sotsial'noe*, 31-36, and Swain, *Russian Social Democracy*, 181-182.

⁵²⁷ For an account of the elections, see Osipov, "Strakhovaia kampaniia," 86-89.

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁵²⁹ *Voprosy strakhovaniia* 1415 (t1914), in *Bol'shevistskaia pechat'*, 551.

⁵³⁰ *Strakhovanie r abochikh* 7 (1914): 5-7.

Supplemental Readings

Section VII: Fraction Politics

Lenin as Election Campaign Manager - Doug Gennes (medium)

An older and shorter SWP pamphlet that inspired August Nimtz to write his larger work on Lenin's electoral strategy.

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1CHX8JZKpgD4N3QFAXMYM0Yij8qfW2J-R?usp=sharing>

The Bolsheviks in the Tsarist Duma - A. Badayev (long)

<https://redstarpublishers.org/badayev.pdf>

Constituency and Party in Fraction Politics - Kautsky (short)

<https://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1081/origins-of-democratic-centralism/>

Actions of the Baden Deputies - Luxemburg (translated by Ben Lewis)

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1F8ynYVO9ivd4RsTdKqCiatHmvxT1nx5gSoYArHhHjrw/edit?usp=sharing>

Lenin's Electoral Strategy from Marx and Engels through the Revolution of 1905: The Ballot, the Streets - or Both - August Nimtz (long)

The first book in Nimtz's two-part work on Lenin's electoral strategy.

<https://www.pdfdrive.com/lenins-electoral-strategy-from-marx-and-engels-through-the-revolution-of-1905-the-ballot-the-streets-or-both-e157926938.html>

The second book in Nimtz's two-part work on Lenin's electoral strategy.

<https://www.pdfdrive.com/lenins-electoral-strategy-from-1907-to-the-october-revolution-of-1917-the-ballot-the-streetsor-both-e157840824.html>

Section VIII

The Democratic Social Republic

Section VIII: The Democratic Social Republic

Summary

Our fight for the democratic socialist republic is perhaps the most important contradistinction between Marxist Unity Group and other caucuses in DSA, (maybe) second only to our fight against the US Constitution. It differentiates our revolutionary strategy from other branches of Marxism and communist politics — including, crucially, our ideas about the composition and role of party and program. However, it is easily the most misapprehended element of MUG's politics among our comrades of different persuasions. A common refrain: "Isn't the USA already a democratic republic?" Simply: No! A deep understanding of the **democratic republicanism** of Marx and Engels is crucial to understanding the structure of the **dictatorship of the proletariat** (as outlined by the Paris Commune); in contraposition to that ideal form, the *interdiction* of proletarian democracy in the USA - a liberal constitutional regime enshrining perdurable oligarchy - is illuminated, in diametric contrast to ideological autonarratives about "liberty and justice for all." The democratic republic is our primary goal, and understanding it deeply is so crucial to our work as Marxists today that we dedicate a full week of our study to the comprehensive explication of its characteristics.

We begin our inquiry with two excellent readings by Mike Macnair of the CBGB: "Control the Bureaucrats," published on November 11, 2024, in the *Weekly Worker*, and Chapter 9 of his magnum opus, *Revolutionary Strategy*. The majority of this summary will focus on these theoretically and historiographically dense pieces.

In the first essay, we return to the concept of **smashing the state** by revisiting Lenin's 1917 *State and Revolution* pamphlet, where Lenin delineates the communists (who aim to smash the existing state) from the social democrats (who believe the proletariat could simply commandeer the existing state machinery). This was and remains an unfinished text. It re-examines the work of Marx and Engels (but only that which Lenin could access) and critiques the ideas of other leading Social Democratic theoreticians. In "Control the Bureaucrats," Macnair points out that the text offers only Lenin's **programmatic** conclusions, falling short of delivering a **systematic** theoretical extrapolation. This is what Macnair aims to uncover, and he starts by contextualizing the work itself, beginning 24 years prior to its drafting.

In 1893, the Second International split with the anarcho-syndicalists by obliging the workers' movement to run in parliamentary elections and engage in parliamentary institutions (the anarcho-syndicalists regarded this as unprincipled). Kautsky's 1909 *Road to Power* argued that the proletarian party must become the majority party while remaining in opposition to other parties. This way, the workers' party could seize and use the capitalist state to expropriate the capitalists. Kautsky criticized Pannekoek's *generalstreiklerei* (reformism) but argued against entering coalition governments (opportunism); neither approach could wrest an exclusively proletarian government from the capitalists. This position is mirrored in Lenin's polemics with Bukharin and the international left tendency in 1916. Against Bukharin's wholesale anti-statism, Lenin notes that the dictatorship of the proletariat, as the transitional form between capitalism and socialism, is itself a state form; therefore, opposing the very concept of the state is nonsensical. What communists ought to combat, said Lenin, was rather opportunist and reformist positionalities within the state.

Half a year later, in the late summer of 1917, amidst the Bolshevik's internal debate, Lenin advanced the idea of **insurrection** against the provisional government as opposed to gradually obtaining a majority within it - a significant departure from his previous position. Here is where he drafted *State and Revolution*. In re-examining Marx and Engels, Lenin emphasizes a few main points: the state grows out of class antagonisms, exists for class rule, and is an institution by and for the ruling class. Macnair identifies Lenin's position as a departure from classical Marxism. For Marxists, the withering away of the (capitalist) state occurs when "the proletariat abolishes [it], breaks it up, smashes it"; for Lenin, the proletariat would create a (semi-)state for itself to repress the capitalists, and *that* is the state which would wither away.

Macnair notes that the capitalist state is a *specific* entity — “an outgrowth of the absolutist state with two essential institutions: the bureaucracy and the standing army.” Drawing on *The Civil War in France*, Lenin emphasizes key features of the Paris Commune, which provided the model for the state the proletariat would erect:

4. the abolition of the standing army and its replacement with a people’s militia
5. *all* officials elected, subject to recall, and paid no more than a skilled workers’ wage
6. unification of powers

In the second half of the pamphlet, Lenin critiques Plekhanov and Kautsky for being evasive about what the state *is*. Macnair notes that while Lenin is correct that it isn’t made explicit, Kautsky operationally understands the state as a central public authority comprised of neutral technical roles empowered to give orders; Macnair points out that in Engels’ writing (in passages *not* quoted by Lenin) this **legal idea** is similarly suggested: that the state “sits above the classes and balances between them, in practice controlled by whichever class is economically dominant.” Lenin responds to an assertion by Kautsky that in the socialist state, individual workers at a train station “would not have direct management over when the trains would run, for a parliament of workers was necessary — not the individual workers at any station, by adding that *all* large-scale enterprises would require this strict discipline against “direct management” but with control and supervision by all - when everybody is a bureaucrat, nobody is.

Macnair then takes us through the history of Lenin’s practical application of these ideas in the *April Theses* and their historical outcome, which we will summarize at some length here — for the insight in this study encompass many of our current debates and clarify our aims. We will spare the whole history of the Bolshevik’s seizure of power in 1917, for Macnair does himself. Still, he notes that the Bolsheviks and their militia, the Red Guards, taking power resulted from their utilization of fraternization tactics to fight the coup attempt by Kerensky and co. in the infamous Kornilov affair, abolishing the formal monarchy and granting the Bolsheviks popular legitimacy, all of which paved the way for their successful seizure of Petrograd.

However, these tactics failed to demobilize Kalladin’s cossacks, who were only defeated because the militia was transformed into a “quasi-regular army” by the supply of artillery from Putilov factory workers. The Red Guard began to experience a series of defeats at the hands of German troops across Russia and bordering Northern European countries, culminating in a humiliating defeat in January 1918. 1918-1920 was characterized by the response to these defeats: the transformation of the militia into a real army. In order to develop this army, the Bolsheviks had to utilize *spetzy* [specialists] supervised by party commissars, who could demand higher wages than the average worker (and their own Bolshevik supervisors), thus creating the conditions for bureaucratic corruption and special privileges, and ultimately regressing to a *tsarist-type* state.

The 1920 Comintern “Theses on the Role of the Communist Party in the Proletarian Revolution,” in sharp contrast from what Lenin argued in *State and Revolution*, argues “that the proletariat is necessarily represented in the dictatorship of the proletariat by its most advanced part,” or, its **vanguard**, “in the form of the communist party … theoriz[ing] both state and party as strong, centralized military dictatorship forms.” Because Lenin only saw the state as an instrument of class rule and not as an army that must defend itself against external attack and natural disaster; “the ‘commune state’ is thus really a proposal for the abolition of the state, not its withering away,” which could only be realized in “a higher phase of communism.” But, says Macnair, Lenin didn’t get it all wrong. He, Marx, and Engels were correct against Kautsky that “the working class needs to smash the capitalist state.”

Macnair recognizes that the commune and workers’ councils were unstable and ineffective at smashing capitalism. He points out that a standing army and bureaucracy are necessary for victory. However, both “must be dependent on the proletariat” and capable of eventually withering away. Macnair ends by tasking the contemporary proletariat with “working

out the institutional forms which will make a professional bureaucracy answerable to the lay members ... in the existing organizations of the working class ... learn[ing] how to control ... [and] create its own power over its full-time

apparatus.” In doing this, we will equip ourselves to finally smash capitalism and create the truly democratic workers’ state our revolutionary forebears could not achieve.

We move to Chapter 9 of *Revolutionary Strategy*, “Republican Democracy and Revolutionary Patience.” Macnair delineates various strategic debates over the last two centuries that remain alive in our debates today. He begins by showing that Bakunin’s *generalstreiklerei* (now duly infamous at this point in the reader) evolved into the mass-strike “strategy” inherited by the anarchists, movementists, and direct-action advocates. The mass-strike strategy was also indirectly inherited by the **Trotskyists**. The Trotskyist **transitional method** argues for reformist struggles and trade unionism to develop “present consciousness,” which the Trotskyists hope to direct into the seizure of power by soviets, with prerequisite majority support being unnecessary. Says Macnair, “taken together with [their] extreme bureaucratic centralism and various secretive and frontist tactics,” we see a near-repeat of the Bakuninist policy elaborated earlier in the reader, with as much torque and stamina. So, we’ve come full circle. Macnair hopes to lift revolutionaries out of this death drive of repetition. We cannot rely on mass-strike strategy, for it’s “no strategy at all,” only a set of insufficient **tactics**. We should work within spontaneous movements that do arise, but we must go further and fight for a *political* alternative to capitalism.

After taking on Trotskyism, Macnair turns to **Kautskyism**. Macnair notes that while the “official communist” parties aspired to create a coalition, the other socialist and left parties refused, leaving them as functionally Kautskyan with a markedly reduced democratic character “[promoting] class-political consciousness and a sort of internationalism”, thereby associating Kautskyism with the “struggle for an independent workers’ party, intimately linked to independent workers’ media, trade unions, cooperatives, and [internationalism] … [against] shortcuts to power that evade the problem of **winning a majority** through either coalitionism … or the mass strike.” However, Kautskyism “turned the idea of the democratic republic … into a synonym for ‘rule of law’ **constitutionalism**” — class rule under capitalism. Their dogmatic approach to unity in a single party incapacitated them against the coalitionist right, so “that they collapsed ignominiously in the face of Italian fascism and German Nazism.” Macnair argues that the worst failures of Kautskyism live on in the existing left in nationalistic rhetoric and efforts to “take hold of and use the existing bureaucratic-coercive state machinery,” which predictably continues to result in coalitions with the right *at the expense of the unification of genuinely revolutionary tendencies*, to customarily catastrophic effects on the potency of socialist organization.

Next, we analyze **Cominternism**, inherited by “the Trotskyist and ex-Trotskyist organizations [and] to a lesser extent .. Maoist groups.” Macnair again points his finger at our beloved Trots, accusing their **united front** and **worker’s government** slogans as rationalizations for deal-making with the coalitionist and nationalist elements of the left, or ‘**non-sectarian’ sectarianism**.

The transcendence of these familiar repetitions of failure is found in the struggle for left unity. So, what of **strategy**? The defeat of capitalism is only possible by the self-emancipation of the working class (as **the whole social class dependent on the wage fund**) by collective decision-making about the utilization of the means of production (made possible through **democratic republicanism**, without which “state ownership is just private ownership by state bureaucrats”). We must struggle for **political power** in the form of the democratic republic and not through **parliamentary constitutionalism**. Democratic republicanism allocates local and sectoral decision-making to regional and sectoral bodies, while central bodies make decisions about common action. Democratic republicanism enshrines **self-government of localities**, as opposed to **Bonapartist centralism** and **constitutional federalism** alike. The working class must cohere **unity in action** on the basis of accepting **diversity of opinions**, and only **public ownership of information** can make possible **common, cooperative appropriation of the means of production**. The democratic republic is self-evidently impossible without **earnestly winning clear majority support**. Force or minority action cannot be used to evade the struggle for a majority because “we cannot claim to impose our **minimum program** on the society as a whole through minority action.”

The party must stand for the independent interests of the working class. It must organize as a **class-as-a-class**, which is not limited to particular sections of the class that are employed, but **society as a whole**. It must be democratic-republican

in its organizational character and be borne out of **the existing party organizations of the working class**. The party must be **independent of the capitalists** and the existing capitalist state (in its funding, its educational and welfare systems, its media, etc.) to have the ability to speak against the capitalists' interests. Finally, it cannot accept responsibility as a minority within capitalist parties or in any government other than one committed to the immediate formation of the democratic republic in the interests of the working class. The party should *ideally* unite *both* those who insist on the struggle for the democratic republic *and* those who believe the existing state regime can be used to defend working-class interests. Differences should be expressed via **public factions**, with **independent press, organization, and membership**, and with **complete freedom of criticism**. Still, **the** state loyalists/constitutionalists will render this impossible by always vetoing revolutionary politics, necessitating the organization of a separate party — therefore, **partial unity around immediate tasks is possible** but must be conditioned by the same conditions as listed above.

And what of the **united class front**: unity in action of *the whole class* around immediate common goals against the forced split by revolutionary veto-ers? This brings us necessarily to the question of **internationalism**. The working class can only take collective control of the means of production and decide democratically on their use *on a world scale*. Therefore, we need **a global democratic republic** and must “fight for working-class politics on the international scale before attempting to take power in any single country … [which] unless the workers’ party is on the verge of at least a continental majority, is likely to lead to disaster.” **Full class political consciousness** can only be attained by the *whole* working class.

We come now to Marx’s Third Address of May 1871 from *The Civil War in France*. We’ve analyzed the Paris Commune and **the Commune ideal** already. The first decree of the Commune was **the suppression of the standing army** and its **replacement by the armed people**, which was the sole mechanism by which it could defend itself against the backlash of the Empire. It was “formed of the municipal councilors, chosen by universal suffrage … responsible and revocable at short terms.” It was “to be a working, not a parliamentary body, **executive and legislative at the same time**.” The police force “was at once stripped of its political attributes” and was to be **responsible to and revocable by the Commune**; the same was true of all other officials at every level of administration and for the judicial magistrates and judges as well, and all were to be paid **workmen’s wages**. Churches and their proselytizing were made purely private affairs, and scientific and educational institutions were relieved of both the church and the state’s intrusions. Schools were expanded and open to all. Delegates of rural areas assembled by district, and these district assemblies sent deputies to the National Delegation in Paris, “with each delegate to be at any time revocable and bound by the **mandat imperatif** (formal instructions) of his constituencies.” Marx calls the Commune “*the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economical emancipation of labor*.” The Commune intended to **abolish class property**, expropriate the expropriators, and transform the means of production into the instruments of **free and associated labor**. Marx says plainly: “What else would it be but communism?”

Bruno Leipold’s “Marx’s Social Republic: Radical Republicanism and the Political Institutions of Socialism” emphasizes three ways Marx’s politics were “shaped by [the Commune’s] republican inheritance”:

1. The replacement of representative governance by the popular election of delegates represented by imperative mandates, recallability, and short terms.
2. Criticism of the separation of powers, privileging the supremacy of the legislative over the executive.
3. Popular control of the state’s administrative and repressive organs.

Leipold notes the emergence of the term “social republic” amongst 1848 radicals. Marx’s analysis of their Revolution implicated the underdevelopment of the working class in the victory of the bourgeoisie and their **bourgeois republic**. For him, the Commune was when the working class proved adequately developed to take political power and actualize that social republic the 1848 Revolution couldn’t. Though the Commune didn’t last, it revealed not just the necessity of the self-organization of the proletariat. The Commune also gave the proletariat a blueprint for democratizing the state.

We come finally to a short excerpt from Rosa Luxemburg's *Theory and Practice*. Luxemburg wrote *Theory and Practice* in response to Kautsky, who had critiqued her article, *The Mass Strike*. Kautsky urged Luxemburg to delete the final pages under threat of the rejection of her article — Luxemburg's "offense" was her explicit programmatic demand and agitation for the republic. Kautsky accused her of being a renegade to the party, declaring, "A single personality, no matter how high she may stand, cannot pull off a *fait accompli* on her book, which could have unforeseeable consequences for the party." Luxemburg was unimpressed and emboldened. She quoted the section in her article that Kautsky wanted to censor: "[U]niversal, equal direct suffrage for all adults without distinction of sex is [our] immediate goal ... our agitation [should] champion the following demand, which the first point of our political program leads to: *the demand for a republic* ... by pushing forward the republican character of Social Democracy we win, above all, one more opportunity to illustrate ... our principled opposition *as a class party of the proletariat* to the united camp *of all bourgeois parties*." She affirmed this "entirely new agitation," as Kautsky called it, "with a clear conscience." We should all aspire to be so bold!

Study Questions

*Independent Study questions are italicized

1. *What is the significance of the democratic republic as the political form for working class rule?*
2. Why did Marx advocate for the unicameral state body?
3. How should we interpret Marx's famous phrase "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery" in the context of his republicanism?
4. *What is a democratic republic?*
5. Why does Leipold use the phrase 'social republic'?
6. *Macnair summarizes the arguments of his book. What arguments stand out to you, and why?*

Control the Bureaucrats

by Mike Macnair

November 11, 2004

*What are the lessons of Lenin's 1917 pamphlet *State and Revolution*? Not the need for a 'commune state', argues Mike Macnair, but the need for representatives to be made accountable.*

Lenin's *State and Revolution* is a peculiar text. It is foundational to communist politics, as opposed to social democratic politics. Social democratic politics insists that the proletariat can take hold of and use the existing state, whereas *State and Revolution* insists that the existing state has to be smashed. Perhaps it was for this reason that it was pretty much marginalised in the 'official communist' movement. This was certainly the case from the time of the popular front turn in the early 1930s, but to a considerable extent already by 1920-21.

State and Revolution is also an unfinished text. Its origin is in research that Lenin did arising out of his polemics with Bukharin and his co-thinkers in 1916. That research had not been written up by the time the revolution started, though its main conclusions are present in the third 'Letter from afar', the 'April theses' and 'The tasks of the proletariat in our revolution'. Then, while he was in hiding after the July days, Lenin wrote up the first two parts of his project on the state – consisting of a re-examination of what Marx and Engels had said; and a critique of the principal theorists of the Social Democratic line on the subject, Plekhanov and Kautsky. But at this point the text as published breaks off. So we do not have in a systematic form the theoretical conclusions Lenin drew. Rather, we have the evidence of the programmatic conclusions – 'All power to the soviets' and so on.

If we want to find out what Marx and Engels said about the state, *State and Revolution* is a very partial starting point. The whole topic is much more systematically treated, with extensive use of the writings of Marx and Engels (to which Lenin did not have access), in Hal Draper's book *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution Vol 1, 'State and Bureaucracy'* (1977).

Kautsky

The immediate background to *State and Revolution* is the position that was held by Kautsky and the Second International in general. In 1893 the Second International adopted the position that it was obligatory for the workers' movement to participate in elections and parliamentary institutions. By passing this resolution the Second International made a split with the anarcho-syndicalists, who regarded parliamentary action as unprincipled and thought that that the road to socialism – or anarchism, as the case may be – lay through industrial action.

But then the questions were posed: why are we participating in elections and parliamentary institutions? Is this a (or the) road to workers' power and socialism?

The classic account is Karl Kautsky's pamphlet *The Road to Power*, dated 1909. Kautsky argues that the state is an instrument of class domination, an instrument of the power of the class which has political control over it. In that sense the state in itself is not tied to the capitalist class, except through the mechanisms of capitalist political control over it – that is to say, the government is formed by bourgeois parties. The bureaucratic apparatus of the state, the form of law and the separation of powers, in Kautsky's opinion, are technical instruments which any ruling class in modern society will have to use (Kautsky's views on this latter point are given an extended analysis in Massimo Salvadori's *Karl Kautsky and the Socialist Revolution* 1979).

Therefore, the strategic line which follows is that the proletarian party fights to win a majority through political struggles. By becoming the majority party in the society, the proletariat will be able to take control of the government of the proletarian party exclusively. This will then use the capitalist state against the capitalists, and expropriate the capitalists through the state which the capitalists created. Kautsky argues that at the end of the day the capture of political power consists of the proletariat forming an exclusively proletarian government.

Kautsky's sharp differentiation from the right reformists is that he argues against the workers' party joining coalition governments. The workers' party has to remain an oppositional party until it commands an absolute majority. To quote from *The Road to Power*: "The possessing class will always demand, and its interests will force it to demand, that the power of the state shall be used to hold the proletariat down. On the other hand the proletariat will always demand that any government in which their own party possesses power shall use the power of the state to assist it in its battle against capitalism. Consequently every government based upon a coalition of capitalist and working class parties is foredoomed to disruption."

Similarly, Kautsky on this basis criticised Pannekoek, who argued for the general strike as the road to working class power: the object of the mass strike, wrote Kautsky, "cannot be to destroy the state power; its only object can be to make the government compliant on some specific question, or to replace a government hostile to the proletariat by one willing to meet it halfway ... but never, under no circumstances, can it lead to the destruction of the state power; it can only lead to a certain shifting of the balance of forces within the state power ... the aim of our political struggle remains as in the past: the conquest of state power by winning a majority in parliament and by raising parliament to the ranks of master of the government."

Lenin's Break with Kautsky

In 1916, Bukharin, Preobrazhensky, Piatakov and others formed a 'left' trend in the Bolsheviks, which allied itself with the international left of Luxemburg, Pannekoek and others. Lenin became engaged in polemics against Bukharin.

Bukharin, under the pseudonym 'Nota-Bene', wrote in the first issue of an international magazine of the left youth: "Social democracy – which is, or at least should be, the education of the masses – must now more than ever emphasise its hostility to the state in principle. The present war has shown how deeply the state idea has penetrated the souls of workers."

Lenin's initial response to this, in December 1916, was: "Socialists are in favour of utilising the present state and its institutions in the struggle for the emancipation of the working class, maintaining also that the state should be used for a specific form of transition from capitalism to socialism. This transitional form is the dictatorship of the proletariat, which is also a state ... The point is not that the 'state idea' has clashed with the repudiation of the state, but that opportunist policy (ie, the opportunist, reformist, bourgeois attitude to the state) has clashed with revolutionary Social Democratic policy (ie, the revolutionary Social Democratic attitude towards the bourgeois state and towards utilising it against the bourgeoisie to overthrow the bourgeoisie). These are entirely different things. We hope to return to this very important subject in a separate article."

So in December 1916 Lenin's line on the state seems to be that of Kautsky in *The Road to Power*. It is after this article on the youth international that Lenin plunged into research into the approach of Marx and Engels to the question of the state, which led to *State and Revolution*. Why did he then write this up in August-September?

The answer is that there were again debates on the question of the state, in August and September 1917. These debates were live and critical, because the question was: should the Bolsheviks call for an insurrection to overthrow the provisional government? Was it appropriate to have "constitutional illusions" (as Lenin wrote) in the provisional government, or illusions in simple progress by gradually obtaining a majority? Lenin was seeking to turn his party towards the policy of

insurrection. It was in that context that he returned to the question of the state in *State and Revolution*. He did not finish it, because the demands of the revolutionary movement made the immediate political question primarily a practical rather than a theoretical problem.

What *State and Revolution* Says

As I have noted, the book is in two parts. The first five chapters take quotations from Marx and Engels and try to draw out what they were saying about the state. There are a number of specific points made. The first is that the existence of the state as a form in society grows out of class antagonisms. There are no societies which do not have classes but which do have states. States do not arise simply because the antagonism of classes demands a state to stand above the classes and mitigate their antagonism to prevent civil war. On the contrary, the state is an organ of class rule, an organ for the suppression of one class by another. In the case of the bourgeois state it is an organ of the bourgeoisie for the control of the working class.

There are passages in Engels's writing – which Lenin does not quote – which suggest a variation: the state which sits above the classes and balances between them, but is in practice controlled by whichever class is economically dominant. Lenin takes the former view – that the state is actually an organ of the ruling class, an institution the ruling class has created for its own purposes.

The state is not a mere legal idea, consisting of special bodies of armed men. Put another way, the state is an army. The classical Marxist doctrine is that the state withers away. The proletariat abolishes the capitalist state, breaks it up, smashes it. What withers away, says Lenin, is not the capitalist state, the state which exists now, but the proletarian state – the state, or semi-state, which the proletariat creates itself for the purpose of repressing the capitalists.

There is a celebrated quotation from Marx and Engels on the Commune: "Force is the midwife of history." It is not the case that peaceful transitions are possible in order to let the new power be born: it is necessary, says Lenin, for force at some stage to be used.

The capitalist state is a specific entity, which comes into existence following the end of absolutism. There is an ambiguity (and an endless debate among Marxists) about whether the absolute monarchy, with its extended state bureaucracy, standing army and so on, which characterised France, Prussia, and other countries in the 17th and 18th centuries, is a form of feudal state or a form of capitalist state. The texts from Marx and Engels on which Lenin relies do not have an opinion on that, and neither does Lenin. But the capitalist state is an outgrowth of the absolutist state with two essential institutions: the bureaucracy and the standing army.

Among the critical writings which Lenin draws on is Marx's *The Civil War in France* – his comments on the Paris Commune movement in the 1870s. The Paris Commune provides the model for a semi-proletarian state, the state which the proletariat erects to suppress the old ruling class. Lenin emphasises some particular points.

The first is abolition of the standing army and the creation instead of a militia of the whole people in arms. The second is that all officials are to be elected and subject to recall. This should be taken seriously. This does not mean that only cabinet ministers and the like should be elected and subject to recall. It means that army officers, judges and the official who sits at the desk in the dole office should be elected and subject to recall.

Third, all officials are to be paid no more than a skilled worker's wage – an absolutely elementary Marxist principle which the Socialist Workers Party has abandoned.

Fourth, unification of powers. The capitalist state is characterised by what Montesquieu called the separation of powers between the legislature (here parliament), the judiciary and the executive (here headed by the queen); and that these are separate powers. This is clearer in the United States, where the legislature is the congress, the executive is headed by the

president, and the judiciary is headed by the supreme court. These three powers are separate from each other and have a veto over each other. According to Marx on the Commune, essential to the power of the working class is an end to the separation of powers – the proletariat needs an elected body which is capable of acting as lawmaker, judge and direct administrator (although Marx expressly speaks only of a fusion of the legislature and the executive).

The second part of *State and Revolution* is the critique of Plekhanov and Kautsky. Here Lenin adds a couple of other points. His main argument against both Plekhanov and Kautsky is that they are evasive about what the state is. It is absolutely true, looking at the texts that Lenin quotes and also at other writings of Kautsky, that the latter does not define the state. He seems to have operated in practice on the basis of the legal idea of the state – the idea of a central public authority. The actual soldiers, police officers, prison wardens and bureaucrats who comprise the state Kautsky regarded as neutral technicians. What is left behind is the concept of a public power which can give orders. But this idea is never explicit or upfront, either in Plekhanov or Kautsky: they just leave what ‘the state’ means ambiguous. Kautsky had suggested, though, in one of his texts, that a socialist government did not mean that the workers at every railway station would decide for themselves when the trains would run. Instead the railways would be under the control of a sort of parliament of the workers. Lenin responds to this by adding two additional points. The first is that it is not just the railways where this would apply. It would be true of every factory. We cannot have workers’ management in the sense of direct management, where we all make separate decisions about what happens in our own little department – for example, in the paint shop, to take the example of a car factory, without regard to how many vehicles of what type are coming down the line. Therefore all large-scale enterprises, he says, require the strictest discipline.

The second extra point Lenin makes is that, while we will have to elect a ‘sort of parliament’ to make the ultimate decisions (about the railways, for example), we overcome the problem of the anti-democratic potential of that situation by providing for the “immediate introduction of control and supervision by all, so that all may become ‘bureaucrats’ for a time and that therefore nobody may be able to be a ‘bureaucrat’.”

First and fundamentally, then, Lenin reinstates the idea from Marx and Engels that it is necessary to break up the existing state. Second, the workers must have their own state, their own institutions to suppress the resistance of the exploiters. This is a “commune state”, a state on the model of the Paris Commune: abolition of the standing army and substitution of the armed people; election and recall of all officials; everyone to be held to a worker’s wage; the unification of powers. And, although large-scale operations require strict discipline and hierarchy, to overcome the anti-democratic effects of that hierarchy, we introduce control and supervision by all.

The Fate of the ‘Commune State’

In practice this idea of the state was extremely short-lived.

Certainly the Bolsheviks took power in October 1917 on the basis of a militia, the Red Guards, which they thought of as the armed people. The possibility of their taking power this way arose from the military-political success of the Red Guards and Bolshevik agitators in turning back the Kornilov coup attempt in September. They defeated Kornilov essentially by tactics of fraternisation with the ranks of the soldiers on the other side. Very shortly after the revolution, however, the white general, Kaledin, mobilised an army of Cossacks to take back Petrograd. Once again the Red Guards attempted the tactic of fraternisation but this time it failed. Petrograd would have fallen if it were not for the fact that the workers of the Putilov arms factory improvised artillery: thereby turning the Red Guards from a militia into a quasi-regular army.

Similarly, across western Russia and in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Finland, the Red Guards were unable to defeat German regular troops. Fraternisation did not work and as a military organisation the Red Guards were insufficient. This military judgment was confirmed when fighting restarted after the temporary break in the negotiations at Brest-Litovsk, in

January 1918. The German army rolled over the Red Guards and advanced at great speed. Finally those holding out against making peace were forced to agree that Lenin was right and it was necessary to accept the German terms.

In response to this the Bolsheviks created a standing army, the Red Army. The part of the narrative of the Russian Revolution which both many of the Trotskyists and the ‘official communists’ for different reasons suppress, is the struggle in 1918-20 to create a disciplined, organised, regular army. Behind that, if you are going to have a regular army you need specialists organising the flow of supplies to the army. You need people who know military technique. So the period of the creation of the Red Army is the period of the use by the Bolsheviks of spetsy (specialists) drawn from the old regime. They were subject to control or supervision by party commissars. But nonetheless, it is clear that with the use of specialists the public power is not being immediately returned to the people.

In order to get the spetsy to work, it was necessary to pay them more than the average worker, because they had a monopoly on certain skills and so could hold out and refuse to work unless they were paid more. Then another problem develops: the spetsy are better paid than the Bolsheviks who are supervising them, and we get a dynamic of corruption, and the growth of special privileges for the bureaucracy – already beginning in the later part of the civil war.

The Party State

At the end of the day the difference between 1917 and the Paris Commune is the existence of the Bolshevik Party. The Paris Commune was the seizure of power by the working class in the capital. October 1917 was similarly the seizure of power by the working class in the capital. The fundamental reason why the Commune failed and October succeeded is that Bolshevik organisations and those sympathetic to them — in the cities all over Russia, and in particular in Siberia — seized the cities, seized the railways, with or without local soviet authorisation.

Then the Bolshevik Party was forced to create a standing army, and was therefore forced to create a bureaucratic apparatus. And the spinal core of the new state was party political supervision over the spetsy, which countered the tendency back to a tsarist-type state. In 1917 the Bolshevik Party had about 300,000 members, overwhelmingly workers. By 1921 it had about the same numbers, but 80% were officials. They had been drawn into the work of supervising the state bureaucratic apparatus. They could not dispense with this apparatus, but had to put themselves at its core.

Conversely, the party turned the soviets into an image of the party. It is characteristic of the structure of ordinary political parties that you have an annual conference which elects a leadership, and that the leadership then runs the affairs of the party between the annual conference. The Bolsheviks converted the soviets into bodies which met periodically and elected an executive committee which then ran affairs in substitution for the full soviet. The ‘commune’ principle of election and recall then ceases to operate. The executive committee, and ultimately the council of soviet commissars, has become a political leadership like the leadership of a political party, not a recallable delegate body. It could only actually be a recallable delegate body if the soviets themselves were standing bodies, like parliaments, which met daily for most of the year.

This was a symptom of the fact that the actual spinal core of the state was the party. This was the dictatorship of the proletariat through the dictatorship of the Bolshevik Party as political representatives of the proletariat, not the dictatorship of the proletariat through the commune state.

Now theory begins to follow practice. The 1920 Comintern ‘Theses on the role of the Communist Party in the proletarian revolution’ and Zinoviev’s report on them present a distinct departure from the line of *State and Revolution*: they argue that the proletariat is necessarily represented in the dictatorship of the proletariat by its most advanced part, the Communist Party. They also theorised both state and party as strong, centralised military dictatorship forms.

Behind the Failure

The reason for the transition to the regular army and the dictatorship of the party can be found in the practical necessities of Russia, faced with German and other invaders and White Guard resistance. War is a matter of technique, as Trotsky correctly argued at the time. It is not the case that a militia can defeat a regular army in a straight fight.

The underlying problem is that states in historical societies are not just instruments for the control of the class struggle within the society. They are also partly for external defence against foreign enemies, and for dealing with natural disasters. The state in this sense is an aspect of the social division of labour. When Marx and Engels talk about the withering away of the state, or when we think seriously about what the withering away of the state means (ie, the withering away of the social specialisation of functions: of becoming a soldier or a bureaucrat and remaining a soldier or a bureaucrat for the rest of your life), we are talking about the higher phase of communism.

Hence the mistake in the idea of the ‘commune state’ is that it actually presupposes the immediate end to the social division of labour. Lenin does not think that he has become an anarchist utopian. But because he imagines the state as being simply an instrument for the control of class conflicts, he writes out of existence the state as a defence against external enemies – and hence regular armed forces and war as a technique. The ‘commune state’ is thus really a proposal for the abolition of the state, not for its withering away.

There is a historical background to this, which is that Marx and Engels, when writing about the state, start with Hegel’s critique, which itself starts with a reinterpretation of Hobbes’s Leviathan. And Hobbes is purely concerned with the state without its external relations, assuming the state to be in existence in a vacuum – in the absence of foreign enemies, in the absence of natural disasters. It is a theory of the lawyers’ conception of the state. Only in the material which they write on the Asiatic mode of production, which is not integrated in Lenin’s *State and Revolution*, do Marx and Engels go beyond that narrow conception.

Revolution and the State

There is a point, however, on which Lenin is clearly right: and that is regarding the historical transitions between one form of society and another. For example, the Roman state has to fall in order to open the way for feudalism. In the case of the Byzantine state, although there is a development towards feudalism from the 7th century, its political expression is constantly blocked until, finally, the state falls in 1453. Similarly, the feudal states have to be smashed up (*zerbrechen*), in order to set free the development of capitalism. And we can infer from that, and also equally clearly from the Commune and from 1917, and from all the events that have happened since, that the capitalist state has to fall in order set free the path of proletarian development.

But why is the state – which, as we have said, is simply an army with a bureaucracy to back it – so tied to a particular class that it has to be overthrown in order for another class to succeed it? The answer is that the state is cohered by its structural forms and core ideology. If it was just armed men, all that the state would be would be the aggregate collection of protection rackets existing throughout the society. This would be more accurately called warlordism, or the absence of a state, or the war of all against all, or Afghanistan. In order to be a state, it has to be organised bodies of armed men: it has to be cohered. It is cohered on the basis of institutional forms.

In the slave-owner state, such as the Roman Empire, the emperor is said to be the owner of the world: *imperator dominus mundi*. On that basis he is entitled to take from anybody, and give to anybody else. That is the basis of his legitimacy and his right to tax. The bureaucracy in the late Roman state originates with slaves owned by the emperor. It

becomes something different – it decays – but the underlying principle remains that the social and political forms of slavery give the structural forms of the slave-owner state.

Similarly in feudalism the king is the greatest feudal landowner and the state consists of the king's retinue. The king is expected to live off his feudal revenue. The structural forms of the feudal state are given by the class relations between the feudal ruling class and the serfs: the state is imagined as a manor on a very large scale. The structural forms of the bourgeois state – particularly the rule of law, constitutionalism, the separation of powers and the existence of a central bank and credit financing – tie it to capitalism.

These institutional and ideological links to the classes which historically created them mean that states actively resist the rise of new ruling classes, and cannot be 'made over' by structural reforms without provoking some form of coup d'état or forcible resistance by the state core. A state is, after all, an armed organisation which defends itself. The activity of courts and police is everyday coercion in the interests of property-owners. Thus Marx and Lenin are right that the working class needs to smash the capitalist state, and Kautsky is wrong.

What Sort of Workers' State?

The question which is clearly not answered – either by Marx and Engels on the Commune or by Lenin in *State and Revolution* – is, what are the structural forms which would tie the state to the proletariat? Marx, Engels and Lenin talked of getting rid of the standing army and the bureaucracy. The public power, the legal concept of the state, will wither away. But if we assume that a standing army and bureaucracy will remain, how do we make these dependent on the proletariat, and create the conditions for them to wither away in the long run?

Here, election and recallability of officials, the worker's wage and the end of the separation of powers are certainly starting points. But it also seems to me that it has to be the case that, just as the Bolshevik Party turned out to be the spinal core of the new Soviet state, the only conditions under which there will actually be a revolution which is not just a commune or a temporary rise of workers' councils which then ebb away (as happened in France in 1968 and Portugal in 1974-76) is if there is a party which is committed to carrying through the smashing of the old state and taking power.

The consequence is that the workers' movement needs to work out the institutional forms which will make a professional bureaucracy answerable to the lay members. It needs to work that out in the existing organisations of the working class. It needs to learn how to control power. It needs to develop institutions that go far beyond the thin, impoverished parties of today, which do not address different aspects of the cultural life of the class. Within this network or web of institutions under capitalism the proletariat needs to learn how to create its own power over its full-time apparatus.

In that sense it remains the case that *State and Revolution* has absolutely fundamental lessons for us. It is just that those lessons are not those imagined by the left and council communists and more recently the spontaneists and the 'councillist' Trotskyists who fetishise the soviet form. The lesson is not that soviet power is the magic wand which lets the proletariat take the power. It is that the proletariat needs to begin to develop power over its full-timers under conditions of bourgeois rule – in its own institutions, in its own organisations – if it is to be in a position to take the power from the bourgeoisie and create a state which is actually answerable to the working class, rather than one which becomes a state for itself, like the Stalinist regime.

Revolutionary Strategy, Chapter 9: Republican Democracy and Revolutionary Patience

by Mike Macnair

I began this book with the argument that it was necessary to go back over the strategic debates of the past in order to go forward and effectively address strategy now. The primary focus of the book has been to attempt to understand *critically* the various strategic choices made by socialists between 150 and 80 years ago, rather than echoing *uncritically* one or another side of the old debates, as often occurs with the left today. It is necessary to follow the former course because those choices have led up to the defeats, demoralisation and disorientation that currently affects the socialist movement internationally.

They are also, in reality, live political choices today. This has been reflected throughout the book. The fundamental choice between the perspective of the self-emancipation of the working class or, alternatively, forms of utopian or ethical socialism, was posed openly in the 2006 strategy debate in the LCR by the arguments of Artous and Durand. It is posed in British politics – and elsewhere – by both Eurocommunism and ‘green socialism’.

The coalitionist policy of the right wing of the Second International has been, since 1945, the policy of Second International socialists and ‘official communists’ alike. The substantive difference between them, before first Eurocommunism and then the fall of the USSR, was that ‘official communists’ proposed for each country a socialist-liberal coalition *that would commit to geopolitical formal neutrality combined with friendly relations with the Soviet bloc* (a policy sometimes called ‘Finlandisation’ by the parties of the right).

With the Soviet sheet anchor gone, the majority of the former ‘official communists’ are at best disoriented, and at worst form the *right wing* of governing coalitions (as is the case with the ex-communists and ex-fellow-travellers within the Labour Party in Britain).

Mass-Strike Strategy

The Bakuninist general-strike strategy descended into the ‘mass-strike’ strategy of the left wing of the Second International. The direct inheritors of this policy are today’s collectivist anarchists and advocates of ‘direct action’ and ‘movementism’. But its indirect inheritors are the Trotskyists. The Trotskyist idea of a ‘transitional method’ is that consciousness must change “in struggle” on the basis of “present consciousness”.

Trotskyists imagine that partial, trade union, etc struggles can be led into a generalised challenge to the capitalist state, and in the *course of that challenge* the Trotskyists could guide the movement to the seizure of power in the form of ‘All power to the soviets’ – in spite of their marginal numbers *before* the crisis breaks out. Taken together with the Trotskyists’ extreme bureaucratic centralism and various secretive and frontist tactics, this policy amounts almost exactly to the policy of Bakunin and the Bakuninists in 1870-73.

It has had almost as little success as the Bakuninists’ projects. Before 1991, the Trotskyists could more or less plausibly account for this failure by the dominance in the global workers’ movement of the Soviet bureaucracy and hence of ‘official communism’. Since 1991, the global political collapse of the latter has left the Trotskyists without this excuse. Without the Soviet Union and ‘official communism’ to their right, the Trotskyists have proved to be politically rudderless.

To say this is not to reject in principle mass strikes – or one-day general strikes or even insurrectionary general strikes. The point is that these *tactics*, which may be appropriate under various conditions, do not amount to a *strategy* for workers’ power and socialism. Socialists should certainly not oppose spontaneous movements of this sort that may arise in the course

of the class struggle, but rather fight within them – as Jack Conrad's 2006 *Weekly Worker* series on the 1926 general strike explains – for a *political* alternative to the current capitalist regime.

Kautskyism

Chapter three, on the strategy of the Kautskyan centre, may appear at first to be merely historical. After all, the Kautskyan centre – after its reunification with the right in 1923 – collapsed into the coalitionist right; and after fascism in Italy, Nazism in Germany and 1939–45, it left behind virtually no trace in the parties of the Socialist International. However, this was not the end of the story. In the first place, much of 'Kautskyism' was reflected in the more constructive part of the politics of the Comintern – and from there, in a more limited way, in the more constructive part of the politics of Trotskyism.

Second, although the post-war 'official communist' parties were coalitionist in their political aspirations, their attachment to the USSR meant that the socialist parties and the left bourgeois parties generally refused to enter 'left coalitions' with them. The result was that the communist parties were forced in practice to act as (rather less democratic) Kautskyan parties. In doing so, they could promote a sort of class-political consciousness and a sort of internationalism, and this could provide a considerable strengthening of the workers' movement.

In this sense 'Kautskyism' means the struggle for an independent workers' party, intimately linked to independent workers' media, trade unions, cooperatives and so on, and for – at least symbolic – internationalism. It also means the struggle against the ideas of short cuts to power that evade the problem of winning a majority, through either coalitionism or 'conning the working class into taking power' via the mass strike. These are *positive* lessons for today's left.

But there are negative lessons too. The Kautskyans fostered the illusion of taking hold of and using the existing bureaucratic-coercive state. They turned the idea of the democratic republic – in the hands of Marx and Engels the immediate alternative to this state – into a synonym for 'rule of law' constitutionalism. The national horizons of their strategy helped support the feeding of the working class into the mincing machine of war; and so did their belief that unity in a single party was indispensable, even if it came at the price of giving the coalitionist right wing a veto.

The statist, 'rule of law' and nationalist commitments shared by the Kautskyan centre and the coalitionist right meant that they collapsed ignominiously in the face of Italian fascism and German Nazism. This lesson has been repeated over and over again in the colonial 'third world'. In the imperialist countries, since the first impulse of the post-war settlement began to fade, the electoral cycle has repeatedly produced weaker reformist governments that end in disillusionment, the temporary rise of the far right and the victory of further centre-right governments.

These, too, are live political issues at the present date. The large majority of the existing left uses nationalist arguments and seeks to take hold of and use the existing bureaucratic-coercive state machinery.

The idea that unity of the 'broad movement' is essential, even if this means that the pro-capitalist right wing is given a veto, is the essence of the French Socialist left's decision to stick with the right rather than unify the opponents of the EU constitutional treaty, and of Rifondazione's 2006 decision to go into Prodi's Unione government in Italy. In both cases the results have been clearly disastrous.

Cominternism

The primary inheritors in today's politics of the ideas of the early Comintern are the Trotskyist and ex-Trotskyist organisations. To a lesser extent the same is true of Maoist groups, although since the right turn of Beijing in the 1980s these have become smaller and less influential. Both sets of ideas have a wider influence in diluted form through ex-

member ‘independents’ who have got fed up with the organised groups but not made a systematic critique of their politics. The main burden of chapters four to eight has been to try and separate out those elements in the ideas of the Comintern that were rational responses to real strategic problems from those that were blind alleys that lent support to the refusal of organised groups and ‘independents’ alike to unite effectively. This was particularly relevant to defeatism, the party of a new type, and the general staff of world revolution.

The reverse of the coin, in the case of both Trotskyist groups and independents, is the use of ‘united front’ and ‘workers’ government’ slogans to justify diplomatic deals with elements of the ‘official’ (ie, coalitionist and nationalist) left. These almost invariably involve ‘non-sectarian’ sectarianism: ie, sectarianism to their left and opportunism to their right. The phenomenon can be seen in full flower in the SWP. It also informs the LCR majority’s use of ‘united front’ policy to evade the problem of the disunity between the Ligue and Lutte Ouvrière.

The struggle for a united and effective left in the workers’ movement therefore unavoidably involves a struggle for a definite break with the errors of the early Comintern that have been inherited by the Trotskyists, and with the Trotskyists’ own errors in interpreting Comintern materials.

In several countries partial gains have been made by left unity. Partial *willingness to break with bureaucratic centralism* has been the key to both the unity and the gains. In England, the US, France and Argentina this has been absent and no progress has been made – in Argentina in spite of conditions of acute crisis in 2000-01.

At present, however, it seems depressingly likely that the continued coalitionism of the former ‘official communists’ and Maoists, and the Trotskyist diplomatic version of the ‘united front’, will result in these gains coming to nothing. The fate of the Brazilian Workers Party seems a clear example. If this depressing vista comes true, the Trotskyist sects will no doubt say, ‘There you are – told you so’. But – as the failure of the sects in England, the US, France and Argentina shows – the truth will be that there has been an *insufficiently critical* break with the inheritance of the early Comintern.

Strategy

The strategic coordinates that I have positively argued for in the last eight chapters can be summarised as follows:

4. There is no way forward from capitalism other than the self-emancipation of the working class. The ideas of a peasant-led revolution, of a long-term strategic alliance of the proletariat and peasantry as equals, of ‘advanced social democracy’ or of a ‘broad democratic alliance’ have all been proved false. They have been proved false by the fate of the so-called ‘socialist countries’ and by the fact that the fall of the USSR, combined with the decay of the US-led world economic order, has led to increasing attacks on the concessions that capital made to social democratic and left nationalist governments elsewhere in order to ‘contain communism’. The idea of the ‘movement of movements’ has proved, with extraordinary rapidity, to lead nowhere.
5. The ‘working class’ here means the *whole social class dependent on the wage fund*, including employed and unemployed, unwaged women ‘homemakers’, youth and pensioners. It does not just mean the employed workers, still less the ‘productive’ workers or the workers in industry. This class has the potential to lead society forward beyond capitalism because it is *separated from* the means of production and hence forced to cooperate and organise to defend its interests. This cooperation foreshadows the free *cooperative* appropriation of the means of production that is communism.
6. The self-emancipation of the working class requires the working class to lay its hands collectively on the means of production. This does not mean state ownership of the means of production, which is merely a legal form. Without democratic republicanism, the legal form of state ownership means private ownership by state bureaucrats. It means that the working class *collectively decides how the means of production are used*.

7. The self-emancipation of the working class therefore means in the first place the struggle for the working class to take political power. The only form through which the working class can take *political power* and lay collective hands on the means of production is the democratic republic. This does not mean ‘rule of law’ parliamentary constitutionalism, to which it is, in fact, *opposed*. It means a regime in which – *in addition* to the political liberties partially provided by ‘rule of law’ constitutionalism (freedom of speech, assembly, association, movement, etc) and an extension of these liberties – all public officials are elected and recallable; there is universal military training and service and the right to bear arms, and political rights in the armed forces; generalised trial by jury; freedom of information; and so on.
8. In particular, democratic republicanism implies that what has to be decided centrally for effective common action should be decided centrally, but that what does not have to be decided centrally should be decided locally (or sectorally: rail timetables, for example). Self-government of the localities, not Bonapartist centralism. But equally not constitutional federalism, which hands the ultimate power to the lawyers and turns the rights of the units of the federation into a form of private property.

The reason for points (4) and (5) is, in the first place, that the working class can only organise its cooperation through unity in action on the basis of accepting diversity of opinions; and, second, that there cannot be a *common, cooperative* appropriation of the means of production where there is private ownership of information, of institutional powers or of ‘political careers’. Without the principles of democratic republicanism there is precisely private ownership by individuals or groups of information, of institutional powers and of ‘political careers’. That is the meaning of the bureaucracies of the former ‘socialist countries’, of the trade unions, of the socialist and communist parties, and of the Trotskyist sects.

9. Since the only form in which the working class can actually take power is the democratic republic, it is only when this idea wins a majority in the society that the democratic republic can be achieved. Without clear majority support, a democratic republic is self-evidently impossible. All ideas of an enlightened minority conning the working class into taking power, whether through coalitions, through the mass strike or, more generally, through one or another sort of frontist arrangement of the minority party cog driving the bigger wheel (front, soviet, etc), have to be rejected.
10. To say this is not to reject either illegal or forcible action in defence of the immediate interests of the working class. The defensive action of minorities - particular sections of workers taking strike action, refusing to pay rents, organising self-defence against fascist attacks, etc - may appear to be anti-democratic because it is minority action against the wishes of an elected government.

This could be the case if *the state was a democratic republic*. But it is not. In spite of universal suffrage, the state regime is, in fact, oligarchic, corrupt and committed to the interests of the capitalist minority through the ‘rule of law’, deficit financing in the financial markets, and the national-state form in the world market.

To take as good coin the capitalists’ and their states’ hypocritical protestations against illegal or forcible action is merely to disarm the working class, since the capitalists and the state routinely act illegally and make illegal use of force in defence of their interests. The point is to avoid making the use of force or minority action into a strategy – let alone one that attempts to evade the struggle for a majority. We cannot claim to *impose our minimum programme on the society as a whole* through minority action. But *self-defence of workers’ immediate interests* by

sections of the class in defiance of a governmental ‘majority’ created by corrupt and fraudulent means is in no sense anti-democratic.

Party

The struggle for the working class to take political power involves in the here and now the organisation of a *political party* standing for the independent interests of the working class. This follows from the fact that the class as a class is not the same thing as the particular sections of the class who are in employment. It also follows from the fact that to emancipate itself the working class must take political power and give the lead to society as a whole. Such a political party needs to be democratic-republican in its organisational character, just as much as the form of authority that the working class needs to create in the society as a whole needs to be the democratic republic. That is, it needs the liberties (freedom of speech, etc), freedom of information, elected and recallable officials, and both central decision-making mechanisms *and* self-government of the localities and sectors.

The last point follows in the first place from the point made to explain points (4) and (5): the working class needs the principles of democratic republicanism in order to cooperate, and there can be no real, free cooperation where there is private property in information and in ‘political careers’.

It follows in the second place from a central lesson of the Russian Revolution, repeatedly confirmed elsewhere. It is the *existing party organisations* of the working class that can offer an alternative form of authority to the authority of the bourgeoisie: not the trade unions, and not the improvised organisations of the mass struggle such as soviets. Moreover, all states are party-states, shaped by the parties that created them and excluding the parties that opposed their creation. Hence a bureaucratic centralist party, if it took political power, would inevitably create a bureaucratic centralist state.

To do the job of organising the struggle for the self-emancipation of the working class, the workers’ party has to be *independent* of the capitalists and of the existing capitalist state. This implies that the working class has to build up its own funds, its own educational and welfare systems and its own media. Dependence on the capitalists and their state for these resources results in inability to speak *against* the capitalists’ interests.

It implies also that the workers’ party cannot accept responsibility either as a minority in a government with capitalist or pro-capitalist parties or in any government at all that is not committed to the immediate creation of the democratic republic in the interests of the working class.

The underlying reason for this point was explained in chapters two and seven. Capitalist nation-states are firms in the world market, and to defend the interests of the nation-state it is *necessary* to carry on the capitalists’ side of the class struggle against the working class.

Ideally, this implies that there should be a single workers’ party uniting *both* those who believe that the workers’ interests can be defended through the existing state regime *and* those who insist on the struggle for the democratic republic, with this difference expressed in the form of public *factions* with their own press, organisation and membership, and complete freedom of criticism. At the crunch moments when it becomes necessary to do so, the working class would then have the ability to choose between these factions.

In practice, however, this is impossible. *Because* the state and the capitalists are on their side, the state loyalists/coalitionists will always insist on a veto on ‘revolutionary’ politics. This makes it necessary for those who stand for the working class taking the political power to organise a party separate from the state loyalists/coalitionists.

This, in turn, poses the question of the ‘united class front’: the struggle for unity in action of *the whole class* around immediate common goals, against the split forced by the loyalist/coalitionist demands for a veto.

International

Capitalism is an international system and both the capitalist class and the working class are international classes. The nation-state is merely a firm within the international capitalist system; it is just as much vulnerable to the flight of capital and disinvestment as are individual firms. The working class can therefore only lay collective hands on the means of production and decide democratically on their use *on a world scale*. The first and foremost lesson of the ‘short 20th century’ is the impossibility of socialism in a single country.

But exactly the same reasons mean that it is impossible to have *political power of the working class* or the democratic republic – for more than a few months – in a single country. The struggle for workers’ power is therefore a struggle for a global democratic republic and immediately for continental democratic republics.

There is an important implication of this point: it is strategically necessary – as far as possible – to fight for a majority for working class politics on the international scale *before* attempting to take the power in any single country: taking the power in any single country, unless the workers’ party is on the verge of at least a continental majority, is likely to lead to disaster.

Further, it is impossible to have full class political consciousness – ie, mass consciousness by the working class of itself as a class and its independent interests – in a single country. *The independent class party of the working class, in the broadest sense, is necessarily an international party.* Indeed, it is increasingly the case that cooperation of the working class in international trade union organisations is essential to defending the immediate interests of workers in the direct class struggle.

It is impossible to achieve either the democratic republic or the independent workers’ party without rejecting both bureaucratic/Bonapartist centralism and legal federalism. This is true all the more of the struggle for the global or continental democratic republic and those for an international workers’ party and international trade unions, etc. This is the fundamental lesson both of Comintern and of the petty caricatures of Comintern that the Trotskyists have made.

What is Not Said

I have said nothing in this summary about imperialism, although I have written on this issue at length elsewhere. The global hierarchy of nation-states is real, and justifies defeatism in the imperialist countries in relation to their colonial wars. But the primary conclusion from the Leninist theory of imperialism – the ‘anti-imperialist united front’, which descends to the modern left as Maoism and third-worldism – is shown by the experience of the 20th century to be a blind alley.

I have said nothing about the ‘permanent revolution’ versus ‘stages theory’. Again, a principal lesson of the 20th century is that *both* approaches are blind alleys. In addition, both are strategic approaches to *pre-capitalist* states and countries under global capitalism. There are a few of these left, but not enough to justify treating the issues as fundamental to strategy.

I have said nothing about one of the principal issues that has divided the left: that of Soviet defencism versus third-campism. Views on the class character of the USSR, etc are important to Marxist *theory*. But the fall of the USSR means that this is no longer a question of *strategy*.

In relation to the national question, I have argued that the positive goal of the workers’ party should be the *international* – continental and eventually global – democratic republic. The implication of this approach is that slogans about national ‘self-determination’ have a secondary tactical character.

In relation to ‘gender politics’ I have argued on the one hand that the self-emancipation of the working class means the self-emancipation of the whole social class dependent on the wage fund. It should be obvious that this is inconceivable without the struggle for the self-emancipation of women *as part of* this struggle. On the other hand, I have argued that the idea of a united, cross-class, feminist movement as an effective political actor has proved illusory in the course of the last 30 years (chapter one).

‘Reform or Revolution’

The Mandelite Fourth International in general has argued for the creation of parties that are “not programmatically delimited between reform and revolution”. The examples are the Brazilian Workers Party, Rifondazione, the Scottish Socialist Party and so on. Comrade Callinicos, in contrast, argues that the dividing line between ‘reform and revolution’ is still fundamental. His principal conclusion from this is the need for the ‘Leninist’ party, by which he means a bureaucratic-centralist Trotskyist party; with the consequence that *alliances* such as Respect (ie, coalitions and fronts) are all that can be achieved on a broader level.

The burden of the whole book has been that this is an *ideologised* form of a real political divide. The real divide is, on the one side, for or against taking responsibility in a coalition government to run the capitalist state. On the other side, it is for or against the open advocacy of the independent interests of the working class, of the democratic republic and of internationalism (because the loyalists/coalitionists veto this open advocacy).

As I have said before (point 11), there *can* be partial unity around immediate tasks between the partisans of coalitionism/loyalism and those of working class political power and internationalism; but the condition of this unity is open debate and unflinching criticism of the coalitionists/loyalists by an *organised party* or *public faction* of the partisans of working class political power. Otherwise we might as well just join the Labour Party, the French Socialist Party, or whatever as individuals.

The Fourth International is for unity in a *party* that involves at least partial suspension of criticism (‘non-sectarianism’). The SWP is for unity in a *coalition* that equally involves at least partial suspension of criticism. In both cases this is merely to give political support to loyalism/coalitionism. The SWP’s difference from the Fourth International therefore reduces to the organisational separation of the ‘Leninist’ – ie, bureaucratic-centralist – party, *without this party having tasks of overt criticism of the coalitionists among its current allies*. This is merely to be a sect.

The ideological form is thus the *counterposition* of ‘reform’ and ‘revolution’.

Marxists are social revolutionaries in the sense that we seek the transfer of social leadership from the capitalist class to the working class. We are also political revolutionaries in the sense that we understand that this cannot be finally achieved without the replacement of the current *political state order*.

The Trotskyists' conception of 'revolution' has been the mass-strike strategy. As it has become clear that this strategy is illusory, 'revolution' reduces to the need for the 'Leninist party': that is, to a bastardised form of the false conclusions about the need for Bonapartist centralism that the Comintern drew from the belief that Europe was about to enter into generalised civil war.

At a more abstract theoretical level these ideas are given support by misinterpreting a real fact. This is that history moves at more than one speed: sometimes in a gradual, molecular fashion; sometimes in extremely rapid processes of change. It is the extremely rapid processes of change that are commonly called 'revolutions'. The Trotskyists then argue that we need a 'Leninist party' for *future* revolutionary times. Some Trotskyists and ex-Trotskyists reverse the point: until the outbreak of open revolutionary crisis, we do not need a revolutionary politics.

The trouble is that social revolution and political revolution alike involve *both* the gradual molecular processes of change *and* the short burst of crisis. By fetishising the short burst of crisis the Trotskyists devalue the slow, patient work of building up a political party on the basis of a minimum *political* programme in times of molecular processes of change. The result is, when crisis does break out, they have created only sects, not a party, and are effectively powerless.

Fight for an Opposition

As I have argued, the present problem is not to fight for a workers' *government*, but for an *opposition* that will openly express the independent interests of the working class (chapter seven). Without beginning with the struggle for an opposition, there is no chance of confronting in the future the problem of an alternative governing authority to that of the capitalists.

In parliamentary regimes, which are now a common form across most of the globe, the capitalists rule *immediately* through the idea that the point of elections is to give legitimacy to a *government* that heads up the bureaucratic-coercive state – and electing representatives to the parliament or other representative bodies is only a way of choosing a government. This fetishism of government forces the formation of parties and coalitions in which the capitalists' immediate paid agents have a veto over policy, and creates the corrupt duopoly/monopoly of the professional politicians.

Within this political regime, to govern is to serve capital; and, therefore, to *create a coalition that aims to pose as an alternative government within this political regime* is also to serve capital. To fight for an opposition is to insist that we will not take responsibility for government without commitment to fundamental change in the political regime.

This is by no means to reject altogether either coalitions or blocs around single issues, or electoral agreements that can assist in getting past the undemocratic hurdles set up to secure the monopoly of the corrupt professional politicians – *provided these blocs or agreements do not involve either commitment to form a government or suspension of criticism*. It is perfectly acceptable to enter into such limited blocs or agreements not only with Labour and similar parties, but also with openly pro-capitalist ones. When, for example, the Liberals and some Tories opposed the religious hatred bill, they served the interests of the working class, whatever their reason for doing so.

We should not take *responsibility for government* without commitment to radical-democratic change. But we should propose, or support, both individual democratic reforms (such as freedom of information or a reduction in the patronage powers of the prime minister) and reforms that strengthen the position of the working class (such as a national minimum wage or limitations on working hours).

To oppose in the interests of the working class is also to build political support for the immediate defensive struggles of the working class against capital. Direct political support is valuable. But so is indirect support, where the workers' party at every opportunity challenges the undemocratic character of the political regime – its corruption, its statism, its depend-

ence on the financial markets and so on – and puts forward the alternative of the democratic republic. This activity serves to undermine the false claims of the regime to democratic legitimacy deployed against strikers, etc.

Patience

This strategic orientation demands patience. The fundamental present problem is that after the failures of the strategies of the 20th century, in the *absence* of a Marxist strategic understanding, most socialists are socialists by ethical and emotional commitment only. This leads to the adoption of ‘get-rich-quick’ solutions that enter into the capitalist politicians’ government games.

This is the trouble with ideas that the LCR should join a new *gauche plurielle* project rather than addressing seriously the question of unity with Lutte Ouvrière; with Rifondazione’s decision to participate in the Prodi government; with Die Linke’s participation in a coalition with the SDP in Berlin; with the SSP’s orientation to an SNP-led coalition for independence; with Respect. The result is not to lead towards an effective workers’ party, but towards another round of brief hope and long disillusionment.

A different sort of impatience is offered by those who split prematurely and refuse *partial* unity in the hope of building their own ‘Leninist party’: the Sozialistische Alternative’s split orientation in the process of formation of Die Linke; the splits of the Socialist Party and Workers Power from the Socialist Alliance; and so on. We find that, although these sects sell themselves as ‘revolutionary’, when they stand for election either to parliaments or in unions their policies are broadly similar to the coalitionists. They are still playing within the capitalist rules of the game.

The left, in other words, needs to break with the endless series of failed ‘quick fixes’ that has characterised the 20th century. It needs a strategy of patience, like Kautsky’s: but one that is internationalist and radical-democratic, not one that accepts the existing order of nation-states.

The Civil War in France: The Third Address – May, 1871

The Paris Commune

On the dawn of March 18, Paris arose to the thunder-burst of “Vive la Commune!” What is the Commune, that sphinx so tantalizing to the bourgeois mind?

“The proletarians of Paris,” said the Central Committee in its manifesto of March 18, “amidst the failures and treasons of the ruling classes, have understood that the hour has struck for them to save the situation by taking into their own hands the direction of public affairs.... They have understood that it is their imperious duty, and their absolute right, to render themselves masters of their own destinies, by seizing upon the governmental power.”

But the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes.

The centralized state power, with its ubiquitous organs of standing army, police, bureaucracy, clergy, and judicature – organs wrought after the plan of a systematic and hierarchic division of labor – originates from the days of absolute monarchy, serving nascent middle class society as a mighty weapon in its struggle against feudalism. Still, its development remained clogged by all manner of medieval rubbish, seigniorial rights, local privileges, municipal and guild monopolies, and provincial constitutions. The gigantic broom of the French Revolution of the 18th century swept away all these relics of bygone times, thus clearing simultaneously the social soil of its last hinderances to the superstructure of the modern state edifice raised under the First Empire, itself the offspring of the coalition wars of old semi-feudal Europe against modern France.

During the subsequent regimes, the government, placed under parliamentary control – that is, under the direct control of the propertied classes – became not only a hotbed of huge national debts and crushing taxes; with its irresistible allurements of place, pelf, and patronage, it became not only the bone of contention between the rival factions and adventurers of the ruling classes; but its political character changed simultaneously with the economic changes of society. At the same pace at which the progress of modern industry developed, widened, intensified the class antagonism between capital and labor, the state power assumed more and more the character of the national power of capital over labor, of a public force organized for social enslavement, of an engine of class despotism.

After every revolution marking a progressive phase in the class struggle, the purely repressive character of the state power stands out in bolder and bolder relief. The Revolution of 1830, resulting in the transfer of government from the landlords to the capitalists, transferred it from the more remote to the more direct antagonists of the working men. The bourgeois republicans, who, in the name of the February Revolution, took the state power, used it for the June [1848] massacres, in order to convince the working class that “social” republic means the republic entrusting their social subjection, and in order to convince the royalist bulk of the bourgeois and landlord class that they might safely leave the cares and emoluments of government to the bourgeois “republicans.”

However, after their one heroic exploit of June, the bourgeois republicans had, from the front, to fall back to the rear of the “Party of Order” – a combination formed by all the rival fractions and factions of the appropriating classes. The proper form of their joint-stock government was the parliamentary republic, with Louis Bonaparte for its president. Theirs was a regime of avowed class terrorism and deliberate insult towards the “vile multitude.”

If the parliamentary republic, as M. Thiers said, “divided them [the different fractions of the ruling class] least”, it opened an abyss between that class and the whole body of society outside their spare ranks. The restraints by which their own divisions had under former regimes still checked the state power, were removed by their union; and in view of the threatening upheaval of the proletariat, they now used that state power mercilessly and ostentatiously as the national war engine of capital against labor.

In their uninterrupted crusade against the producing masses, they were, however, bound not only to invest the executive with continually increased powers of repression, but at the same time to divest their own parliamentary stronghold – the National Assembly – one by one, of all its own means of defence against the Executive. The Executive, in the person of Louis Bonaparte, turned them out. The natural offspring of the “Party of Order” republic was the Second Empire.

The empire, with the coup d'état for its birth certificate, universal suffrage for its sanction, and the sword for its sceptre, professed to rest upon the peasantry, the large mass of producers not directly involved in the struggle of capital and labor. It professed to save the working class by breaking down parliamentarism, and, with it, the undisguised subserviency of government to the propertied classes. It professed to save the propertied classes by upholding their economic supremacy over the working class; and, finally, it professed to unite all classes by reviving for all the chimera of national glory.

In reality, it was the only form of government possible at a time when the bourgeoisie had already lost, and the working class had not yet acquired, the faculty of ruling the nation. It was acclaimed throughout the world as the savior of society. Under its sway, bourgeois society, freed from political cares, attained a development unexpected even by itself. Its industry and commerce expanded to colossal dimensions; financial swindling celebrated cosmopolitan orgies; the misery of the masses was set off by a shameless display of gorgeous, meretricious and debased luxury. The state power, apparently soaring high above society and the very hotbed of all its corruptions. Its own rottenness, and the rottenness of the society it had saved, were laid bare by the bayonet of Prussia, herself eagerly bent upon transferring the supreme seat of that regime from Paris to Berlin. Imperialism is, at the same time, the most prostitute and the ultimate form of the state power which nascent middle class society had commenced to elaborate as a means of its own emancipation from feudalism, and which full-grown bourgeois society had finally transformed into a means for the enslavement of labor by capital.

The direct antithesis to the empire was the Commune. The cry of “social republic,” with which the February Revolution was ushered in by the Paris proletariat, did but express a vague aspiration after a republic that was not only to supersede the monarchical form of class rule, but class rule itself. The Commune was the positive form of that republic.

Paris, the central seat of the old governmental power, and, at the same time, the social stronghold of the French working class, had risen in arms against the attempt of Thiers and the Rurals to restore and perpetuate that old governmental power bequeathed to them by the empire. Paris could resist only because, in consequence of the siege, it had got rid of the army, and replaced it by a National Guard, the bulk of which consisted of working men. This fact was now to be transformed into an institution. The first decree of the Commune, therefore, was the suppression of the standing army, and the substitution for it of the armed people.

The Commune was formed of the municipal councillors, chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of the town, responsible and revocable at short terms. The majority of its members were naturally working men, or acknowledged representatives of the working class. The Commune was to be a working, not a parliamentary body, executive and legislative at the same time.

Instead of continuing to be the agent of the Central Government, the police was at once stripped of its political attributes, and turned into the responsible, and at all times revocable, agent of the Commune. So were the officials of all other branches of the administration. From the members of the Commune downwards, the public service had to be done at *workman's wage*. The vested interests and the representation allowances of the high dignitaries of state disappeared along with the high dignitaries themselves. Public functions ceased to be the private property of the tools of the Central Government. Not only municipal administration, but the whole initiative hitherto exercised by the state was laid into the hands of the Commune.

Having once got rid of the standing army and the police – the physical force elements of the old government – the Commune was anxious to break the spiritual force of repression, the “parson-power”, by the disestablishment and disen-

dowment of all churches as proprietary bodies. The priests were sent back to the recesses of private life, there to feed upon the alms of the faithful in imitation of their predecessors, the apostles.

The whole of the educational institutions were opened to the people gratuitously, and at the same time cleared of all interference of church and state. Thus, not only was education made accessible to all, but science itself freed from the fetters which class prejudice and governmental force had imposed upon it.

The judicial functionaries were to be divested of that sham independence which had but served to mask their abject subserviency to all succeeding governments to which, in turn, they had taken, and broken, the oaths of allegiance. Like the rest of public servants, magistrates and judges were to be elective, responsible, and revocable.

The Paris Commune was, of course, to serve as a model to all the great industrial centres of France. The communal regime once established in Paris and the secondary centres, the old centralized government would in the provinces, too, have to give way to the self-government of the producers.

In a rough sketch of national organization, which the Commune had no time to develop, it states clearly that the Commune was to be the political form of even the smallest country hamlet, and that in the rural districts the standing army was to be replaced by a national militia, with an extremely short term of service. The rural communities of every district were to administer their common affairs by an assembly of delegates in the central town, and these district assemblies were again to send deputies to the National Delegation in Paris, each delegate to be at any time revocable and bound by the *mandat imperatif* (formal instructions) of his constituents. The few but important functions which would still remain for a central government were not to be suppressed, as has been intentionally misstated, but were to be discharged by Communal and thereafter responsible agents.

The unity of the nation was not to be broken, but, on the contrary, to be organized by Communal Constitution, and to become a reality by the destruction of the state power which claimed to be the embodiment of that unity independent of, and superior to, the nation itself, from which it was but a parasitic excrescence.

While the merely repressive organs of the old governmental power were to be amputated, its legitimate functions were to be wrested from an authority usurping pre-eminence over society itself, and restored to the responsible agents of society. Instead of deciding once in three or six years which member of the ruling class was to misrepresent the people in Parliament, universal suffrage was to serve the people, constituted in Communes, as individual suffrage serves every other employer in the search for the workmen and managers in his business. And it is well known that companies, like individuals, in matters of real business generally know how to put the right man in the right place, and, if they for once make a mistake, to redress it promptly. On the other hand, nothing could be more foreign to the spirit of the Commune than to supersede universal suffrage by hierarchical investiture.⁵³¹

It is generally the fate of completely new historical creations to be mistaken for the counterparts of older, and even defunct, forms of social life, to which they may bear a certain likeness. Thus, this new Commune, which breaks with the modern state power, has been mistaken for a reproduction of the medieval Communes, which first preceded, and afterward became the substratum of, that very state power. The Communal Constitution has been mistaken for an attempt to break up into the federation of small states, as dreamt of by Montesquieu and the Girondins,⁵³² that unity of great nations which, if originally brought about by political force, has now become a powerful coefficient of social production. The antagonism

⁵³¹ A top-down system of appointing officials in bourgeois systems, where high-up officials appoint many or all lower officials.

⁵³² The party of the influential bourgeoisie during the French revolution at the end of the 18th century. (The name is derived from the Department of Gironde.) It came out against the Jacobin government and the revolutionary masses which supported it, under the banner of defending the departments' right to autonomy and federation.

of the Commune against the state power has been mistaken for an exaggerated form of the ancient struggle against over-centralization. Peculiar historical circumstances may have prevented the classical development, as in France, of the bourgeois form of government, and may have allowed, as in England, to complete the great central state organs by corrupt vestries, jobbing councillors, and ferocious poor-law guardians in the towns, and virtually hereditary magistrates in the counties.

The Communal Constitution would have restored to the social body all the forces hitherto absorbed by the state parasite feeding upon, and clogging the free movement of, society. By this one act, it would have initiated the regeneration of France.

The provincial French middle class saw in the Commune an attempt to restore the sway their order had held over the country under Louis Philippe, and which, under Louis Napoleon, was supplanted by the pretended rule of the country over the towns. In reality, the Communal Constitution brought the rural producers under the intellectual lead of the central towns of their districts, and there secured to them, in the working men, the natural trustees of their interests. The very existence of the Commune involved, as a matter of course, local municipal liberty, but no longer as a check upon the now superseded state power. It could only enter into the head of a Bismarck – who, when not engaged on his intrigues of blood and iron, always likes to resume his old trade, so befitting his mental calibre, of contributor to *Kladderadatsch* (the Berlin *Punch*)⁵³³ – it could only enter into such a head to ascribe to the Paris Commune aspirations after the caricature of the old French municipal organization of 1791, the Prussian municipal constitution which degrades the town governments to mere secondary wheels in the police machinery of the Prussian state. The Commune made that catchword of bourgeois revolutions – cheap government – a reality by destroying the two greatest sources of expenditure: the standing army and state functionarism. Its very existence presupposed the non-existence of monarchy, which, in Europe at least, is the normal incumbrance and indispensable cloak of class rule. It supplied the republic with the basis of really democratic institutions. But neither cheap government nor the “true republic” was its ultimate aim; they were its mere concomitants.

The multiplicity of interpretations to which the Commune has been subjected, and the multiplicity of interests which construed it in their favor, show that it was a thoroughly expansive political form, while all the previous forms of government had been emphatically repressive. Its true secret was this:

It was essentially a working class government, the product of the struggle of the producing against the appropriating class, the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economical emancipation of labor.

Except on this last condition, the Communal Constitution would have been an impossibility and a delusion. The political rule of the producer cannot co-exist with the perpetuation of his social slavery. The Commune was therefore to serve as a lever for uprooting the economical foundation upon which rests the existence of classes, and therefore of class rule. With labor emancipated, every man becomes a working man, and productive labor ceases to be a class attribute.

It is a strange fact. In spite of all the tall talk and all the immense literature, for the last 60 years, about emancipation of labor, no sooner do the working men anywhere take the subject into their own hands with a will, than uprises at once all the apologetic phraseology of the mouthpieces of present society with its two poles of capital and wages-slavery (the landlord now is but the sleeping partner of the capitalist), as if the capitalist society was still in its purest state of virgin innocence, with its antagonisms still undeveloped, with its delusions still unexploded, with its prostitute realities not yet laid bare. The Commune, they exclaim, intends to abolish property, the basis of all civilization!

Yes, gentlemen, the Commune intended to abolish that class property which makes the labor of the many the wealth of the few. It aimed at the expropriation of the expropriators. It wanted to make individual property a truth by transforming

⁵³³ Satirical/humorous liberal weekly papers.

the means of production, land, and capital, now chiefly the means of enslaving and exploiting labor, into mere instruments of free and associated labor. But this is communism, “impossible” communism! Why, those members of the ruling classes who are intelligent enough to perceive the impossibility of continuing the present system – and they are many – have become the obtrusive and full-mouthed apostles of co-operative production. If co-operative production is not to remain a sham and a snare; if it is to supersede the capitalist system; if united co operative societies are to regulate national production upon common plan, thus taking it under their own control, and putting an end to the constant anarchy and periodical convulsions which are the fatality of capitalist production – what else, gentlemen, would it be but communism, “possible” communism?

The working class did not expect miracles from the Commune. They have no ready-made utopias to introduce *par décret du peuple*. They know that in order to work out their own emancipation, and along with it that higher form to which present society is irresistably tending by its own economical agencies, they will have to pass through long struggles, through a series of historic processes, transforming circumstances and men. They have no ideals to realize, but to set free the elements of the new society with which old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant. In the full consciousness of their historic mission, and with the heroic resolve to act up to it, the working class can afford to smile at the coarse invective of the gentlemen’s gentlemen with pen and inkhorn, and at the didactic patronage of well-wishing bourgeois-doctrinaires, pouring forth their ignorant platitudes and sectarian crotchets in the oracular tone of scientific infallibility.

When the Paris Commune took the management of the revolution in its own hands; when plain working men for the first time dared to infringe upon the governmental privilege of their “natural superiors,” and, under circumstances of unexampled difficulty, performed it at salaries the highest of which barely amounted to one-fifth of what, according to high scientific authority,⁵³⁴ is the minimum required for a secretary to a certain metropolitan school-board – the old world writhed in convulsions of rage at the sight of the Red Flag, the symbol of the Republic of Labor, floating over the Hôtel de Ville.

⁵³⁴ (Author’s note) Professor Huxley. (Note to the German addition of 1871.)

Marx's Social Republic: Radical Republicanism and the Political Institutions of Socialism

by Bruno Leipold

In William Morris's epic poem, *The Pilgrims of Hope* (1885-6), three English communists travel to Paris to fight for the Commune – the working-class insurrection that controlled the city for seventy-two days from 18 March to 28 May 1871.⁵³⁵ Two of them die fighting on the barricades and the third only narrowly escapes back to England, after the Versailles government butchers the Communards during the infamous *la semaine sanglante* ('the bloody week'). But in the most moving stanza of the poem, the hero describes what it was like to see the city in that fleeting moment when 'Paris was free':

*And that day at last of all days I knew what life was worth; For I saw what few have beheld, a folk with all hearts gay. Then at last I knew indeed that our world of the coming day, that so oft in grief and in sorrow I had preached, and scarcely knew If it was but despair of the present or the hope of the day was due, I say that I saw it now, real solid and at hand.*⁵³⁶

That experience was comparable to the effect that the Commune had on Karl Marx.⁵³⁷ He heaped praise on the Parisian workers for 'storming the heavens' and ensuring that a 'new point of departure of world-historical importance has been gained'.⁵³⁸ But it was not the Commune's modest social measures that caused Marx such excitement. It was because the Commune's popular democratic experiment, 'real solid and at hand', led Marx to reconsider and clarify what political institutions were necessary for achieving and maintaining socialism. As he put it, the Commune was 'the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economical emancipation of Labour'.⁵³⁹ This political form was, as I will argue in this chapter, inherited from the republican tradition, and especially its most radical and popular elements.⁵⁴⁰

I will set out three dimensions of how Marx's political thought was shaped by this republican inheritance.⁵⁴¹ First, his advocacy of a system of popular delegacy to replace representative government, where representatives are constrained by

⁵³⁵ I am grateful to Caroline Fetscher, John Filling, Jared Holley, Steven Klein, David Leipold, James Muldoon, Luise Müller, Mirjam Müller, Karma Nabulsi, Paul Raekstad, Ross Speer, Patricia Springborg, Stuart White, Lea Ypi, and audiences at the University of Oxford, the University of Campinas, the Goethe University Frankfurt, and the Venice International University for their comments.

⁵³⁶ William Morris, 'The Pilgrims of Hope', *The Commonwealth*, 2, no. 17 (8 May 1886), p. 45.

⁵³⁷ Titles of Marx's works are given in the original language of publication and references are to the *Marx Engels Werke* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1956-68), henceforth *MEW*; and the *Marx Engels Collected Works* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975-2005), henceforth *MECW*. Where necessary I refer to the more authoritative but less accessible *Marx Engels Gesamtausgabe* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1975-98; Akademie Verlag: 1998-), henceforth *MEGA*[®]. For other primary sources I have tried to cite both the original and an English translation.

⁵³⁸ Marx to Ludwig Kugelmann, 12 April and 17 April 1871, *MEW*, vol. 33, pp. 205-6, 209; *MECW*, vol. 44, pp. 131-2, 137. For his later more measured assessment, see Marx to Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis, 22 February 1881, *MEW*, vol. 35, p. 160; *MECW*, vol. 46, p. 66.

⁵³⁹ Marx, Civil War in France, *MEW*, vol. 17, p. 342; *MECW*, vol. 22, p. 334.

⁵⁴⁰ For the relationship between republicanism and Marx's social thought, see Bruno Leipold, 'Chains and Invisible Threads: Liberty and Domination in Marx's Account of Wage-Slavery', in *Rethinking Liberty before Liberalism*, eds. Hannah Dawson and Annelien de Dijn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

⁵⁴¹ One way that Marx's political thought might be thought to diverge from the republican tradition is his supposed belief in the disappearance of politics and political institutions once communism is properly established. The textual basis for this interpretation is, however, remarkably thin and confuses Marx's belief in the end of *class-based* politics with the end of politics *as such*. For insightful discussion of this widespread misunderstanding, see

imperative mandates, the right to recall, and short terms of office. Second, his preference for legislative supremacy over the executive and his criticisms of the separation of powers. Third, his support for placing the state's administrative and repressive organs under popular control.

Underlying Marx's commitment to these popular political institutions was his confidence in the capacity of the popular classes to rule and administer themselves. Marx maintained that the Commune had revealed the ability of 'plain working men' to govern themselves 'modestly, conscientiously, and efficiently' and thereby undermined the pretension that the 'governmental privilege' should be reserved for the 'upper 10,000' of wealthy elites – their supposed 'natural superiors'.⁵⁴² It was moreover, Marx insisted, a 'Delusion' that 'administration and political governing were mysteries, transcendent functions only to be trusted to the hands of a trained caste'.⁵⁴³ Marx thus believed that the common citizens had a greater capacity for political decision making and administration than the elitist few; a belief that places him in the company of radical republicans like Machiavelli and distinguishes him from the more aristocratic and oligarchic strains of the republican tradition.⁵⁴⁴

Marx repeatedly referred to the kind of polity that incorporated these popular political institutions as a *social republic*. He argued that the Commune had shown that,

*a Republic is only in France and Europe possible as a 'Social Republic', that is a Republic which disowns the capital and landowner class of the State machinery to supersede it by the Commune, that frankly avows 'social emancipation' as the great goal of the Republic and guarantees thus that social transformation by the Communal organisation.*⁵⁴⁵

The term social republic came to particular prominence amongst radicals during the 1848 Revolutions. It formed half of the popular slogan '*la République démocratique et sociale*' (the Democratic and Social Republic), which became the rallying cry for socialists and republicans fighting for a republic that would both institute universal male suffrage and go beyond political reform and address the social question.⁵⁴⁶ In Marx's analysis, the social republic (and related terms like the 'red republic' and the 'Republic of Labour') was the form of the republic sought by the working class and he distinguished it from the '*bourgeois republic* ... the state whose admitted purpose is to perpetuate the rule of capital, the slavery

Norman Geras, 'Seven Types of Obloquy: Travesties of Marxism', *Socialist Register* 26 (1990), pp. 25–9; and William Clare Roberts, *Marx's Inferno: The Political Theory of Capital* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), pp. 251–3.

⁵⁴² Marx, Civil War in France, MEW, vol. 17, p. 343; MECW, vol. 22, p. 336; Civil War in France (First Draft), MEW, vol. 17, p. 556; MECW, vol. 22, p. 489.

⁵⁴³ Marx, Civil War in France (First Draft), MEW, vol. 17, p. 544; MECW, vol. 22, p. 488.

⁵⁴⁴ John P. McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 66–7.

⁵⁴⁵ Marx, *Civil War in France (First Draft)*, MEW, vol. 17, p. 554; MECW, vol. 22, p. 497. Marx similarly writes that the ' "Social Republic" ... [was] ... a Republic that was not only to supersede the monarchical form of class-rule, but class-rule itself', *Civil War in France*, MEW, vol. 17, p. 338; MECW, vol. 22, pp. 330–1. I have discussed Marx's use of the term in more detail in Bruno Leipold, 'Social Republic', in *Marx from the Margins: A Collective Project, from A to Z*, special issue of *Krisis: Journal for Contemporary Philosophy* 2 (2018), pp. 153–4. Unfortunately, William Clare Roberts's 'Marx's Social Republic: Political Not Metaphysical', *Historical Materialism* (2019), appeared too late for its arguments to be incorporated into this chapter.

⁵⁴⁶ Maurice Agulhon, *The Republican Experiment, 1848–1850*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 1164–5; Jeremy Jennings, *Revolution and the Republic: A History of Political Thought in France since the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 56; Pamela M. Pilbeam, *Republicanism in Nineteenth-Century France, 1814–1871* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), pp. 215–18; and Jonathan Sperber, *The European Revolutions, 1848–1851*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 206–7.

of labour'.⁵⁴⁷ He argued that the underdevelopment of the working class in 1848 ensured the victory of the bourgeoisie and their bourgeois republic and meant that a '*social republic* [only] appeared as a phrase, as a prophecy' of things to come.⁵⁴⁸ For Marx, the subsequent events of the Commune, twenty-three years later, were a striking illustration of the working class finally being in a position to take political power (however briefly) and setting about the task of creating their own social republic.⁵⁴⁹

Marx's conception of the political structure of socialism is more usually known as the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. But despite the canonical role that this phrase has played in Marxist and anti-Marxist thought, Marx's own usage of it is more sporadic and less definitive than its subsequent status would suggest.⁵⁵⁰ What he meant by the phrase has also been significantly distorted by subsequent linguistic and political developments. 'Dictatorship' has evolved from its initial identification with the Roman Republic's constitutional provision for temporarily handing extensive (but still limited) power to an individual during state emergencies, to referring to autocratic rule that is permanent and constitutionally unconstrained.⁵⁵¹ Moreover, the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' has become inescapably associated with one-party rule and the prohibition of democratic and civic freedoms. Using the term *social republic* thus has some advantage in avoiding this ideological baggage as well as preconceptions of what Marx is supposed to have believed about the political institutions of socialism.

My discussion of the social republic will primarily draw on Marx's *The Civil War in France* (1871), as well as two lengthy drafts of the text. Marx wrote this pamphlet (which appeared as an address of the General Council of the International Workingmen's Association) in order to defend the Commune against the nearly universal international condemnation it faced and to push his particular interpretation of events (as such, the text should in parts be treated 'not [as] an account of what the *Commune* was, but of what it might have become'⁵⁵²). From Marx's discussion of the actual and potential institutional features of the Commune we can draw out the broad counters of what he thought the political institutions of socialism should look like. However, this account is only a fragmentary picture of a society's political institutions and it is certainly not a blueprint from which one could straightforwardly derive the constitution of a socialist polity. Marx was opposed to setting out detailed future plans of this kind, and he explicitly praised the Commune for having no 'ready-made

⁵⁴⁷ Marx, 'Die Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich', *MEW*, vol. 7, p. 33; *MECW*, vol. 10, p. 69.

⁵⁴⁸ Marx, *Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte*, *MEW*, vol. 8, pp. 120, 194; *MECW*, vol. 11, pp. 109, 181–2.

⁵⁴⁹ There is some disagreement about the extent to which the Paris Commune should be considered a working-class uprising, see David A. Shafer, *The Paris Commune: French Politics, Culture, and Society at the Crossroads of the Revolutionary Tradition and Revolutionary Socialism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 115; Robert Tombs, *The Paris Commune, 1871* (London: Longman, 1999), pp. 111–16.

⁵⁵⁰ See the exhaustive analysis in Hal Draper, 'Marx and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat', *New Politics* 1, no. 4 (1961), pp. 91–110; and Hal Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution*, vol. 3 (New York: Monthly Review Press, 198A), part IV. See also, Lea Ypi, 'Democratic Dictatorship: Political Legitimacy in Marxist Perspective', *European Journal of Philosophy* (forthcoming). One pertinent example of the varied and interchangeable terminology that Marx uses to describe the political structure of socialism, is his claim that the peasant should side with the workers' republic because the '*social-democratic, the red* republic, is the dictatorship of his allies', Marx, 'Die Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich', *MEW*, vol. 7, p. 84; *MECW*, vol. 10, p. 122.

⁵⁵¹ Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution*, vol. 3, pp. 11–16; Wilfried Nippell, 'Saving the Constitution: The European Discourse on Dictatorship', in *In the Footsteps of Herodotus: Towards European Political Thought*, eds. Janet Coleman and Paschal M. Kitromilides (Florence: L. S. Olschki, 2112), pp. 29–49.

⁵⁵² Gareth Stedman Jones, *Karl Marx: Greatness and Illusion* (London: Allen Lane, 2016), p. 502.

Utopias to introduce *par décret du peuple*’ (‘by decree of the people’).⁵⁵³ This refusal to consider the details of socialism, including its political and constitutional requirements, in the depth it deserves is one of the less convincing aspects of Marx’s thought.⁵⁵⁴ There is, however, much in his account of the social republic that is suggestive and thought provoking, and if we abandon the idea that it has to be ‘swallow[ed]... whole’,⁵⁵⁵ then both republicans and socialists might find something of value for thinking about how our political institutions should be structured.

2. Popular Delegacy and Representative Government

At the outbreak of the Commune, authority over Paris first passed into the hands of the Central Committee of the National Guard, an autonomous and democratic body that had emerged the month before in the turbulent aftermath of the Prussian siege of Paris. Marx enthusiastically described the Central Committee’s federative system of electing its members (from companies and battalions upwards) and claimed that ‘Never were elections more sifted, never delegates fuller representing the masses from which they had sprung’.⁵⁵⁶ Marx extended this praise to the electoral mechanisms of the Commune Council (subsequently shortened to simply Commune), which assumed control from the Central Committee after elections on 26 March 1871. Marx argued that these measures, comprising imperative mandates, representative recall, and short terms of office, transformed an unaccountable system where representatives ruled over the people to one where delegates were subordinated to their oversight and control. As he says in *The Civil War in France*, ‘[i]nstead of deciding once in three or six years which member of the ruling class was to misrepresent the people in Parliament, universal suffrage was to serve the people, constituted in Communes’.⁵⁵⁷

The institutional mechanisms that Marx embraces to constrain representatives (or delegates) conflict with one of the core principles of representative government, which holds, as Bernard Manin identifies in his authoritative account of the topic, that representatives retain partial independence from the will of the people who elected them.⁵⁵⁸ That is, once representatives are elected, they are not required to vote in accordance with the preferences of their constituents and can instead decide on legislation based on their own judgment. At the same time, Manin points out, representatives are not entirely independent of their constituents either, as they are subject to both citizen pressure during their mandate and the threat of not being re-elected at the end of their mandate. This means that representatives have both an incentive to act in accordance with their constituents’ preferences, but are not legally required to do so, giving them a certain degree of discretion. Manin outlines several constitutional mechanisms that can reduce the degree of this discretion, focusing particularly on imperative mandates and the right to recall representatives. Imperative mandates (often referred to by their French name, *mandat impératif*), require representatives to carry out the instructions given to them by their constituents. The right to recall

⁵⁵³ Marx, *Civil War in France*, MEW, vol. 17, p. 343; MECW, vol. 22, p. 335.

⁵⁵⁴ See David Leopold, ‘The Structure of Marx and Engels’ Considered Account of Utopian Socialism’, *History of Political Thought* 26, no. 3 (2005), pp. 443–66; and David Leopold, ‘On Marxian Utopophobia’, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 54, no. 7 (2016), pp. 111–34.

⁵⁵⁵ David Leopold, *The Young Karl Marx: German Philosophy, Modern Politics, and Human Flourishing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 11.

⁵⁵⁶ Marx, *Civil War in France* (First Draft), MEW, vol. 17, p. 538; MECW, vol. 22, p. 483.

⁵⁵⁷ Marx, *Civil War in France*, MEW, vol. 17, p. 3420 MECW, vol. 22, p. 333.

⁵⁵⁸ Bernard Manin, *The Principles of Representative Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 6, 163–7.

allows constituents to sanction representatives immediately rather than at the end of their mandate. Both measures thereby constrain the discretion of representatives. They have however been almost universally absent from or even explicitly banned by the constitutions of representative governments. Manin writes, ‘None of the representative governments established since the end of the eighteenth century has authorized imperative mandates ... Neither has any of them durably applied permanent revocability of representatives.’⁵⁵⁹ In France, the imperative mandate has been expressly prohibited in all of its republican constitutions (with the exception of the never implemented 1793 Jacobin Constitution and the 1946 Constitution of the ill-fated Fourth Republic), and similar provisions can be found in the modern constitutions of countries as diverse as Germany, Korea, Senegal, and Spain.⁵⁶⁰

There was however a long radical republican tradition, from the French Revolution to the Paris Commune, which, inspired by Rousseau, contested this ultimately victorious model of largely unconstrained representation.⁵⁶¹ Across the various republican constitutional moments we find the more radical elements of the tradition voicing a more accountable and delegative understanding of representation. One of the Revolution’s key radical participants, Jean-Paul Marat, had already advised the English people in 1774 that ‘representatives of the people ought ever to act according to the instructions of their constituents’ otherwise ‘What then are our representatives, but our masters?’⁵⁶² When deputies assembled in the Estates General in 1789 they carried instructions (*Cahiers*) from their constituencies, which were almost immediately declared void in response to the aristocratic Second Estate’s attempt to use them to block the early constitutional process of the Revolution, and the imperative mandate was subsequently banned in the 1791 Constitution. However, as the Revolution progressed various radical groupings, including the sans-culottes, concluded that this had resulted in the ‘establishment of an unrestrained power’ which had replaced the king’s despotism with ‘legislative tyranny’, and they thus waged a campaign to legalize the imperative mandate, having some success with the Jacobin Constitution of 1793, which also included a provision for representative recall.⁵⁶³ These more radical ideas on representation surfaced once again with the Commune, with Commune members citing the *mandat impératif* given to them by their constituents in the justification of their votes.⁵⁶⁴ Even after the Commune’s demise, radical republicans waged an unsuccessful campaign for imperative mandates to be

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 163.

⁵⁶⁰ Christoph Müller, *Das imperiale und freie Mandat: Überlegungen zur Lehre von der Repräsentation des Volkes* (Leiden: A. W. Sijthoff, 1966), pp. 50–3; Marc Van der Hulst, *The Parliamentary Mandate: A Global Comparative Study* (Geneva: Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2000), p. 8.

⁵⁶¹ Pierre-Henri Zaidman, *Le mandat impératif: De la Révolution française à la Commune de Paris* (Paris: Les Editions Libertaires, 2008); Marco Goldoni, ‘Rousseau’s Radical Constitutionalism and Its Legacy’, in *Constitutionalism beyond Liberalism*, eds. Michael W. Dowdle and Michael A. Wilkinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 227–53.

⁵⁶² Jean-Paul Marat, *The Chains of Slavery: A Work wherein the Clandestine and Villainous Attempts of Princes to Ruin Liberty Are Pointed Out, and the Dreadful Scenes of Despotism Disclosed . . .* (London: 1774), p. 203. See further discussion in Rachel Hammersley, *The English Republican Tradition and Eighteenth-Century France: Between the Ancients and the Moderns* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), p. 142.

⁵⁶³ Jean-François Varlet, *Projet d'un mandat spécial et impératif, aux mandataires du peuple à la Convention nationale* (Paris: Imprimerie du Cercle social, 1792), pp. 6–7; ‘Proposal for a Special and Imperative Mandate’, in *Social and Political Thought of the French Revolution 1788–1797: An Anthology of Original Texts*, abridged ed., ed. and trans. Marc Allan Goldstein (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), pp. 154–5. For an overview of this episode, see Nicolai von Eggers, ‘When the People Assemble, the Laws Go Silent: Radical Democracy and the French Revolution’, *Constellations* 23, no. 2 (2016), pp. 256–8.

⁵⁶⁴ See particularly the minutes of the session on 1 May 1871, in *Les 31 séances o'cielles de Commune de Paris* (Paris: Revue de France, 1871), pp. 140–2.

included in the constitution of the Third Republic.⁵⁶⁵ They argued that the choice for the French people lay between the ‘*imperative mandate or carte blanche to our mandatories*, masters or slaves, this is the alternative; nothing in between, you must choose’.⁵⁶⁶

Marx inherited this tradition of radical constitutionalism, and we find its influence expressed in his endorsement of imperative mandates and the right to recall representatives, as well as short terms of office, in his defence of the Commune. The Commune is praised for having its members ‘chosen by universal suffrage … responsible and revocable at short terms’, as well as its proposed plans for local and regional communes to send delegates to a national body where ‘each delegate [would] be at any time revocable and bound by the *mandat impératif* (formal instructions) of his constituents’.⁵⁶⁷ Marx also expresses distaste for representatives previously having ‘three or six years … to misrepresent the people’ and constituents only being able to replace them ‘once in many years’.⁵⁶⁸ This preference for short terms of office is also expressed in an 1852 article on the Chartists, where Marx voices his support for their demand for annual general elections (the only one of their six demands that remains unfulfilled today), noting that it was one ‘of the conditions without which Universal Suffrage would be illusory for the working class’.⁵⁶⁹

Marx does not dedicate much space to considering exactly how these electoral mechanisms would ensure greater democratic accountability. But he does make an intriguing comparison between voters choosing representatives and employers hiring workers. He comments that ‘universal suffrage … [will] serve the people’ just ‘as individual suffrage serves every other employer in the search for the workmen and managers in his business’.⁵⁷⁰ Marx continues the comparison by claiming that it is ‘well known’ that both individual citizens and employers have the ‘know how to put the right man in the right place’, but if they do ‘make a mistake’ they have the power to ‘address it promptly’.⁵⁷¹ The ironic point being that just as employers can fire their employees as they please, so the people will be able to recall its representatives as it pleases. The implication of this comparison is that similarly to how workers are currently tied to the will of their employers, so representatives will be tied to the will of their electors. For if a representative diverges from the preferences of the constituents, the constituents can ‘promptly’ rectify their mistake by immediately recalling their representative, rather than having to wait for the end of the representative’s mandate to vote them out office. The representative can thus be expected to tailor their behaviour, just as a worker does, to ensuring that the constituents do not try to recall them.

The outcome of the accountability mechanisms that Marx endorses would mean the transformation of representative government into a system of popular delegacy. In the former, representation is understood as the ceding of decision making

⁵⁶⁵ Daniel Mollenhauer, Auf der Suche nach der ‘wahren Republik’: Die französischen ‘radicaux’ in der frühen Dritten Republik (1870–1890) (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1997), chap. 4.

⁵⁶⁶ Anonymous [Charles Ferdinand Gambon], Le mandat impératif par un paysan et lettre du citoyen Félix Pyat (Genève: L’imprimerie Coopérative, 1873), p. 21.

⁵⁶⁷ Marx, *Civil War in France*, MEW, vol. 17, p. 339–40; MECW, vol. 22, pp. 331–2. There is some ambiguity here if ‘short terms’ is supposed to refer to the length of mandate or how quickly the electorate can recall their representatives.

⁵⁶⁸ Marx, *Civil War in France*, MEW, vol. 17, p. 340; MECW, vol. 22, p. 333; *Civil War in France* (Second Draft), MEW, vol. 17, p. 544; MECW, vol. 22, p. 488.

⁵⁶⁹ Marx, ‘The Chartists’, MEW, vol. 8, p. 344; MECW, vol. 11, p. 335. The Chartists’ other demands were: universal manhood suffrage, the secret ballot, equally sized constituencies, salaries for members of parliament, and the removal of property qualifications for members of parliament.

⁵⁷⁰ Marx, *Civil War in France*, MEW, vol. 17, p. 340; MECW, vol. 22, p. 333.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid.

power by the people to representatives and the people's role reduced to deciding whether to renew or decline their mandate at the next election. In between elections, representatives exercise their mandate with a large degree of discretion and without the formal involvement of the people. In a system of popular delegacy, representation is instead understood as a form of commission, where representatives (or delegates) implement the wishes of their constituents. The people also retain the continuous power to intervene in the decision making of their representatives by giving them formal instructions or recalling them entirely. Through the institutions of popular delegacy, Marx thought that universal suffrage would be turned from a tool to choose between elite representatives, to one where the people remain firmly in possession of political power. That point is vividly made in the first draft of *The Civil War in France*, where Marx argues,

*There general suffrage, till now abused either for the parliamentary sanction of the Holy State Power, or a play in the hands of the ruling classes, only employed by the people to choose the instruments of parliamentary class rule once in many years, adapted to its real purposes, to choose by the communes their own functionaries of administration and initiation.*⁵⁷²

Marx's critique of representative government in his discussion of the Paris Commune is prefigured in some of his early political writings, particularly in his criticisms of Hegel in his *Zur Kritik des Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie* (Contribution to a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, 1843). Hegel had rejected 'commissioned or mandated agents' because he believed that representatives had a 'better understanding' of the common good than the people who elected them.⁵⁷³ Marx countered that unencumbered representatives 'in reality represent *particular* interests' and without the formal constraints of imperative mandates, representatives stop being delegates of the people, commenting that 'Formally they are commissioned, but once they are *actually* commissioned they are *no longer mandatories*. They are supposed to *be delegates*, and they are *not*'.⁵⁷⁴ Marx further objected to how representative government reduced political participation, a '*single and temporary*' event, to a '*sensational* act, [that] it is political society at a moment of *ecstasy*'.⁵⁷⁵

As several commentators have noticed, Marx's critique of reducing the people's involvement in politics to merely choosing who is to lead them every few years and his endorsement of an alternative system of popular delegacy bears a striking resemblance to Rousseau.⁵⁷⁶ Rousseau famously argued in *Du contrat social* (On the Social Contract, 1762) that representative government amounted to slavery punctuated by momentary freedom during elections. The English people were thus 'free only during the election of Members of Parliament; as soon as they are elected, it is enslaved, it is nothing'.⁵⁷⁷ Rousseau's criticism of representation has often given rise to the interpretation that he thinks freedom is only realizable in small city-states where every citizen can participate directly and representation is unnecessary. But in his

⁵⁷² Marx, *Civil War in France* (First Draft), MEW, vol. 17, p. 544; MECW, vol. 22, p. 488.

⁵⁷³ Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), §309, p. 478; *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), §309, p. 348.

⁵⁷⁴ Marx, *Zur Kritik des Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie*, MEW, vol. 1, p. 329; MECW, vol. 3, p. 123.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid, MEW, vol. 1, p. 317; MECW, vol. 3, p. 112.

⁵⁷⁶ See for example, Lucio Colletti, 'Introduction', in *Early Writings*, by Karl Marx (London: Penguin, 1975), p. 46; Norman Arthur Fischer, *Marxist Ethics within Western Political Theory: A Dialogue with Republicanism, Communitarianism, and Liberalism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 63–5; Goldoni, 'Rousseau's Radical Constitutionalism', p. 250; and Manin, *Principles of Representative Government*, p. 162. David Leopold shares this assessment but cautions against exaggerating both the broader similarity between Rousseau and Marx's political thought and the extent of Rousseau's influence on Marx, *Young Karl Marx*, pp. 262–71.

⁵⁷⁷ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 3 (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 430; *The Social Contract*, in *The Social Contract and Later Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 114.

Considérations sur le gouvernement de Pologne (Considerations on the Government of Poland, 1772) Rousseau suggests that liberty and large modern states can in fact be reconciled. He argues that the inevitable corruption of legislators in a representative system can be avoided by two mechanisms: holding frequent elections and requiring legislators to ‘adhere exactly to their instructions’.⁵⁷⁸ Rousseau argues that without these preventative measures the legislature becomes the ‘instrument of servitude’.⁵⁷⁹ He thus observes of the unencumbered English system of representation,

*I can only marvel at the negligence, the carelessness, and I dare say the stupidity of the English Nation, which after arming its deputies with the supreme power, adds not a single restraint to regulate the use they might make of it during the entire seven years of their mandate.*⁵⁸⁰

Marx and Rousseau thus both share a commitment to imperative mandates and frequent elections as constitutional mechanisms to keeping representatives accountable to the people who elected them. (The similarity between Marx and Rousseau on this question is not surprising, given that in the same summer that the young Marx wrote his critique of Hegel he read and took notes on Rousseau’s *Du contrat social*).⁵⁸¹ Both Marx and Rousseau turn to popular delegacy as a way to realize democracy and popular sovereignty in a large modern polity, without resorting to the largely unconstrained form of representation that has today become exclusively identified with ‘democracy’. Defenders of representative government have, in contrast, tended to present their preferred regime as the only alternative to Athenian-style direct democracy and since (they maintain) we cannot go back to these small city-states, representative government wins by default. Marx and Rousseau’s advocacy of popular delegacy shows that these poles do not exhaust the possibilities for realizing democracy in a modern state.

3. Legislative Supremacy and the Separation of Powers

Marx praised the Commune for having combined executive and legislative power in one body, commenting that it had been a ‘working, not a parliamentary, body, executive and legislative at the same time’.⁵⁸² The council of the Commune had realized this by reserving executive administrative decisions for the council members themselves. The Commune set up ten commissions (covering familiar ministerial departments such as war, finance, justice, and education), which were made up of between five and eight assembly members and with the head of each commission chosen by the assembly. That meant that two thirds of the Commune’s ninety-odd members exercised an administrative role in addition to their legislative

⁵⁷⁸ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Considérations sur le gouvernement de Pologne*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 3, p. 979; *Considerations on the Government of Poland*, in *Social Contract and Later Political Writings*, p. 201.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid. The maximum parliamentary term was not reduced from seven to five years until the 1911 Parliament Act.

⁵⁸¹ Marx’s notes on Rousseau can be found in *MEGA*, vol. IV.2, pp. 91–101. In addition to Rousseau, Marx also took notes on Machiavelli’s *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio* (Discourses on the First Decade of Titus Livy, 1517) and Montesquieu’s *De l’esprit des lois* (The Spirit of the Laws, 1748), which are available in the same volume, at pp. 106–15 and 276–8.

⁵⁸² Marx, *Civil War in France*, *MEW*, vol. 17, p. 339; *MECW*, vol. 22, p. 331. For socialist criticism of this aspect of Marx’s constitutional thought, see Karl Kautsky, *Die proletarische Revolution und ihr Programm* (Stuttgart: J. H. W. Dietz Nachfolger/Berlin: Buchhandlung Vorwärts, 1922), pp. 127–35; *The Labour Revolution*, trans. H. J. Stenning (London, G. Allen and Unwin, 1925), pp. 75–83.

one (hence why Marx calls it a ‘working … body’).⁵⁸³ There were thus no president or cabinet ministers who stood outside of the legislature and executive functions were subordinated to legislative direction and control.

Marx’s praise of this constitutional feature of the Commune was in accord with his long-standing suspicion of the executive. In his analysis of the 1848 French Constitution, Marx heavily criticized the power it invested in the executive, through the office of the president, at the expense of the legislature. He thought that the Constitution had thereby simply replaced ‘hereditary monarchy’ with an ‘elective monarchy’.⁵⁸⁴ He argued that the Constitution endowed the president with ‘all the attributes of royal power’, by giving him the right to pardon criminals, to dismiss local and municipal councils, to initiate foreign treaties, and, most damningly, the right to appoint and dismiss ministers without consulting the National Assembly.⁵⁸⁵ Marx argues that this final feature of the Constitution meant that the legislature had ‘forfeit[ed] all real influence’ over the operation of the bloated executive bureaucracy and le: it solely in the hands of the president.⁵⁸⁶ The president’s power was further enhanced, Marx maintained, by its personal nature, since though the National Assembly represented the ‘manifold aspects of national spirit’, the votes for the presidency were ‘concentrated on one individual’ so that the ‘national spirit finds its incarnation’ in his person.⁵⁸⁷ Marx thus concluded that the Constitution had created ‘two heads … the *Legislative Assembly*, on the one hand, the *President*, on the other’, where the latter constitutional office provided the opening for an ambitious individual to amass sufficient power to overthrow the legislature and impose their own autocratic rule, as Louis-Napoléon successfully did in his *coup d'état* of 1851.⁵⁸⁸

Marx’s analysis of the 1848 Constitution has several elements in common with that of the radical republican Félix Pyat. Pyat was a journalist, playwright, and member of both the Second Republic’s National Assembly and later the council of the Commune. During the constituent debates in 1848 he famously took to the rostrum to denounce the proposed office of the president, arguing that he would be an ‘elective king’ more dangerous than the ‘hereditary king’ he replaced.⁵⁸⁹ Pyat presciently warned that the constitution would create a dangerous rivalry between ‘two heads’, where the president would have the advantage of ‘tend[ing] to condense, to concentrate, to absorb all powers, to represent, to personify, to incarnate the people’.⁵⁹⁰ In order to avoid that outcome, Pyat urged that the ‘legislative power must … completely dominate the executive power’.⁵⁹¹

⁵⁸³ These figures are from Richard N. Hunt, *The Political Ideas of Marx and Engels*, vol. 2 (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1984), pp. 144–5. See also Tombs, *Paris Commune*, pp. 80–1.

⁵⁸⁴ Marx, ‘Die Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich’, MEW, vol. 7, p. 41; MECW, vol. 10, p. 77.

⁵⁸⁵ Marx, Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte, MEW, vol. 8, p. 127; MECW, vol. 11, p. 116.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid., MEW, vol. 8, p. 150; MECW, vol. 11, p. 139.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., MEW, vol. 8, p. 128; MECW, vol. 11, p. 117.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid., MEW, vol. 8, p. 127; MECW, vol. 11, p. 115.

⁵⁸⁹ Félix Pyat, Speech to the National Assembly, 5 October 1848, *Compte rendu des séances de l'Assemblée Nationale*, vol. 4 (Paris: Imprimerie de l’Assemblée Nationale, 1850), pp. 651–2. It is likely that Marx was aware of Pyat’s speech, since he was closely following events in France and the speech was well publicized in the French radical press (see, for instance, *La Réforme*, 6 October 1848, no. 277, p. 1).

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid. Pyat was immediately followed by Alexis de Tocqueville, who defended the proposed role of the president—an action he later regretted, see his *Souvenirs*, in *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 12 (Paris: Gallimard, 1;64), p. 18. *Recollections: The French Revolution of 1848 and Its Aftermath*, ed. Olivier

Marx and Pyat's preference for legislative supremacy over the executive places them in a tradition of radical constitutional thought that can be traced back to the Convention period of the French Revolution and the 1793 Jacobin Constitution.⁵⁹² In this tradition, which is sometimes called 'assembly government' (*gouvernement d'assemblée*), the 'legislative assembly, popularly elected, holds undisputed supremacy over all other state organs' and 'the executive is strictly subordinated, the servant or agent of the assembly and dismissed at the assembly's discretion'.⁵⁹³ Marx's preference for this constitutional form derives from his belief that the executive tended to develop an alien and unaccountable will, which in revolutionary situations meant that it played a reactionary role in comparison to the legislature. In his commentary on the 1848 Revolution, Marx argues that the 'executive power, in contrast to the legislative, expresses the heteronomy of the nation, in contrast to its autonomy';⁵⁹⁴ and in his analysis of the 1789 French Revolution he argues that it was 'made' by the legislature and that whenever the legislature was the 'dominant element' it had made the 'great, organic, general revolutions' because it was the 'the representative of the people, of the will of the species', while the executive was responsible for 'small revolutions, the retrograde revolutions, the reactions', because it was 'representative of the particular will, of subjective arbitrariness'.⁵⁹⁵

Assembly government differs from regimes with a strict separation of powers, a constitutional doctrine that Marx heavily criticized.⁵⁹⁶ In a point-by-point analysis of the 1848 French Constitution, Marx commented on Article 19 (which specified that the 'separation of powers is the first principle of a free government'): 'Here we have the old constitutional folly. The condition of a "free government" is not the *division*, but the UNITY of power. The machinery of government cannot be too simple. It is always the craft of knaves to make it complicated and mysterious.'⁵⁹⁷

Read in isolation this passage can have an alarmingly authoritarian quality. Indeed, the emphasis on the 'UNITY of power' suggests a worrying endorsement of concentrations of power. But if we place the passage in the context of both

Zunz, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2?16), p. 12.. For this episode, see Eugene Newton Curtis, *The French Assembly of 1848 and American Constitutional Doctrines* (New York: Columbia University, 1;18), pp. 18:-8.

⁵⁹² Although Marx's preference for legislative supremacy would seem to further showcase his constitutional affinity to Rousseau, his specification that the legislature should carry out executive administrative tasks distances him from Rousseau, who believed this was properly the role of the executive. That may reflect Marx not employing Rousseau's distinction between sovereignty and government—a feature that potentially brings Marx closer to the Jacobins than Rousseau, see Richard Tuck, *The Sleeping Sovereign: The Invention of Modern Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 158–61, 254–5. I thank Stuart White for suggesting this point to me.

⁵⁹³ Karl Loewenstein, *Political Power and the Governmental Process* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 81. Loewenstein condemns this constitutional type as 'arch-democratic, arch-republican, "monolithic" in the extreme'. But as Richard Hunt argues, Marx's position can also be seen as simply deepening a commitment to ministerial responsibility and the 'standard European practice of parliamentary rule' in contrast to the kind of extreme separation of powers found in the American Constitution, *Political Ideas of Marx and Engels*, vol. 2, p. 144.

⁵⁹⁴ Marx, Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte, MEW, vol. 8, p. 196; MECW, vol. II, p. 186.

⁵⁹⁵ Marx, Zur Kritik des Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie, MEW, vol. 1, p. 260; MECW, vol. 3, p. 57.

⁵⁹⁶ Marx's criticism of the separation of powers is directed towards the power it assigns to the executive at the expense of the legislature and not at the independence of the judiciary. His approval of the Commune having 'divested [the judiciary] of that shame independence' is a reference to judges no longer being directly appointed by the government and instead being elected by the people, Marx, *Civil War in France*, MEW, vol. 17, p. 339; MECW, vol. 17, p. 332. Hunt notes that 'nowhere did he [Marx] call for any merging of judicial with executive or legislative authority', *Political Ideas of Marx and Engels*, vol. 2, p. 138.

⁵⁹⁷ Marx, 'The Constitution of the French Republic Adopted November 4, 1848', MEW, vol. 7, p. 498; MECW, vol. 10, p. 570. 'UNITY' is capitalized in the more authoritative version in *MEGA*®, vol. 1.10, p. 540.

Marx's wider constitutional thought and the popular republican constitutionalism that we have so far discussed, then it becomes clear that his objection to the separation of powers is that it wrongly concentrates power in the executive at the expense of the legislature. That in turn was, as we saw earlier, grounded in a worry that executive power has a tendency towards independence that escapes the people's control. That criticism of the separation of powers was in fact precisely what its founding defenders praised about the doctrine. Maurice Vile, in his classic study of the separation of powers, writes that the doctrine's founders 'assume[d] that the legislature will, or may, be taken over entirely by the democratic element' and that therefore power had to be dispersed to 'branches of the government largely or wholly outside the legislature'.⁵⁹⁸ Thus though the separation of powers is today considered one of the cornerstones of democratic government, its founders explicitly believed that it would serve to limit the democratic influence on the constitution.

The above passage by Marx on the separation of powers is also usefully read in its immediate context. Marx's language was likely inspired by an article written a few weeks earlier by his friend, Ernest Jones, a socialist republican and prominent Chartist,⁵⁹⁹ with both of their articles appearing in Jones's magazine *Notes to the People* in May and June 1851. Jones's article explored the history of renaissance Florence, including its constitutional structure, and made the strikingly similar point to Marx that,

*they [the Florentines] sought safety in a complicated machinery of government, in the famous system of 'check and countercheck'; now the fact is government cannot be too simple. If government is good, the fewer checks it has in its progress the better; if it is bad, the more complicated its machinery is, the greater is the difficulty in removing or amending it.*⁶⁰⁰

Both Jones and Marx thus argue that 'government cannot be too simple' and criticize constitutions that make the 'machinery of government ... complicated'. Marx's criticism is directed at the separation of powers, while Jones's is directed at the closely associated (though distinct) system of checks and balances (Marx seems not to have distinguished between these doctrines).⁶⁰¹ Marx and Jones's preference for simple government contrasts with the contemporaneous judgment of Alexis de Tocqueville who had argued for two legislative chambers in the 1848 Constitution because he preferred a 'somewhat complicated system of checks and balances' to a 'simpler theory, bestowing undivided power on a homogeneous authority ... [with] no barriers to its actions'.⁶⁰²

A similar divide can be found between radical and moderate republicans during the American constitutional debates, with Anti-Federalists advocating a simple constitution that could be easily understood by everyone against the Federalists' complex system of checks and balances, which the Anti-Federalists suspected would limit democratic accountability.⁶⁰³ Indeed, the Federalists specifically designed these checks and balances with the aim of delaying and cooling the expression

⁵⁹⁸ M. J. C. Vile, *Constitutionalism and the Separation of Powers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 33.

⁵⁹⁹ For the link between Chartism and republicanism see Mark Bevir, 'Republicanism, Socialism, and Democracy in Britain: The Origins of the Radical Left', *Journal of Social History* 34, no. 2 (2000), pp. 351–3.

⁶⁰⁰ Ernest Jones, 'History of Florence', *Notes to the People*, : (May 1851), p. 80.

⁶⁰¹ The 'pure doctrine' of the separation of powers holds that government should be split into three branches, legislative, executive, and judicial, with each branch having a single corresponding function and a complete separation of persons between branches. The theory of checks and balances adds to this that each branch should also have a limited power to intervene in the other branch's functions. See Vile, *Constitutionalism and the Separation of Powers*, pp. 13, 18.

⁶⁰² Tocqueville, *Souvenirs*, pp. 184–5; *Recollections*, p. 123.

⁶⁰³ Herbert J. Storing, *What the Anti-Federalists Were For: The Political Thought of the Opponents of the Constitution* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 53–63.

of the popular will through the legislature.⁶⁰⁴ They believed that the ‘greatest danger’ to representative government was that the ‘legislature will acquire the defects of a popular assembly’, and that power must therefore not only be dispersed to other branches but those branches must also have the power to intervene in its operation.⁶⁰⁵ Presidential veto power, judicial review by the Supreme Court, and the balancing power of the aristocratic Senate were thus all incorporated into the Constitution in order to limit the power of what was taken to be the more democratic element of the Constitution: the House of Representatives. Alexander Hamilton boasted that this system ‘is so complex, so skilfully contrived, that it is next to impossible that an impolitic or wicked measure should pass the scrutiny with success’.⁶⁰⁶

The Anti-Federalists rejected these aristocratic and anti-majoritarian checks on the legislature, and instead favoured a clearly delineated and transparent constitution, where (similarly to Marx) the legislature was superior to the other branches, since they believed it to be ‘more representative of the people in their diversity than the President, and more accountable to them than the judges’.⁶⁰⁷ One of the many anonymous Anti-Federalists, compared the virtue of transparent and simple forms of government to the ‘mechanic’ who ‘understands the machinery’ he works with because he can see through its entire operation, and the Anti-Federalist concludes that the ‘constitution of a wise and free people, ought to be as evident to simple reason, as the letters of our alphabet’.⁶⁰⁸ Marx’s own characterization of ‘complicated and mysterious’ government as the ‘craft of knaves’ can be seen as an echo of this older radical constitutionalism.

4. Popular Control of the State’s Organs

In *The Civil War in France* Marx condemns the existing state as a professional, hierarchical, and centralized body that has escaped the control of its citizens. He criticizes the state’s ‘systematic and hierarchic division of labour’, its ‘trained caste’ of bureaucrats, its ‘centralized statemachinery’, and for being the ‘master instead of the servant of society’.⁶⁰⁹ Because of these features, Marx argues that the existing state is an inappropriate vehicle for working-class revolution. In perhaps the pamphlet’s most cited line, he says that the ‘working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made State machinery, and wield it for its own purposes’.⁶¹⁰ A phrase that in one of the drafts of the text was accompanied by the similarly pregnant statement that the ‘political instrument of their [the working-class] enslavement cannot serve as the

⁶⁰⁴ Bernard Manin, ‘Checks, Balances and Boundaries: The Separation of Powers in the Constitutional Debate of 1787’, in *The Invention of the Modern Republic*, ed. Biancamaria Fontana (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 59–63.

⁶⁰⁵ David Wootton, ‘Liberty, Metaphor, and Mechanism: “Checks and Balances” and the Origins of Modern Constitutionalism’, in *Liberty and American Experience in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. David Womersley (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2006), p. 264.

⁶⁰⁶ Cited in Storing, *What the Anti-Federalists Were For*, p. 54.

⁶⁰⁷ Manin, ‘Checks, Balances and Boundaries’, pp. 40–1. Where Marx’s thought does differ from the Anti-Federalist position (but not most French radical republican thought) is his preference for the legislature to exercise both legislative and executive functions, which the Anti-Federalists would have opposed because of their ‘one branch, one function’ doctrine.

⁶⁰⁸ Anonymous, ‘Address by Denatus’, in *The Complete Anti-Federalist*, vol. 5 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 262.

⁶⁰⁹ Respectively, Marx, *Civil War in France*, MEW, vol. 17: 336; MECW, vol. 22: 328; *Civil War in France* (First Draft), MEW, vol. 17, pp. 544, 538, 539; MECW, vol. 22, pp. 488, 438, 484.

⁶¹⁰ Marx, *Civil War in France*, MEW, vol. 17, p. 336; MECW, vol. 22, p. 328. Marx considered this point so important that he (and Engels) cited it in their 1872 preface to the *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei* (Manifesto of the Communist Party) (18B8) and noted that this was one of the aspects on which the original manifesto had ‘become antiquated’, see Marx and Engels ‘Vorwort zum Manifest’, MEW, vol. 18, p. 96; MECW, vol. 23, p. 175.

political instrument of their emancipation'.⁶¹¹ Simply taking hold of the existing state machinery and directing it towards socialism was thus ruled out, and the working class would instead need to transform it into polity that lacked the objectionable features of the existing state.

Marx identifies five main organs of the existing state: the bureaucracy or civil service, the army, the police, the established church, and the judiciary.⁶¹² He discusses, in varying levels of depth, how each of these state organs should be transformed. For reasons of space and in order to focus on those aspects where Marx's radical republican inheritance is most interestingly displayed, I will only discuss Marx's ideas on the transformation of the first two organs: the standing army and the bureaucracy.

Marx believed that the standing army should be turned into a civic militia and he praised the Commune for having made its first act the 'suppression of the standing army, and the substitution for it of the armed people'.⁶¹³ (Broadly, a civic militia differs from a standing army in that it consists of part-time citizen-soldiers rather than full-time professional soldiers). Marx credits the National Guard, Paris's civic militia, with making the Commune possible in the first place. He argues that it was only because the working class was armed and organized in a militia that it could resist the Versailles government's troops and set up its own administration.⁶¹⁴ The National Guard was indeed a quite unique institution that played a central role in the events leading up to and during the Commune. While it had traditionally been a bourgeois militia, its ranks had become increasingly composed of the working classes, and by 1871 was 'widely understood to be a democratic body of citizen soldiers' far removed from the 'army's authoritarian and militaristic traditions'.⁶¹⁵ For instance, in contrast to the army, it elected its own non-commissioned officers and junior officers, and units were recruited and organized locally. The siege of Paris had meant that the National Guard had grown spectacularly to 340,000 men, and it became the epicentre of local social and political life, providing working-class neighbourhoods with everything from a 'substitute workplace, provider of family income, political club ... [and] recreation organization'.⁶¹⁶ The immediate context for the outbreak of the Commune was thus a situation of 'local, democratic, armed organizations on an unprecedented scale'.⁶¹⁷

Marx's comments on the National Guard suggest four advantages that he sees in a civic militia over standing army. First, it is cheaper. Marx says that removing the standing army discards 'the most fertile source of all state taxation and state debts' and is the 'first economical *condition sine qua [non]* for all social improvements'.⁶¹⁸ Second, a civic militia makes for a better army. Marx argues that the National Guard was the 'safest guarantee against Foreign aggression' and suggests that if the Commune had been formed at the start of the Franco-Prussian War, it would have 'taken the defence [of Paris] out of the hands of traitors' and 'imprinted its enthusiasm' on the armed forces and turned the struggle into a real

⁶¹¹ Marx, Civil War in France (Second Draft), MEW, vol. 17, p. 592; MECW, vol. 22, p. 533.

⁶¹² Marx, Civil War in France, MEW, vol. 17, p. 336; MECW, vol. 22, p. 328.

⁶¹³ Ibid., MEW, vol. 17, p. 338; MECW, vol. 22, p. 331.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid., and Civil War in France (Second Draft), MEW, vol. 17, p. 595; MECW, vol. 22, pp. 536–7.

⁶¹⁵ Shafer, Paris Commune, p. 137.

⁶¹⁶ Tombs, Paris Commune, p. 50.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid., p. 46.

⁶¹⁸ Marx, Civil War in France (First Draft), MEW, vol. 17, pp. 543–4; MECW, vol. 22, p. 488.

‘war of republican France’.⁶¹⁹ Third, a civic militia improves the character of its soldiers relative to professional soldiers. Marx argues that professional soldiers acquire ‘inveterate habits … under the training of the enemies of the working class’ (such as shooting prisoners without trial), which would eventually be remedied when they joined the workers in a civic militia.⁶²⁰ Fourth, and most importantly, a civic militia is less prone to siding with reactionary forces against popular movements. Marx brands the standing army a ‘constant danger to government usurpation of class rule’.⁶²¹ He believed that a standing army was a continual source of potential reaction, providing the ruling class, or a leader with Caesarist ambitions, with the means by which they can put an end to the turmoil of a revolution. Marx believed that a civic militia was less likely to be used in this manner because of its closer ties to the people (for instance, his specification that the militia should have an ‘extremely short term of service’ suggests a concern with ensuring that they do not develop a separate existence).⁶²² His description of army troops as ‘French soldatesca’, as ‘mercenary vindicators’ of bourgeois society, and as the ‘iron hand of mercenary soldiery’ further presents them as a force external to society, paid by the government to crush the people.⁶²³ In summary, Marx believed that the standing army ‘defend[s] the government against the people’, while a civic militia is ‘the people armed against governmental usurpation’.⁶²⁴

In this defence of the civic militia we can detect traces of the republican ‘citizen-soldier’ tradition in Marx’s thought.⁶²⁵ From Machiavelli to Rousseau, republican thinkers in this tradition have warned of the danger of professional soldiers to the republic, either as mercenaries or as a standing army.⁶²⁶ They argue that professional armies stand apart from the people and can hence be used by the elites to crush them. They emphasize that arming the people allows them to defend themselves against this threat to their domestic liberty, as well as acting as a bulwark against foreign domination. Rousseau argued that a standing army is ‘good for only two purposes: to attack and conquer neighbours, or to shackle and enslave citizens’.⁶²⁷ Instead, he proposed that ‘Each citizen ought to be a soldier by duty, none by profession.’⁶²⁸ He also maintained that a

⁶¹⁹ Ibid., MEW, vol. 17, pp. 536, 544; MECW, vol. 22, pp. 481, 488. There is a possibility that by ‘Foreign aggression’ Marx is referring to the obverse characteristic of a civic militia: that is less likely to engage in foreign wars. However, the context of the Prussian siege suggests that Marx is referring to the civic militia being better at defending the nation from foreign attack.

⁶²⁰ Marx, Civil War in France, MEW, vol. 17, p. 331; MECW, vol. 22, p. 323; Civil War in France (Second Draft), MEW, vol. 17, p. 585 MECW, vol. 22, pp. 526–7.

⁶²¹ Marx, Civil War in France (First Draft), MEW, vol. 17, p. 543; MECW, vol. 22, p. 488.

⁶²² Marx, Civil War in France, MEW, vol. 17, p. 340; MECW, vol. 22, p. 332.

⁶²³ Respectively, Marx, Civil War in France (Second Draft), MEW, vol. 17, p. 585; MECW, vol. 22, p. 526; Civil War in France, MEW, vol. 17, pp. 356, 361; MECW, vol. 22, pp. 348, 354.

⁶²⁴ Marx, Civil War in France (Second Draft), MEW, vol. 17, pp. 595–6; MECW, vol. 22, p. 537.

⁶²⁵ R. Claire Snyder, ‘The Citizen-Soldier and the Tragedy of *The Eighteenth Brumaire*’, *Strategies: Journal of Theory, Culture and Politics* 16, no. 1 (2003), pp. 23–37.

⁶²⁶ R. Claire Snyder, *Citizen-Soldiers and Manly Warriors: Military Service and Gender in the Civic Republican Tradition* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999); J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 199–211.

⁶²⁷ Rousseau, *Considérations*, pp. 1013–14; *Considerations*, pp. 233–4.

⁶²⁸ Ibid.

militia ‘costs the Republic little’, fights better than a professional army (since ‘one always defends one’s goods better than another’s’), and does not harass the local population as professional soldiers are wont to do.⁶²⁹

Marx’s arguments in favour of a civic militia bear a strong resemblance to these positions. His concern with ensuring that the armed forces do not form a separate body from society reflects, as R. Claire Snyder argues, ‘one of the main principles of the citizen-soldier tradition: a military staffed by the people is less likely to fire on their own neighbors and comrades’.⁶³⁰ Furthermore, Marx’s defence of the National Guard as the ‘safest guarantee against Foreign aggression’ and his criticism of the army generals who, he believed, failed to properly deploy the National Guard against Prussian forces,⁶³¹ was in line with the widely held belief amongst contemporary radicals that Paris could have beaten the Prussians if they had unleashed popular enthusiasm by re-enacting the legendary republican *levee en masse* from the French Revolution.⁶³²

Marx’s discussion of the civic militia in *The Civil War in France* is primarily concerned with the role it plays in defending the revolution from reactionary forces, and not with the connection republicanism often makes between service in the militia and developing the virtues necessary for citizenship.⁶³³ However, that link is displayed in an earlier article discussing the Prussian government’s attempt in 1848 to create a watered-down civic militia. Marx here condemns the government’s stipulation that a serving militia member ‘may neither think nor speak of public affairs’ and must ‘relinquish his primary political rights’, arguing that this would produce citizens that mirrored the ‘passive, willless and disinterested obedience of the soldier’.⁶³⁴ Marx bitterly quipped that the proposed civic militia would thus make ‘A fine school … to bring up the republicans of the future!’⁶³⁵

Turning to the second state organ: the bureaucracy. The most important change to the bureaucracy that Marx specifies is that public officials are to be elected and subject to recall. A repeated refrain in *The Civil War in France* and its drafts is the specification that ‘public servants … were to be elective, responsible, and revocable’.⁶³⁶ Marx thereby transfers the same system of accountability that he applied to political representation to public administration as a whole. Just how many of the total positions in public administration are to be chosen by election is not entirely clear (we could imagine it being limited to just the most senior administrative posts or extending to most, or even all, public officials). Some of Marx’s rhetoric certainly suggests that it would indeed apply very extensively. For instance, he says it applies to the ‘officials of all other branches of the Administration’ and notes that rural public officials, like the ‘notary, advocate, [and] executor’ (who were currently ‘blood-suckers’ and ‘judicial vampires’), would all be transformed ‘into salaried communal agents,

⁶²⁹ Ibid. The financial benefits of a civic militia are a recurrent theme of Rousseau’s advocacy of the institution.

⁶³⁰ Snyder, ‘The Citizen-Soldier and the Tragedy of *The Eighteenth Brumaire*’, p. 33.

⁶³¹ Marx, *The Civil War in France*, MEW, vol. 17, pp. 331–2; MECW, vol. 22, pp. 323–4.

⁶³² Tombs, *Paris Commune*, pp. 47–8.

⁶³³ For the link, see Snyder, *Citizen-Soldiers and Manly Warriors*, pp. 22–4, 54–5.

⁶³⁴ Marx, ‘Der Bürgerwehrgesetzentwurf’, MEW, vol. 7, pp. 243–5; MECW, vol. A, pp. 256–7.

⁶³⁵ Ibid. Marx’s embrace of the ‘republican’ label here was due to his and Engels’s strategy during the 1848 Revolutions of first fighting with republicans against absolute and constitutional monarchies, before they could then turn to communism.

⁶³⁶ Marx, *Civil War in France*, MEW, vol. 17, p. 339; MECW, vol. 22, p. 322. Though in the second draft, Marx speaks of public officials being ‘appointed and always revocable by the Commune’ rather than being elected by the people, *Civil War in France (Second Draft)*, MEW, vol. 17, p. 596; MECW, vol. 22, p. 547 (emphasis added).

elected by, and responsible to [the peasant]'.⁶³⁷ The outcome of making the bureaucracy elected in this way would be a considerable and far-reaching deprofessionalization of public administration.⁶³⁸ Public officials would, Marx argues, no longer be a ‘trained caste’ and the ‘army of stateparasites [would be] removed’.⁶³⁹ Marx further believed that the outcome of making public officials revocable would be to make the bureaucracy properly accountable. He notes that it would do ‘away with the state hierarchy altogether’ and replace ‘the haughty masters of the people into its always removable servants, a mock responsibility by a real responsibility, as they act continuously under public supervision’.⁶⁴⁰

Marx likely drew these ideas from the Commune’s 19 April 1871 *Déclaration au peuple français* (which was ‘the closest to a summary of its programme’).⁶⁴¹ The declaration called for the ‘permanent intervention of the citizens in communal affairs’, and gave a glimpse of its administrative ideal, by proclaiming ‘The choice by election or competitive examination, with accountability (*responsabilité*) and permanent right of supervision (*contrôle*) and dismissal (*démission*), of magistrates and communal officials of every grade’.⁶⁴² Marx’s repeated call for all public officials to be ‘elective, responsible, and revocable’ can be seen as a pithy formulation of this demand.⁶⁴³

A tangible financial dimension of the deprofessionalization of the bureaucracy is Marx’s specification that ‘[f]rom the members of the Commune downwards’ all public officials were to be paid ‘*workmen’s wages*’.⁶⁴⁴ In the context of the pay structure of nineteenth-century France’s bureaucracy that was an especially radical demand. From the time of Napoleon I to World War I the French state had a small number of extremely well-paid civil servants, who received fifty to one hundred times the average income (so that they could lead a similarly ‘dignified’ life to those living off inherited capital).⁶⁴⁵ In Balzac’s *Cousin Bette* (1846), for example, the irresponsible and philandering Baron Hulot d’Ervy earns 25,000 francs per year from his high-ranking post in the War Ministry, when day wages for workmen were, at the time, just 1 to 1.5 francs, giving them in the region of 300–450 francs a year.⁶⁴⁶ Radically cutting the salaries for these top posts would have been a powerful symbol of how public administration had been taken out of the hands of aristocratic dignitaries and placed into the hands of ordinary workers. Elite functionaries like Baron Hulot (the ‘state parasites’ Marx refers to) would no longer suck the financial resources out of the country for their own personal gain. Limiting wages to the level of workers would thus be an important part of the process whereby ‘the high dignitaries of State disappeared’.⁶⁴⁷ In fact, the Commune did

⁶³⁷ Marx, *Civil War in France*, MEW, vol. 17, pp. 339, 345; MECW, vol. 22, pp. 331, 337.

⁶³⁸ Hunt, *Political Ideas of Marx and Engels*, vol. 2, pp. 132–4.

⁶³⁹ Marx, *Civil War in France* (First Draft), MEW, vol. 17, p. 545; MECW, vol. 22, p. 490.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid., MEW, vol. 17, p. 544; MECW, vol. 22, p. 488.

⁶⁴¹ Tombs, *Paris Commune*, p. 78. Marx references the declaration in *Civil War in France*, MEW, vol. 17, pp. 339–40; MECW, vol. 22, p. 332.

⁶⁴² A translation of the declaration is available in Tombs, *Paris Commune*, pp. 217–19.

⁶⁴³ Marx however differs from the declaration in that he makes no mention of posts being filled by elections or ‘competitive examinations’.

⁶⁴⁴ Marx, *Civil War in France*, MEW, vol. 17, p. 339; MECW, vol. 22, p. 331.

⁶⁴⁵ Thomas Picketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), pp. 416–17.

⁶⁴⁶ See the financial appendix in Honoré de Balzac, *Cousin Bette*, ed. David Bellos, trans. Sylvia Raphael (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 463–5. Balzac was one of Marx’s favourite contemporary authors and he references *Cousin Bette* in *Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte*, MEW, vol. 8, p. 206; MECW, vol. 11, p. 196.

⁶⁴⁷ Marx, *Civil War in France*, MEW, vol. 17, p. 339; MECW, vol. 22, p. 331.

not set the salaries of public officials to the level of ‘*workmen’s wages*’, as Marx claims, but limited them to a maximum of 6,000 francs a year (workers in 1871 earned about 5 francs a day, giving them roughly 1,500 a year).⁶⁴⁸ Marx was therefore deliberately exaggerating what the Commune had in fact achieved (an already radical step), in the direction of what he hoped future socialist regimes would do.⁶⁴⁹

Marx’s specification that all public posts are to be subject to election and recall and paying all functionaries the same workmen’s wages presents, what Richard Hunt calls, a ‘tantalising vision of a democracy without professionals’.⁶⁵⁰ In Marx’s conception of the social republic public functions are no longer reserved for a ‘trained caste’ but carried out by the people as a whole. This deprofessionalization of the state’s administrative and repressive functions is one of Marx’s much less appreciated political ideas. It is a vision which stands in stark contrast to the massive expansion of the state and its professional personnel since Marx’s writings. It in fact has more in common with the ancient model of democratic Athens, where nearly all public administrative officials (magistracies) were selected from the citizen body as a whole.⁶⁵¹ That system was based on the principle of rotation, which held that a citizen was not simply someone with the right to choose one’s rulers but someone who rules and is ruled in turn; an idea founded on a ‘deep distrust of professionalism’ and the belief that ‘every political function was performable by non-specialists unless there were compelling reasons to think otherwise’.⁶⁵² It was an ideal that had inspired the young Marx, admiringly writing that ‘in Greece, the *res publica* is the real private affair of the citizens’.⁶⁵³ These ancient republics had, in Marx’s eyes, achieved a praiseworthy ‘substantial unity between the state and people’.⁶⁵⁴ Marx similarly applauds the Commune for having achieved the ‘reabsorption of the State power by society, as its own living forces instead of as forces controlling and subduing it, by the popular masses themselves’.⁶⁵⁵ Marx’s commentary on the Commune was thus in certain respects a return to the classical republican ideas of his youth.⁶⁵⁶

⁶⁴⁸ Tombs, *Paris Commune*, p. 86; Shafer, *Paris Commune*, p. 138. The pay figures for workers (1–1.5 francs and later 5 francs) are taken from the respective sources and may reflect different methods of accounting rather than rising wages or inflation.

⁶⁴⁹ We know that it was deliberate since Marx copied out a press report of the maximum salary announcement and reported the correct figures to the General Council of the International Workingmen’s Association. See, ‘Meeting of the General Council April 25 1871’, MEGA, vol. 1.22, p. 541 and Karl Marx, *Notebook on the Paris Commune: Press Excerpts and Notes*, ed. Hal Draper (Berkeley, CA: Independent Socialist Press, 1971), p. 36.

⁶⁵⁰ Hunt, *Political Ideas of Marx and Engels*, vol. 2, p. 367.

⁶⁵¹ Though an important difference between Marx’s social republic and democratic Athens is that Marx only discusses selecting officials through elections and makes no mention of sortition, a mechanism that Athens made extensive use of. That perhaps reflects the broader eclipse, in modern political thought and constitutional practice, of selection by lot in favour of elections, see Manin, *Principles of Representative Government*, pp. 79–93.

⁶⁵² Ibid., pp. 28–32. See also, C. L. R. James, ‘Every Cook Can Govern: A Study of Democracy in Ancient Greece and Its Meaning for Today’, in *A New Notion: Two Works by C. L. R. James*, ed. Noel Ignatiev (Oakland, CA: P. M. Press, 2010), pp. 136–55.

⁶⁵³ Marx, *Zur Kritik des Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie*, MEW, vol. 1, p. 234; MECW, vol. 3, p. 32.

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁵ Marx, *Civil War in France* (First Draft), MEW, vol. 17, p. 543; MECW, vol. 22, p. 487.

⁶⁵⁶ Miguel Abensour, *Democracy against the State: Marx and the Machiavellian Moment*, trans. Max Blechman and Martin Breau (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), pp. 84–8; and Colletti, ‘Introduction to Marx *Early Writings*’, pp. 42–4.

5. Conclusion

This chapter has set out three strands of how Marx's conception of the political institutions of socialism was inherited from the radical elements of the republican tradition: his support for replacing representative government with popular legacy; his preference for legislative supremacy and his critique of the separation of powers; and, finally, his belief in the necessity of transforming the state's administrative and repressive organs by placing them under popular control. Together, these make up some of the core elements of Marx's social republic.

In the introduction I suggested that, while Marx's discussion of these political institutions often lacks the depth and detail that we might wish, his account of the social republic provides a stimulating body of ideas for socialists and republicans to draw on. One such idea is that socialism requires a particular political structure – perhaps the most important insight that Marx develops in his discussion of the Paris Commune. Marx argues that the people of Paris,

have taken the actual management of their Revolution into their own hands and found at the same time, in the case of success, the means to hold it in the hands of the People itself, [by] displacing the State machinery, the governmental machinery of the ruling classes by a governmental machinery of their own.⁶⁵⁷

The Commune had thus shown not just how the people should take the revolution 'into their own hands' but also the 'means to hold it' in their hands; namely, by forging a 'governmental machinery of their own'. Using the existing 'governmental machinery of the ruling classes' would mean that the revolution would slip from the people's control. The governmental machinery of socialism would therefore have to transform the inherited political and administrative institutions into properly democratic ones. By doing so, Marx believed that the Commune had 'supplied the Republic with the basis of really democratic institutions'.⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵⁷ Marx, Civil War in France (First Draft), MEW, vol. 17, p. 556; MECW, vol. 22, p. 498.

⁶⁵⁸ Marx, Civil War in France, MEW, vol. 17, p. 342; MECW, vol. 22, p. 334.

Theory and Practice (excerpt)

by Rosa Luxemburg

1910

In this representation of the facts, which places me in such a ridiculous light, Comrade Kautsky has fallen victim to singular errors. In reality it was not at all a question of “one passage” and the possible danger of its “wording”: it was a question of the content, of the slogan of a republic and the agitation for it – and Comrade Kautsky must excuse me, in the precarious position in which his presentation of the case has left me, if I call upon him as chief witness and rescuer in my greatest need. Comrade Kautsky wrote me this after he received my mass strike article:

Your article is very beautiful and very important, I am not in agreement with everything and reserve the right to polemize against it. Today I don't have time to do so in writing. Enough, I gladly accept the article if you delete pages 29 to the end. Under no circumstances could I print this. Even your point of departure is false. There is not one word in our program about a republic. Not out of oversight, not because of editorial caprice, but on well-considered grounds. Likewise the Gotha Program said nothing of a republic, and Marx, as much as he condemned this program, acknowledged in his letter that it wouldn't do to openly demand a republic (Neue Zeit, 1, p.573). Engels spoke on the same matter regarding the Erfurt Program (Neue Zeit, XX, 1, p.11)

I don't have time to set forth to you the grounds which Marx and Engels, Bebel and Liebknecht acknowledged to be sound. Enough, that what you want is an entirely new agitation which until now has always been rejected. This new agitation, however, is the sort we have no business discussing so openly. With your article you want to proclaim on your own hook, as a single individual, an entirely new agitation which the party has always rejected. We cannot and will not proceed in this manner. A single personality, however high she may stand, cannot pull off a fait accompli on her own hook which can have unforeseeable consequences for the party.

It goes on in the same vein for about another two pages.

The “entirely new agitation,” “which could have “unforeseeable consequences” for the party, had the following wording:

Universal, equal direct suffrage for all adults, without distinction of sex, is the immediate goal which ensures us the enthusiastic agreement of the broadest strata at the present moment. But this goal is not the only one which we must now preach. As long as we answer the infamous electoral reform bungling of the government and the bourgeois parties by proclaiming the slogan of a truly democratic electoral system, we still find ourselves – taking the political situation as a whole – on the defensive. In accord with the good old principle of every real battle tactic, that a powerful blow is the best defense, we must answer the ever more insolent provocations of the reigning reaction by turning the tables in our agitation and going over to a sharp attack all along the line. This can be done in the most visible, clear, and so to speak, lapidary form if our agitation clearly champions the following demand, which the first point our political program leads to: the demand for a republic.

Up till now the watchword republic has played a limited role in our agitation. There were good reasons for this: our party wished to save the German working class from those bourgeois, or rather petty bourgeois republican illusions which were (for example) so disastrous in the history of French socialism, and still are today. From the beginning, the proletarian struggle in Germany was consistently and resolutely directed not against this or that form and excrescence of class society in particular, but against class society as such; instead of splintering into anti-militarism, anti-monarchism, and other petty bourgeois “isms,” it constantly built itself as anti-capitalism, mortal enemy of the existing order in all its excrescences and forms, whether under the cloak of monarchy or republic. And through forty years' radical labor of enlightenment, we have succeeded in making this conviction the enduring possession of the awakened German proletariat: that the best bourgeois republic is no less a class state and bulwark of capitalist exploitation than the present monarchy, and that only the abolition of the wage system and class rule in every form, and not the outward show of “popular sovereignty” in a bourgeois republic, can materially alter the condition of the proletariat.

Well then, it is just because the forty-year labor of Social Democracy has been such a fundamental prophylaxis against the dangers of republican petty bourgeois illusions in Germany that today we can calmly make a place in our agitation for the foremost principle of our political program, a place that is its due by right. By pushing forward the republican character of Social Democracy we win, above all, one more opportunity to illustrate in a palpable, popular fashion our principled opposition as a class party of the proletariat to the united camp of all bourgeois parties. For the frightening downfall of bourgeois liberalism in Germany is revealed most drastically in its Byzantine genuflection to the monarchy, in which liberal burgherdom runs only a nose behind conservative Junkerdom.

But this is not enough. The general state of Germany's domestic and foreign politics in recent years points to the monarchy as the center, or at least the outward, visible head of the reigning reaction. The semi-absolute monarchy with its personal authority has formed for a quarter century, and with every year more so, the stronghold of militarism, the driving force of battleship diplomacy, the leading spirit of geopolitical adventure, just as it has been the shield of Junkerdom in Prussia and the bulwark of the ascendancy of Prussia's political backwardness in the entire Reich: it is finally, so to speak, the personal sworn foe of the working class and Social Democracy.

In Germany, the slogan of a republic is thus infinitely more than the expression of a beautiful dream of democratic "peoples' government," or political doctrinairism floating in the clouds: it is a practical war cry against militarism, navalism, colonialism, geopolitics, Junker rule, the Prussianization of Germany; it is only a consequence and drastic summation of our daily battle against all individual manifestations of the reigning reaction. In particular, the most recent events point straight in the same direction: Junkerdom's threats in the Reichstag of an absolutist coup d'état and the Reich Chancellor's insolent attacks on Reichstag voting rights in the Prussian Landtag, as well as the redemption of the "royal pledge" on the question of Prussian suffrage through the Bethmann reform bill.

With a clear conscience I can here set forth this "entirely new agitation," as it has already appeared in print without causing the party the slightest injury in body and soul.

Supplemental Readings

Section VIII: The Democratic Social Republic

Marx's Social Republic: Political Not Metaphysical - William Clare Roberts (short)

Marx locates social relations, embodied in political structures, as the source of domination and unfreedom in capitalist society. The arbitrary domination of capital must be solved through the creation of a democratic republic in which each citizen has a say in the decisions that impact her life.

https://www.dropbox.com/s/9kipoye66fxb3e0/HIMA_advance_1870_Roberts.pdf?dl=0

Marx and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat - Hal Draper (short)

This a persuasive argument for why Marx and his contemporaries saw the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' as just another term for working class political rule through a democratic republic.

<https://www.marxists.org/subject/marxmyths/hal-draper/article2.htm>

Citizen Marx - Bruno Leipold (long)

Marx transitioned from republicanism to communism, to a synthesis of the two after witnessing the Paris Commune. His social republicanism looked to extend the republican values of non-domination to all aspects of social life.

https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:fa034057-08fe-484b-a9aa-20c998b26569/download_file?file_format=application%2Fpdf&safe_filename=Leipold_2017_Citizen_Marx_the.pdf&type_of_work=Thesis

Marx's Inferno - William Clare Roberts (long)

Marx's Capital is best read as a political treaty aimed to intervene in the working class and socialist debates of its time. Key to understanding Marx is his grounding in the republican tradition of freedom from arbitrary domination.

Audiobook: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=fpMYbE91aqo>

Section IX

Decolonization

Section IX: Decolonization

Summary

For Marxists in the Second International, questions of militarism and policing were central to the struggle for democracy. With the rise of capitalism, standing armies became more and more developed, demanding greater resources from the state to maintain imperial extraction and keep the colonies in line. Domestically, states began investing more in internal security forces, including police, intelligence agencies and prisons. Capitalist development gave birth to the **imperial police state**, which was an obvious enemy to the exploited and oppressed people of the world. Winning a democratic republic meant dissolving what Engels called the “special bodies of armed men” and replacing them with democratic, universal militia of the entire populace.

These questions are familiar to us in DSA, where abolitionist politics are mainstream, and many members are veterans of the George Floyd Uprising. In many ways, the contemporary abolitionist movement is a return to the orthodox Marxist position on policing.

We begin by rooting our analysis in the principles of **national self-determination**, articulated by left-wing social democrats like Lenin, who not only opposed the first World War, but argued to turn the war into a revolutionary struggle against the imperial powers. Lenin saw self-determination as part of the broader democratic struggle of the working-class, part of a whole with the demand for a democratic republic, abolition of the police and standing army, women’s liberation, etc. For socialism to be possible, socialists needed to fight for **consistent democracy**, allowing people everywhere to determine their own fates.

The point was not that the nation-state represented a path to socialism. The point was that socialism was incompatible with the system of imperialism and colonial subjugation, which denied the working-class the freedom to self-organize and take political action on its own terms. Decolonization was a democratic demand.

How does this concept translate to the United States, with its own history of colonialism, slavery, and apartheid, distinct from Europe and Russia? In *Democracy Was a Decolonial Project*, Aziz Rana charted the history of decolonization in the 20th century US through the lens of anti-constitutionalism. Rana identified two threads of **decolonial democracy**: one, represented by WEB Dubois, Harry Haywood, and James and Grace Lee Boggs, identified the colonial structure in the form of the state, with federalism, the courts, and the Senate serving as tools of white reaction. In other words, decolonization meant less a distinct nation-state (which is not to say the right to separation should be off the table, as Lenin argued at length) and more gutting the existing constitutional order and bringing real democracy to both the nation and the localities, allowing Black majorities in places like the Deep South and the northern urban core to self-govern.

The other thread, represented by the Black Panthers and the indigenous activist Hank Adams, saw constitution-drafting as a means of redistributing resources and territory to realize the sovereignty of oppressed people in the United States beyond formal legal equality, including reparations; universal housing, food and medical care; full employment and income; and dismantling the police and military. If the first tradition was “all power to the soviets,” the second explicitly identified itself with “peace, land and bread,” echoed by Afeni Shakur:

We cannot afford not to rewrite [the Constitution]! We must attempt this last straw at National Salvation under this present system, for we must exhaust all legal means. We know that there can be no peace until there is land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and blessed liberty!

As the era of Black Power came to a close, the ruling class evolved to respond both to the political threat of Black liberation, and the changing structure of global capital, which was abandoning the northern industrial core and causing an explosion in the surplus population of the United States. In *Race and Globalization*, Ruth Wilson Gilmore identified this strategy as **the prison fix**, where the state responds to the crises of unemployment and Black revolt by redirecting its surpluses into mass incarceration, warehousing over a million people, transferring wealth between working-class communities, and using prisoners as a source of slave labor.

This leaves us with the imperial police state of the 21st century: the United States empire, built on slavery and genocide against indigenous people, now subjugating oppressed nations across the world, while building a massive web of surveillance and incarceration to control its surplus population.

Study Questions:

1. Why does Lenin argue that the principle of national self-determination is necessary for socialism?
2. How do the principles of national self-determination apply (or not) for oppressed people in the United States?
3. What is the relationship between the constitutional framework of the United States and racial oppression?
4. What is the prison fix and why do socialists oppose it as a project?

The Revolutionary Proletariat and the Right of Nations to Self Determination

by Vladimir Lenin

Like most programmes or tactical resolutions of the Social-Democratic parties, the Zimmerwald Manifesto proclaims the “right of nations to self-determination”. In Nos. 252 and 253 of *Berner Tagwacht*, Parabellum⁶⁵⁹ has called “illusory” “the struggle for the non-existent right to self-determination”, and *has contraposed* to it “the proletariat’s revolutionary mass struggle against capitalism”, while at the same time assuring us that “we are against annexations” (an assurance is repeated five times in Parabellum’s article), and against all violence against nations.

The arguments advanced by Parabellum in support of his position boil down to an assertion that today all national problems, like those of Alsace-Lorraine, Armenia, etc., are problems of imperialism; that capital has outgrown the framework of national states; that it is impossible to turn the clock of history back to the obsolete ideal of national states, etc.

Let us see whether Parabellum’s reasoning is correct.

First of all, it is Parabellum who is looking backward, not forward, when, in opposing working-class acceptance “of the ideal of the national state”, he looks towards Britain, France, Italy, Germany, i. e., countries where the movement for national liberation is a thing of the past, and not towards the East, towards Asia, Africa, and the colonies, where this movement is a thing of the present and the future. Mention of India, China, Persia, and Egypt will be sufficient.

Furthermore, imperialism means that capital has outgrown the framework of national states; it means that national oppression has been extended and heightened on a new historical foundation. Hence, it follows that, despite Parabellum, we must *link* the revolutionary struggle for socialism with a revolutionary programme on the national question.

From what Parabellum says, it appears that, *in the name of* the socialist revolution, he scornfully rejects a consistently revolutionary programme in the sphere of democracy. He is wrong to do so. The proletariat cannot be victorious except through democracy, i.e., by giving full effect to democracy and by linking with each step of its struggle democratic demands formulated in the most resolute terms. It is absurd to *contrapose* the socialist revolution and the revolutionary struggle against capitalism to a *single* problem of democracy, in this case, the national question. We must *combine* the revolutionary struggle against capitalism with a revolutionary programme and tactics on all democratic demands: a republic, a militia, the popular election of officials, equal rights for women, the self-determination of nations, etc. While capitalism exists, these demands—all of them—can only be accomplished as an exception, and even then in an incomplete and distorted form. Basing ourselves on the democracy already achieved, and exposing its incompleteness under capitalism, we demand the overthrow of capitalism, the expropriation of the bourgeoisie, as a necessary basis both for the abolition of the poverty of the masses and for the *complete* and *all-round* institution of *all* democratic reforms. Some of these reforms will be started before the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, others *in the course* of that overthrow, and still others after it. The social revolution is not a single battle, but a period covering a series of battles over all sorts of problems of economic and democratic reform, which are consummated only by the expropriation of the bourgeoisie. It is for the sake of this final aim that we must formulate *every one* of our democratic demands in a consistently revolutionary way. It is quite conceivable that the workers of some particular country will overthrow the bourgeoisie *before* even a single fundamental democratic reform has been fully achieved. It is, however, quite inconceivable that the proletariat, as a historical class, will be able to defeat the bourgeoisie, unless it is prepared for that by being educated in the spirit of the most consistent and resolutely revolutionary democracy.

⁶⁵⁹ Parabellum—K. Radek.

Imperialism means the progressively mounting oppression of the nations of the world by a handful of Great Powers; it means a period of wars between the latter to extend and consolidate the oppression of nations; it means a period in which the masses of the people are deceived by hypocritical social-patriots, i.e., individuals who, under the pretext of the “freedom of nations”, “the right of nations to self-determination”, and “defence of the fatherland”, justify and defend the oppression of the majority of the world’s nations by the Great Powers.

That is why the focal point in the Social-Democratic programme must be that division of nations into oppressor and oppressed which forms the *essence* of imperialism, and is *deceitfully* evaded by the social-chauvinists and Kautsky. This division is not significant from the angle of bourgeois pacifism or the philistine Utopia of peaceful competition among independent nations under capitalism, but it is most significant from the angle of the revolutionary struggle against imperialism. It is from this division that *our* definition of the “right of nations to self-determination” must follow, a definition that is consistently democratic, revolutionary, and in *accord* with the general task of the immediate struggle for socialism. It is for that right, and in a struggle to achieve sincere recognition for it, that the Social-Democrats of the oppressor nations must demand that the oppressed nations should have the right of secession, for otherwise recognition of equal rights for nations and of international working-class solidarity would in fact be merely empty phrase-mongering, sheer hypocrisy. On the other hand, the Social-Democrats of the oppressed nations must attach prime significance to the unity and the merging of the workers of the oppressed nations with those of the oppressor nations; otherwise these Social-Democrats will involuntarily become the allies of their own national *bourgeoisie*, which always betrays the interests of the people and of democracy, and is *always* ready, in its turn, to annex territory and oppress other nations.

The way in which the national question was posed at the end of the sixties of the past century may serve as an instructive example. The petty-bourgeois democrats, to whom any thought of the class struggle and of the socialist revolution was wholly alien, pictured to themselves a Utopia of peaceful competition among free and equal nations, under capitalism. In examining the immediate tasks of the social revolution, the Proudhonists totally “negated” the national question and the right of nations to self-determination. Marx ridiculed French Proudhonism and showed the affinity between it and French chauvinism. (“All Europe must and will sit quietly on their hindquarters until the gentlemen in France abolish ‘poverty’.... By the negation of nationalities they appeared, quite unconsciously, to understand their absorption by the model French nation.”) Marx demanded the *separation of Ireland* from Britain “although after the separation there may come federation”, demanding it, not from the standpoint of the petty-bourgeois Utopia of a peaceful capitalism, or from considerations of “justice for Ireland”,⁶⁶⁰ but from the standpoint of the interests of the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat of the *oppressor, i.e., British, nation* against capitalism. The freedom of that nation has been cramped and mutilated by the fact that it has oppressed another nation. The British proletariat’s internationalism would remain a hypocritical phrase if *they* did not demand the separation of Ireland. Never in favour of petty states, or the splitting up of states in general, or the principle of federation, Marx considered the separation of an oppressed nation to be a step towards federation, and consequently, not towards a split, but towards concentration, both political and economic, but concentration on the basis of democracy. As Parabellum sees it, Marx was probably waging an “illusory struggle” in demanding separation for Ireland. Actually, however, this demand alone presented a consistently revolutionary programme; it alone was in accord with internationalism; it alone advocated concentration along *non-imperialist* lines.

The imperialism of our days has led to a situation in which the Great-Power oppression of nations has become general. The view that a struggle must be conducted against the social-chauvinism of the dominant nations, who are now engaged in an imperialist war to enhance the oppression of nations, and are oppressing most of the world’s nations and most of the earth’s population—this view must be decisive, cardinal and basic in the national programme of Social-Democracy.

⁶⁶⁰ See Marx’s letters to Engels of June 7 and 20, 1866 and of November 2, 1867.

Take a glance at the present trends in Social-Democratic thinking on this subject. The petty-bourgeois Utopians, who dreamt of equality and peace among nations under capitalism, have been succeeded by the social-imperialists. In combating the former, Parabellum is tilting at windmills, thereby unwittingly playing in the hands of the social-imperialists. What is the social-chauvinists' programme on the national question?

They either entirely deny the right to self-determination, using arguments like those advanced by Parabellum (Cunow, Parvus, the Russian opportunists Semkovsky, Liebman, and others), or they recognise that right in a patently hypocritical fashion, namely, without applying it to those very nations that are oppressed by their own nation or by her military allies (Plekhanov, Hyndman, all the pro-French patriots, then Scheidemann, etc., etc.). The most plausible formulation of the social-chauvinist lie, one that is therefore most dangerous to the proletariat, is provided by Kautsky. In word, he is in favour of the self-determination of nations; in word, he is for the Social-Democratic Party "*die Selbstdigkeit der Nationen allseitig [!] und rückhaltlos [?] achtet und fordert*"⁶⁶¹ (*Die Neue Zeit* No. 33, II, S. 241, May 21, 1915). In deed, however, he has adapted the national programme to the prevailing social-chauvinism, distorted and docked it; he gives no precise definition of the duties of the socialists in the oppressor nations, and patently falsifies the democratic principle itself when he says that to demand "state independence" (*staatliche Selb standigkeit*) for every nation would mean demanding "too much" ("zu viel", *Die Neue Zeit* No. 33, II, S. 77, April 16, 1915). "National autonomy", if you please, is enough! The principal question, the one the imperialist bourgeoisie will not permit discussion of, namely, the question of the *boundaries of a state* that is built upon the oppression of nations, is evaded by Kautsky, who, to please that bourgeoisie, has thrown out of the programme what is most essential. The bourgeoisie are ready to promise all the "national equality" and "national autonomy" you please, so long as the proletariat remain within the framework of legality and "peacefully" submit to them on the question of the state *boundaries*! Kautsky has formulated the national programme of Social-Democracy in a reformist, not a revolutionary manner.

Parabellum's national programme, or, to be more precise, his *assurances* that "we are against annexations", has the wholehearted backing of the *Parteivorstand*,⁶⁶² Kautsky, Plekhanov and Co., for the very reason that the programme does not expose the dominant social-patriots. Bourgeois pacifists would also endorse that programme. Parabellum's splendid *general* programme ("a revolutionary mass struggle against capitalism") serves him—as it did the Proudhonists of the sixties—not for the drawing up, in conformity with it and in its spirit, of a programme on the national question that is uncompromising and equally revolutionary, but in order to leave the way open to the social-patriots. In our imperialist times most socialists throughout the world are members of nations that oppress other nations and strive to extend that oppression. That is why our "struggle against annexations" will be meaningless and will not scare the social-patriots in the least, unless we declare that a socialist of an oppressor nation who does not conduct both peacetime and wartime propaganda in favour of freedom of secession for oppressed nations, is no socialist and no internationalist, but a chauvinist! The socialist of an oppressor nation who fails to conduct such propaganda in defiance of government bans, i.e., in the free, i.e., in the illegal press, is a hypocritical advocate of equal rights for nations!

Parabellum has only a single sentence on Russia, which has not yet completed its bourgeois-democratic revolution:

"Selbst das wirtschaftlich sehr zurückgebliebene Russland hat in der Haltung der Polnischen, Lettischen, Armenischen Bourgeoisie gezeigt, dass nicht nur die militärische Bewachung es ist, die die Völker in diesem

⁶⁶¹ "comprehensively[!] and unreservedly [?] respecting and demanding the independence of nations".—Ed.

⁶⁶² The Executive of the German Social-Democratic Party.—Ed.

*'Zuchthaus der Völker' zusammenhält, sondern Bedürfnisse der kapitalistischen Expansion, für die das ungeheure Territorium ein glänzender Boden der Entwicklung ist.'*⁶⁶³

That is not a “Social-Democratic standpoint” but a liberal-bourgeois one, not an internationalist, but a Great-Russian chauvinist standpoint. Parabellum, who is such a fine fighter against the German social-patriots, seems to have little knowledge of Russian chauvinism. For Parabellum’s wording to be converted into a Social-Democratic postulate and for Social-Democratic conclusions to be drawn from it, it should be modified and supplemented as follows:

Russia is a prison of peoples, not only because of the military-feudal character of tsarism and not only because the Great-Russian bourgeoisie support tsarism, but also because the Polish, etc., bourgeoisie have sacrificed the freedom of nations and democracy in general for the interests of capitalist expansion. The Russian proletariat cannot march at the head of the people towards a victorious democratic revolution (which is its immediate task), or fight alongside its brothers, the proletarians of Europe, for a socialist revolution, without immediately demanding, fully and “rückhaltlos”,⁶⁶⁴ for all nations oppressed by tsarism, the freedom to secede from Russia. This we demand, not independently of our revolutionary struggle for socialism, but because this struggle will remain a hollow phrase if it is not linked up with a revolutionary approach to all questions of democracy, including the national question. We demand freedom of self-determination, *i.e.*, independence, *i.e.*, freedom of secession for the oppressed nations, not because we have dreamt of splitting up the country economically, or of the ideal of small states, but, on the contrary, because we want large states and the closer unity and even fusion of nations, only on a truly democratic, truly internationalist basis, which is inconceivable without the freedom to secede. Just as Marx, in 1869, demanded the separation of Ireland, not for a split between Ireland and Britain, but for a subsequent free union between them, not so as to secure “justice for Ireland”, but in the interests of the revolutionary struggle of the British proletariat, we in the same way consider the refusal of Russian socialists to demand freedom of self-determination for nations, in the sense we have indicated above, to be a direct betrayal of democracy, internationalism and socialism.

⁶⁶³ “Even economically very backward Russia has proved, in the stand taken by the Polish, Lettish and Armenian bourgeoisie that it is not only the military guard that keeps together the peoples in that ‘prison of peoples’, but also the need for capitalist expansion, for which the vast territory is a splendid ground for development.”—*Ed.*

⁶⁶⁴ “unreservedly”.—*Ed.*

Democracy Was a Decolonial Project

by Aziz Rana

The word “decolonization,” in much mainstream American commentary, is treated as an unproductive and blunt slogan: a way of reducing a nuanced history—be it in the United States or in Israel/Palestine—to a zero-sum and violent fight over who has power. “To talk of dismantling an American settler state of 330 million people is to take a rhetorical flight of fancy,” writes Michael Powell in the *Atlantic*. The colonial frame, he continues, generates “a morality tale stripped of subtleties” and “makes it all too easy to brush aside the practicalities of coexistence.” The implication of Powell’s argument is clear: decolonization suggests forced removal and separation. As *New York Times* columnist Bret Stephens writes, “real atonement” is for all non-Indigenous populations—white, Black, immigrant—to return to where they came: “If you’re an American citizen of non-Native American descent, leave.”

It goes almost without saying that these are caricatures, selective renderings of terms with long debates over their meanings. What if we looked past them, to how generations of activists and thinkers in the United States viewed their own effort to dislodge what they saw as the country’s colonial infrastructure? If we did so, we would realize that if anything, activists saw zero-sum thinking as a key marker of the colonial mindset itself. In fact, they understood the very aim of decolonization as finding a real path out of such thinking. For that reason, anticolonial American activists across various communities—Indigenous, Puerto Rican, and Black, to name a few—often turned to constitutional politics, which they embraced as a mechanism for creating a genuinely inclusive society in which equal and effective freedom was available to all communities.

Activists saw zero-sum thinking as a key marker of the colonial mindset itself.

A closer engagement with Black radical thinkers, the ideas of figures from Harry Haywood and W. E. B. Du Bois to James Boggs and Afeni Shakur in the Black Panther Party, highlights just this point. Their analysis, as well as that of Indigenous activists like Hank Adams, offers a powerful lens for reflecting on the relationship between decolonization, reform, and a nonexclusionary vision of liberation. The erasure of these constitutional visions in today’s public debates strips the depth out of anticolonial political thinking across the American twentieth century—and by doing so, restricts the tools we need today for addressing our current social crises.

For many Americans, constitutionalism is associated with a traditional civil rights frame. This is, no doubt, a large part of its history. In the 1950s, liberal Black and white voices presented the struggle for Black freedom as one of fulfilling principles embedded in the existing federal Constitution, especially those of equal protection associated with Reconstruction-era amendments. The project emphasized litigation and focused on redeeming an egalitarian national promise by unlocking the Constitution’s textual language. *Brown v. Board of Education*, which declared “separate but equal” doctrine inherently unequal in 1954, is the great substantive and symbolic embodiment of that project.

But the civil rights frame was never the only way of connecting constitutional politics and racial transformation. Throughout the twentieth century, Black radicals questioned whether the end of legal inequality would be enough to uproot racial subordination. As Du Bois declared in 1960, while the country was “approaching . . . a time when” Black people may be “in law equal in citizenship to other Americans,” this represented only “a beginning of even more difficult problems of race and culture.” Such figures rejected a presentation of the United States as a fundamentally liberal society, if incompletely so, in which Black freedom was primarily about providing worthy elements in nonwhite communities with an equal opportunity to achieve professional and middle-class respectability.

Instead, they argued that the intensity and violence of racial hierarchy were the product of underlying structures in American society—including deep-rooted flaws in the federal Constitution itself. The country needed more than some fine-

tuning of its already egalitarian essence, because U.S. conditions embodied one variant of the colonial systems that proliferated across the globe. Such colonial circumstances, [remarked](#) Du Bois to an audience in Haiti in 1944, were not only those in which one country “belong[ed] to another country,” but also included “groups, like the Negros of the United States, who do not form a separate nation and yet who resemble in their economic and political condition a distinctly colonial status.”

Du Bois and others did not explicitly use the term “settler colonial” (it would be decades until the term was in wide circulation). Yet their analysis of colonization was adapted to the particularities of the American experience, and therefore distinct from various European imperial experiments, like those of the British in India or the Belgians in the Congo. In the U.S. context, these thinkers argued, self-government and economic prosperity for racial insiders proceeded through institutions that were designed to extract much-needed land and labor from Native and outsider groups, in the latter case particularly enslaved African workers and their descendants.

This fact generated some striking conclusions. For starters, it meant that unless Americans confronted the exploitative nature of their economic system, formal legal equality alone would never produce Black freedom. A liberal frame ignored how racial hierarchy had been woven into the fabric of American capitalism, in both small-scale production and large-scale industrialization. And if this was true, this also meant that the legal-political infrastructure of the country was organized to sustain such hierarchy. Therefore, any truly transformative response to American colonial conditions had to realize two facts. First, racial and class politics could not be separated. And second, change would require more than creative interpretations of existing text—it would necessitate basic shifts to the structure of American governance itself.

To set these shifts into motion, Black anticolonial activists would need to develop their own competing constitutional politics: a vision of alternative institutional design, values, and even governing text. Although it would be explicitly decolonial, change could not proceed in a way comparable to settings like the Congo, in which the relatively thin layer of power-holding elites were European colonial administrators without their own national movement or deeply felt connections to the land. As the great labor radical James Boggs maintained of the United States, all communities, those white and nonwhite, were permanently and mutually entangled. Decolonization, according to him, had to [entail](#) “tackling” together “all the problems of this society, because at the root of all the problems of black people is the same structure and the same system which is at the root of all the problems of all people.”

In a sense, Boggs was critiquing both a traditional civil rights frame and the idea that decolonization in the United States could merely graft onto the society a one-size fits all Third Worldism marked by a plebiscite and Black formal nationhood. The latter was a view that certainly percolated among some Black American anticolonialists, perhaps most clearly expressed in the effort in the 1960s and 1970s to establish a Republic of New Afrika. Yet the driving tendency was elsewhere. It saw the racially and economically intertwined nature of American life as requiring projects of Black freedom and of change in majority white society to be joined. As Boggs again wrote in *Racism and Class Struggle* (1970), “the Black Power movement must recognize that if this society is ever going to be changed to meet the needs of black people, then Black Power will have to resolve the problems of the society as a whole and not just those of black people.”

What concretely did this kind of politics entail? There were two basic orientations, emphasized at different moments and by different figures. The first concerned altering the American system of government to make it genuinely democratic. The second orientation emphasized fundamental reforms to economy and society.

Du Bois’s 1945 book, *Color and Democracy*, offers a systematic account of the first approach. Du Bois believed that truly overcoming both capitalism and white supremacy required confronting the structural problems of political representation in the United States. Doing so would mean targeting the existing Constitution, which, he maintained, created an infrastructure for minority rule—indeed, for a specific and quintessentially American brand of white authoritarianism. This was because the Constitution organized representation around states, privileging geography over actual people. And it

fragmented and undermined popular authority through endless veto points. The result were rules that placed a massive thumb on the scale in favor of the forces of racial reaction, with ripple effects for who served as president, who sat on the Supreme Court, and what policies were contemplated. It helped ex-Confederates defeat Reconstruction and reclaim power. And once Black people were again disenfranchised, it so dramatically overrepresented Southern white constituents that Jim Crow politicians effectively determined the extent of any practical changes to the social order. “This extraordinary situation”—embodied by the “rotten-borough system” of the states, what Du Bois called a “national tabu [*sic*]” Americans were not allowed to critique—had “neither rhyme nor reason.” It was rather “a survival of an eighteenth-century American Tory hatred and fear of democracy, surviving as a fetish” in the form of unreflective Constitution-worship. The result was a set of institutional arrangements in which “the race problem [had] been deliberately intermixed with state particularism to thwart democracy.”

In many ways, Du Bois’s analysis mirrored the ideas of the Black communist activist and thinker Harry Haywood. Haywood was closely identified with the [anticolonial idea](#) of Black people as “an oppressed nation” in the United States and with the CPUSA’s 1920s and 1930s promotion of the “Black belt” thesis, calling for Black self-determination in counties stretching from eastern Virginia to eastern Texas. His vision of “political self-rule” in the Black belt, though, did not mean secession. Like Du Bois, Haywood, too, was focused on how to create democratic arrangements for all.

A civil rights frame was never the only way of connecting constitutional politics and racial transformation.

According to Haywood, Reconstruction’s defeat was tied to the ultimate failure to abolish “the plantation system” and therefore the persistence of deeply oppressive structures of racial capitalism. Genuine freedom for Black people across the South, he believed, could not be achieved without confronting the question of land and property. African Americans in the Black belt were a distinct and cohesive economic and political community: they had been enslaved on the land and, even in the mid-twentieth century, continued to provide the oppressed labor for its plantation economy. “There is no escape from the conclusion that freedom and prosperity for the people of the South, Negro and white, can be won only through drastic overhauling of the present system of land ownership and agrarian relations,” he argued in 1948.

But such a project was near impossible to achieve within existing institutions. Black people were not only systematically disenfranchised through explicit Jim Crow policies that denied African Americans the vote; they were also disenfranchised by the very structure of Southern state boundaries and administrative units. Haywood wrote that these “boundaries . . . arbitrarily crisscross the area of contiguous Negro majority breaking up this area into a maze of governmental administrative, judicial, and electoral subdivisions, which in no way correspond to the life needs of its people.” When white authoritarians won elections, it was because planter elites had made manipulating those elections a conscious political project. “These divisions are purposely maintained—in many cases are even gerrymandered—by the South’s rulers with the aim of continuing the political suppression of the region’s predominant” Black constituencies, Haywood wrote. All of this meant that as a programmatic agenda, “the abolition of these bureaucratic and arbitrarily established boundaries and their replacement by truly democratic ones . . . is a key task of American democracy.”

Haywood’s anticolonial vision was thus grounded in a very specific account of constitutional transformation. He called for “full equality throughout the country” alongside “self-determination in the South.” He defended the importance of ongoing struggles across the United States for Black labor and political rights. But in the South, he did not seek a new nation-state, but a new “governmental and administrative structure” to replace the old states. These institutions would facilitate Black democratic majoritarianism and serve as popular instruments for redistributing land from white “oligarchs” to the working poor, Black and white. As Haywood concluded, such Black “self-government” meant “a regrouping of country and administrative districts to guarantee full proportional representation.” It amounted to “a simple democratic demand, in full conformity with the principles of majority rule.”

It was such a sensibility that led James and Grace Lee Boggs, in the 1960s and 1970s, to update Black belt ideas as urban centers—rather than the rural South—became the heart of Black economic and political experience. As cities’ populations swelled, state-based representation, they argued, was increasingly becoming a holdover from “an agricultural era.” In a post–World War II and increasingly post-civil rights America, the system still gave disproportionate power to demographically white and geographically rural and suburban spaces. The result was national policy that deemphasized the needs of the Black poor and working classes living in cities.

The Boggses thus [called](#) for movement activists “to formulate a new Constitution that establishes a new relationship of government to people and property, as well as new relationships between the national government, the states, and the cities.” In arguing for proper federal electoral representation for cities—where large Black majorities actually lived—they imagined how aims of Black self-determination and actual American democracy could reinforce one another. Like Du Bois and Haywood before them, they saw the fundamental task of their new constitution as addressing the problems of having state-based representation as the basic unit of American government, which carried implications for the organization of federal institutions like the Senate and Supreme Court.

If one Black decolonial orientation reimagined political democracy and governance, the other focused on a social, cultural, and economic agenda. Even here, constitutional politics played a key role. This fact is best illustrated by the Black Panthers’ own experiment in constitution-writing, which culminated with the September 1970 staging in Philadelphia of a Revolutionary People’s Constitutional Convention (RPCC). That location and date embodied a large-scale counter-event in opposition to the by-then-routine anniversary celebrations on September 17 of the drafters’ signing of the 1787 U.S. Constitution.

Depending on estimates, the number of delegates and participants at the RPCC ranged from twelve to fifteen thousand people, with five to six thousand attending the plenary sessions at Temple University and Huey Newton’s opening speech; thousands more stood outside the doors but could not get seats. As one participant [recalled](#) later, delegates to the Convention came “from an array of organizations” besides the Panthers: “the American Indian Movement, the Brown Berets, the Young Lords, I wor Keun (a radical Asian-American collective), Students for a Democratic Society . . . , the newly formed Gay Liberation Front, and many feminist groups.” Those present also reported that various 1960s-era activists and celebrities mingled with the crowd and took part in plenary sessions, from Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, Tom Hayden, and William Kunstler to Muhammad Ali himself.

The event was the product of tireless organizing by Panther activists like Afeni Shakur, who were committed to using constitutional remaking as a framework for building cross-group and coalitional solidarity. Shakur, who today is remembered almost exclusively as the rapper Tupac Shakur’s mother, was a formidable activist and constitutional actor in her own right. For her and others, constitution-writing was a strategy to reach as broad an audience as possible: the language of constitutionalism maintained contact with the norms and traditions of the majority-white society while still suggesting an irruptive politics. As a shared enterprise in refounding, constitution-writing was culturally American. And yet, it also mirrored the defining acts of anticolonial rupture and independence in Asia and Africa, where there had been a proliferation of constitution-writing exercises. It thus provided space for radical activists to reconceive American values in a way that was nonviolent, revolutionary, and collaborative all at the same time.

And collaborative it had to be, since the document was meant to be written together with various non-Black political formations. The new constitution, the Panthers hoped, would be able to remake American society in ways that transcended its colonial infrastructure while respecting the intertwined nature of its white and nonwhite communities. Beyond the white and Black binary, activists also understood how the different social position of groups such as Native peoples (with their experience of expropriation and violent removal), Mexican Americans (with their related history of conquest, ongoing discrimination, and dependent labor status), or Puerto Ricans (legal subjects of an imperial state) spoke to the real com-

plexities of overcoming the American brand of colonialism. Each of these groups, while all caught up in the same overarching structures of colonial power, were located in collective life in profoundly distinct ways, with necessarily different implications for the meaning of freedom.

The activists' aim was to express the collective agency of a movement coalition across backgrounds and identities—meaning that they sought to incorporate proposals that had no direct relation to race and colonialism. Some of the convention's constitutional demands, for instance, incorporated extensive LGBTQ+ rights including for transgender persons and guarantees that "all modes of human sexual self-expression deserve protection of the law and social sanction." They also contained feminist demands, such as those for extensive reproductive rights, "socialization of housework and child care," and "guaranteed paid maternity leave."

The result was a series of workshop reports that spelled out a normative vision for a future constitution grounded in decolonization but not limited to that frame alone. Alongside the policies already mentioned, the reports called for constitutionally entrenching the sovereign right of all colonized peoples, including Puerto Ricans and Indigenous nations, to determine, once and for all, their future political status, as well as what legal relationship (if any) they wished to have with a reconstructed United States. They further demanded broad-ranging reparations, at home but also for communities abroad that had faced security state intervention; expanded socioeconomic rights and wealth transfers through the public and universal provision of food, housing, medical care, a nonexploitative job, and a guaranteed income; and extensive demobilization of the military, security, and police.

Taken together, the goal was a new popular compact for all Americans regardless of race or identity—a non-exploitative job for everyone, a guaranteed income for everyone. "We cannot afford not to rewrite [the Constitution]!" Shakur concluded. "We must attempt this last straw at National Salvation under this present system, for we must exhaust all legal means. We know that there can be no peace until there is land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and blessed liberty!"

Ultimately, these reports embodied the high-water mark for the Panthers' efforts at articulating a decolonial alternative. Plans for participants to reconvene in Washington, D.C. in November 1970 to hold a massive ratification of the new constitution more or less collapsed, due to a combination of internal disagreements and U.S. government sabotage and repression.

Constitution-writing was nonviolent, revolutionary, and collaborative all at the same time.

But these ideas nonetheless dovetailed with separate proposals proliferating during the era. In 1972's Trail of Broken Treaties, a caravan of Indigenous organizations traveled from the U.S. West Coast to the Washington, D.C. office of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. These organizations developed a set of demands partially drafted by the Assiniboine-Sioux activist [Hank Adams](#), who in 1968 had also been a member of the national steering committee of the Poor People's Campaign led by Martin Luther King, Jr. That twenty-point [position paper](#) called for Native nations, even without formal independence, to enjoy actual control over their territory, resources, and members—effectively establishing a system of concurrent sovereignty with the United States. The paper further contended that U.S. federal actions with respect to such nations would only be legitimate if based on treaty obligations. It held that all existing treaties should be enforced, with Indigenous peoples enjoying the ability to seek restitution before an appropriate arbiter for the violation of legal rights. Along with extensive material redistribution, activists additionally pressed for the "Restoration of the Native American Land Base"—meaningful land reform and return.

And at various historical moments, activists, especially tied to Mexican American and Puerto Rican politics, argued for the decriminalization of the border as a central decolonial commitment. For instance, the socialist Congressperson Vito Marcantonio, who represented a heavily Puerto Rican New York district throughout the 1940s, repeatedly joined [calls](#) for Puerto Rican independence with both economic restitution and the presumptive admission of post-independence Puerto

Ricans into the United States. This idea persisted across the century, especially in immigrant politics. In order for the United States to reverse its imperial relation with its neighbors, it would have to embrace a fundamentally different politics for the border.

The great difficulty these decolonial ideas faced was not that their aims were exclusionary and zero-sum, merely reversing who now enjoyed a power to oppress. It was rather that during key moments in the twentieth century, including in the late 1960s and 1970s, there was no real pathway for creating an American majority behind both the reconstructive legal-political agenda and the transformative social, cultural, and economic one. Part of the reason had to do with the evident logistical difficulty of some of the proposals. But at a deeper level, the reform sensibility as a whole faced decisive pushback due to political currents. The growing conservatism of white working-class politics—which fed presidential victories for Richard Nixon as well as an anti-New Deal turn even within the Democratic Party—had profound effects on what ideas could get a real hearing in American life.

Unsurprisingly, the new climate proved inhospitable to radicalism. An emerging post-1960s consensus among center-left circles about how any reform discourse could proceed meant that constitutional politics had to be narrowed in scope and ambition. Now, it had to embrace the existing legal-political system and seek ameliorative changes on terms managed by Cold War judges and other state officials. The idea that anticolonial thinkers in the United States had a competing constitutional framework disappeared from popular debate. If anything, their thought became framed in terms familiar from opinion pieces today: as *anti*-constitutional and as having no account of inclusive democracy.

This conventional wisdom no doubt derived partly from choices made by some Black radical activists. For all their engagement with constitutional politics, the Panthers never adequately linked their social, cultural, and economic agenda to reforms to democratic governance of the kind that Du Bois and Haywood had developed earlier in such detail. And as the country shifted rightward, that lacuna left the prevailing institutions as the only model of American thinking about constitutional democracy.

In the retreat away from large-scale transformation and constitutional reform, the vast majority of activists in organizations like the Panthers turned to a local focus on basic services (from children's breakfasts to health care clinics, ambulances, clothing, busing, prisoner support, and education centers). But smaller Black radical offshoots, including elements within the Panthers, reacted to repression and blocked reforms by embracing an armed response to the U.S. state. That response was a politically implausible pathway to change, along with raising all the ethical concerns marked by a turn to violence. Above all, it further allowed state and business officials to cast *all* traditions of decolonization as destructive and inherently *un*-democratic.

This was, of course, despite the depth and breadth of decolonial politics across the twentieth century, and the fact that thinkers and activists—again from Du Bois and Boggs to Hank Adams—had overwhelmingly avoided that dead end. They had sought consciously to link change to inclusive coalition-building and imaginative new democratic processes. But in a society marked by Nixonian law and order, simply being subject to the government's lawlessness provided the ammunition for critics to tar *all* anticolonial activists (especially Black and Indigenous ones), not to mention their efforts, as dangerously out of bounds. All the while the state was engaged in extensive crackdowns, often on false pretenses—up to and including the killing of Panther leaders like Fred Hampton.

The idea that anticolonial thinkers in the United States had a competing constitutional framework disappeared from popular debate.

Ultimately, the two decolonial orientations, now shorn of their constitutional ambitions and insurgent potential, were reduced in political life to husks of their former selves. Often all that persisted of these ideas in mainstream American politics was the notion of Black electoral control, typically at the city level through new party machines. But such representation, something the Boggses had sought, existed without any of the wide-ranging structural changes they wanted.

These changes would have ensured that city power was not hamstrung by the regressive politics and austerity commitments at the state and national levels. And it would have linked mass city mobilizations or experiments in places like Jackson, Mississippi to granting local populations the capacity to access the resources and national infrastructure required to realize those projects.

Demands like those articulated at the RPCC were largely ignored. The symbolic idea of a Black “nation” still persisted, but the conventional version of the idea deemphasized the class radicalism of the Panthers. At times, it could even devolve into a brand of ethnic politics that focused on cultural pride in ways that mirrored the very white localism Black anticolonial activists had challenged.

Today offers a striking opening to think again about the richness of that decolonial imagination. Over the last two decades, the country has faced intensifying social conditions: extreme military violence, financial crisis, striking class inequalities, the carceral state’s generational effects on poor and minority communities, white authoritarianism, and ecological disaster, to name a few. The existing legal-political institutions, marked by the same antidemocratic weaknesses Du Bois and Haywood highlighted nearly a century ago, have only strengthened a Trumpian far right and worsened these dilemmas.

At the same time, Biden and those around him seem trapped in a Cold War imagination built around increasingly hollow precepts—from the virtues of American primacy and global market liberalism to deep wariness of any significant structural changes, no matter how necessary. All of this has proven fundamentally ill-equipped for the times. The results have veered from paralysis to catastrophe—as underscored by the U.S. approach to Gaza. It is no wonder that anticolonial activism and thought have returned to the forefront: more than ever, the conventional political lens in the United States appears exhausted.

The response must be to push back decisively against any knee-jerk rejection of a century’s worth of anticolonial American ideas and efforts. Instead, it is essential to appreciate how even if past activists did not engage in the familiar moves of court-centric constitutional politics, they nonetheless articulated a clear framework for making sense of the constitutional system *as a whole*. And they saw their efforts at reform as a way of building a society in which all—again, no matter the group identity—enjoyed equal and effective freedom. In this way, these activists had perhaps much in common with figures elsewhere, like Nelson Mandela and others in South Africa, who too sought to find a pathway for everyone out of the destructiveness of an embedded colonial state and economy. Their ideas may have been shaped for American conditions, but they were part of global efforts to think beyond the colonial binary.

Doing the same today requires engaging seriously with the parts of those past American anticolonial agendas that remain vibrant political resources. It also means confronting the central dilemma that long bedeviled such transformative politics: how to build a broad, multiracial majority behind both democracy and decolonization in a society like the United States, marked as it is by imperial power and ongoing colonial legacies. Holding those two ends—democracy and decolonization—together at once is the strategic and conceptual challenge for our times. Fortunately, it is also our ethical inheritance from movements past.

Race and Globalization

by Ruth Wilson Gilmore

Prison and Globalization

Ever since Richard M. Nixon's 1968 campaign for US president on a "law and order" platform, the United States has been home to a pulsing moral panic over crime. Between 1980 and 2000 the "law and order" putsch swelled prisons and jails with 1.68 million people, so that today [2002] 2,000,000 women, men, boys, and girls live in cages.⁶⁶⁵ The US rate of imprisonment is the highest in the world.⁶⁶⁶ African Americans and Latinos comprise two-thirds of the prison population; 7 percent are women of all races. Almost half the prisoners had steady employment before they were arrested, while upwards of 80 percent were at some time represented by state-appointed lawyers for the indigent: in short, as a class, convicts are the working or workless poor. Why did "the law" enmesh so many people so quickly, but delay casting its dragnet for a decade after Nixon's successful bid for the presidency?

The 1938–68 World War II and Cold War military buildup produced a territorial redistribution of wealth from the urban industrialized northeast and north central to the agricultural and resource dominated south and coastal west.⁶⁶⁷ While one urban-rural wealth gap was narrowed by state-funded military development, the equalization of wealth between regions masked deepening inequalities *within* regions as measured in both racial and urban rural terms.⁶⁶⁸

Military Keynesianism characterized the US version of a *welfare* state: the enormous outlays and consequent multipliers for inventing, producing, and staffing *warfare* capacities underwrote modest social protections against calamity, alongside opportunities for advancement. Prior to the military buildup, the New Deal United States developed social welfare capacities, the design of which were objects of fierce interregional struggle.³⁸ In concert with the successful political struggle by the Union's most rigorously codified *and* terrorist white supremacist regimes⁶⁶⁹ to make the south and west principal sites for military agglomeration, the federal government also expanded to the national scale—via the structure of welfare programs—particular racial and gender inequalities.⁶⁷⁰ As a result, under the New Deal white people fared better than people of color; women had to apply individually for what men received as entitlements; and urban industrial workers secured limited labor rights denied agricultural and household workers.⁶⁷¹

⁶⁶⁵The figure 2,000,000 does not include persons detained with or without charge by the US Immigration and Naturalization Service.

⁶⁶⁶Jenni Gainsborough and Marc Mauer, *Diminishing Returns: Crime and Incarceration in the 1990s*, Washington, DC: The Sentencing Project, 2000.

⁶⁶⁷Bruce J. Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994; Gilmore, "From Military Keynesianism to Post-Keynesian Militarism."

⁶⁶⁸John Egerton, *Speak Now against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South*, New York: Knopf, 1995.

⁶⁶⁹Ralph Ginzburg, *100 Years of Lynching*, Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1988 [1962]; C. McWilliams, *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999 [1939].

⁶⁷⁰While there was plenty of racism and sexism outside the South and West, the structure of New Deal social welfare programs equalized across a differentiated landscape a series of perspectives about eligibility, need, and merit that became common sense; see, for example, Gwendolyn Mink, *The Wages of Motherhood: Inequality in the Welfare State, 1917–1942*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995.

⁶⁷¹Linda Gordon, *Pitied but not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890–1935*, New York: Free Press, 1994; Maralyn Edid, *Farm Labor Organizing: Trends & Prospects*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell/ILR, 1994.

The welfare-warfare state⁶⁷² (another way to think of “military Keynesianism”) was first and foremost a safety net for the capital class as a whole⁶⁷³ in all major areas: collective investment, labor division and control, comparative regional and sectoral advantage, national consumer market integration, and global reach. Up until 1967–68 the capital class paid high taxes for such extensive insurance.⁶⁷⁴ But in the mid-1960s the rate of profit, which had climbed for nearly thirty years, began to drop off. Large corporations and banks, anxious about the flattening profit curve, began to agitate forcefully and successfully to reduce their taxes. Capital’s tax revolts, fought out in federal and state legislatures and at the Federal Reserve Bank, provoked the decline of military Keynesianism.⁶⁷⁵ The primary definers of the system’s demise laid responsibility at the door of unruly people of color, rather than in the halls of capital—where overdevelopment of productive capacity weighed against future earnings⁶⁷⁶ and therefore demanded a new relation with labor mediated by the state.

The 1968 law-and-order campaign was part of a successful “southern strategy” aimed at bringing white-supremacist Democrats from *anywhere* into the Republican fold.⁶⁷⁷ Mid-1960s radical activism—both spontaneous and organized—had successfully produced widespread disorder throughout society. The ascendant right used the fact of disorder to persuade voters that the incumbents failed to govern. The claim accurately described objective conditions. But in order to exploit the evidence for political gain, the right had to interpret the turmoil as something they could contain, if elected, using already-existing, unexceptionable capacities: the power to defend the nation against enemies foreign and domestic. And so the *contemporary* US crime problem was born, in the context of solidifying the political incorporation of the militarized south and west into a broadening anti-New Deal conservatism. The disorder that became “crime” had particular urban and racial qualities, and the collective characteristics of activists—whose relative visibility as enemies inversely reflected their structural powerlessness—defined the face of the individual criminal. To deepen its claims, the right assigned the welfare-warfare state’s *social* project institutional responsibility for the anxiety and upheaval of the period.

The postwar liberation movement focused in part on extending eligibility to those who had been deliberately excluded from New Deal legislation. While some factions of the civil rights movement worked to bring about simple inclusion, radical African, Latino, Asian, and Native American groupings fought the many ways the state at all scales organized poor people’s perpetual dispossession.⁶⁷⁸ Radical white activists both aligned with people of color and launched autonomous attacks against symbols and strongholds of US capitalism and Euro-American racism and imperialism.

Indeed, growing opposition to the US war in Southeast Asia helped forge an international community of resistance. At the same time, activism against colonialism and apartheid on a world scale found in Black Power a compelling renewal of linkages between “First” and “Third World” Pan African and other liberation struggles.⁶⁷⁹ Meanwhile, students and workers built and defended barricades from Mexico City to Paris: no sooner had smoke cleared in one place than fires of revolt flared up in another. The more that militant anti-capitalism and international solidarity became everyday features of

⁶⁷²James O’Connor, *The Fiscal Crisis of the State*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1973.

⁶⁷³Toni Negri, *Revolution Retrieved*, London: Red Notes, 1988.

⁶⁷⁴Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.

⁶⁷⁵Edwin Dickens, “The Federal Reserve’s Low Interest-Rate Policy in 1970–1972: Determinants and Constraints,” *Review of Radical Political Economics* 28.3 (1996): 115–125.

⁶⁷⁶Robert Brenner, *Turbulence in the World Economy*, London and New York: Verso, 2001.

⁶⁷⁷See, for example, Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001.

⁶⁷⁸Jacqueline Jones, *The Dispossessed: America’s Underclass from The Civil War to The Present*, New York: Basic Books, 1992.

⁶⁷⁹C. L. R. James, *Fighting Racism in World War II*, New York: Pathfinder, 1980.

US *anti-racist activism*, the more vehemently the state and its avatars responded by “individualizing disorder”⁶⁸⁰ into singular instances of criminality—which could then be solved via arrest or state-sanctioned killings.

Both institutional and individualized condemnation were essential because the deadly anti-racist struggle had been nationally televised. Television affected the outlook of ordinary US white people who had to be persuaded that welfare did not help them (it did) and that justice should be measured by punishing individuals rather than via social reconstruction.⁶⁸¹ Thus, the political will for *militarism* remained intact, but the will for *equity* (another way to think about welfare), however weak it had been, yielded to pressure for privatizing or eliminating public—or social—goods and services. In other words, the basic structure of the postwar US racial state⁶⁸² has shifted, from welfare-warfare to workfare-warfare, and that shift is the product of, and is producing, a new political as well as economic geography.

The expansion of prison coincides with this fundamental shift and constitutes a geographical solution to socioeconomic problems, politically organized by the state which is, itself, in the process of radical restructuring. This view brings the complexities and contradictions of globalization to the fore, by showing how already-existing social, political, and economic relations constitute the conditions of possibility (but not inevitability) for ways to solve major problems. In the present case, “major problems” appear, materially and ideologically, as surpluses of finance capital, land, labor, and state capacity that have accumulated from a series of overlapping and interlocking crises stretching across three decades.

In the wake of capital’s tax revolt, and the state’s first movements toward restructuring both capital-labor and international economic relations, the United States slipped into the long mid-1970s recession. Inflation consequent to abandonment of the gold standard⁶⁸³ and rising energy costs sent prices skyward, while at the same time steep unemployment deepened the effects of high inflation for workers and their families. Big corporations eliminated jobs and factories in high-wage heavy industries (for example, auto, steel, rubber), decimating entire regions of the country and emptying cities of wealth and people. Even higher unemployment plagued farmworkers and timber, fishing, mining, and other rural workers. Landowners’ revenues did not keep up with the cost of money because of changing production processes and product markets, as well as seemingly “natural” disasters. Defaults displaced both large and smaller farmers and other kinds of rural producers from their devalued lands, with the effect that land and rural industry ownership sped up the century-long tendency to concentrate.⁶⁸⁴

Urban dwellers left cities, looking for new jobs, cheaper housing,⁶⁸⁵ or whiter communities, while new suburban residential and industrial districts developed as center-cities crumbled. Those left behind were stuck in space, their mobility hampered by the frictions of diminished political and economic power. As specific labor markets collapsed, entire cohorts of modestly educated men and women—particularly people of color, but also poor white people—lost employment and

⁶⁸⁰Allen Feldman, *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991, 109.

⁶⁸¹Ruth Wilson Gilmore, “Decorative Beasts,” in this volume, 51–77.

⁶⁸²Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*.

⁶⁸³Anwar M. Shaikh and E. Ahmet Tonak, *Measuring the Wealth of Nations*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

⁶⁸⁴Gilmore, “From Military Keynesianism to Post-Keynesian Militarism.”

⁶⁸⁵About 65 percent of US households are owner-occupied. When the data are broken down by race, we see a different picture: for example, only about 45 percent of Black households are owner occupied, because of federally mandated racist lending criteria as well as lower-than-average incomes. See Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993; Melvin L. Oliver and Thomas M. Shapiro, *Black Wealth/White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality*, New York: Routledge, 1995.

saw household income drop.⁶⁸⁶ Meanwhile, international migrants arrived in the United States, pushed and pulled across borders by the same forces producing the US cataclysm.

The state's ability to intervene in these displacements was severely constrained by its waning legitimacy to use existing welfare capacities to mitigate crises. However, what withered was not the abstract geopolitical institution called "the state," but rather the short-lived *welfare* partner to the ongoing *warfare* state.⁶⁸⁷ Unabsorbed accumulations from the 1973–77 recession lay the groundwork for additional surpluses idled in the 1981–84 recession, and again in 1990–94, as the furious integration of some worlds produced the terrifying disintegration of others.

Prison Expansion

Many map the new geography according to the gross capital movements we call "globalization." This chapter proposes a different cartographic effort, which is to map the political geography of the contemporary United States by positing at the center the site where state-building is least contested, yet most class based and racialized: the prison. A prison-centered map shows dynamic connections among (1) criminalization; (2) imprisonment; (3) wealth transfer between poor communities; (4) disfranchisement; and (5) migration of state and non-state practices, policies, and capitalist ventures that all depend on carcerality as a basic state-building project. These are all forms of structural adjustment and have interregional, national, and international consequences. In other words, if economics lies at the base of the prison system, its growth is a function of politics, not mechanics.

The political geography of criminal law in the United States is a mosaic of state statutes overlaid by juridically distinct federal law. Although no single lawmaking body determines crimes and their consequences, there are trends that more than 52 legislative bodies have followed and led each other along over the past two decades. The trends center on (1) making previously noncriminal behavior criminal, (2) increasing sentences for old and new crimes, and (3) refiguring minor offenses as major ones. More than 70 percent of new convicts in 1999 were sentenced for nonviolent crimes, with drug convictions in the plurality—30 percent of new state prisoners and 60 percent of all federal prisoners.⁶⁸⁸ Even what counts as "violence" has broadened over this period.⁶⁸⁹ The summary effect of these trends has been a general convergence toward ineluctable and long prison terms.

The weight of new and harsher laws falls on poor people in general and especially people of color—who are disproportionately poor. Indigenous people, and people of African descent (citizens and immigrants), are the most criminalized groups. Their rate of incarceration climbed steeply over the past twenty years, while economic opportunity for modestly educated people fell drastically and state programs for income guarantees and job creation withered under both Republican and Democratic administrations.⁶⁹⁰ Citizen and immigrant Latinos in collapsing primary or insecure secondary labor markets have experienced intensified incarceration; and there has been a steady increase in citizen and immigrant Asian and Pacific Islanders in prison and jail.⁶⁹¹ Finally, at the same time that revisions to federal law have curtailed constitutional protections for noncitizens accused of crimes and for all persons convicted of crimes, immigration law has adopted crimi-

⁶⁸⁶See, for example, Roger Waldinger and Mehdi Bozorgmehr (eds.), *Ethnic Los Angeles*, New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1996.

⁶⁸⁷Seymour Melman, *The Permanent War Economy: American Capitalism in Decline*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974

⁶⁸⁸Gainsborough and Mauer, *Diminishing Returns*.

⁶⁸⁹The meaning of violence used to define racism in this chapter (see footnote 1 above) is far narrower than the meaning of violence used by current lawmakers to expand punishment.

⁶⁹⁰Gilmore, "From Military Keynesianism to Post-Keynesian Militarism."

⁶⁹¹Waldinger and Bozorgmehr (eds.), *Ethnic Los Angeles*.

nalization as a weapon to control cross-border movement and to disrupt settlement of working people who are non-elite long-distance migrants.⁶⁹²

Does the lawmaking and prison building fury mean there's more crime? Although data are difficult to compare because of changes in categories, the best estimate for crime as a driving force of prison expansion shows it to account for little more than 10 percent of the increase. Rather, it is a greater propensity to lock people up, as opposed to people's greater propensity to do old or new illegal things, that accounts for about 90 percent of US prison and jail growth since 1980. People who are arrested are more likely now than twenty years ago to be detained pending trial; and those convicted are more likely to be sentenced to prison or jail and for longer terms than earlier cohorts.⁶⁹³

A counterintuitive proposition might also help further understanding of why there are so many US residents in prison. The lockup punishment imperative must be positively correlated with lockup space. Legislative bodies can make any number of laws requiring prison terms, and they can, in theory, drastically overcrowd prisons and then build new prisons to correct for noncompliance with constitutional, if not international,⁶⁹⁴ custody standards. However, if one scrutinizes the temporality of prison growth in California, the largest US state, one sees that lawmaking expanding criminalization followed, rather than led, the historically unprecedented building boom the state embarked on in the early 1980s. And the inception of the building boom followed, rather than led, significant, well-reported, reductions in crime.⁶⁹⁵ A similar pattern holds true for the other leading prison state, Texas.⁶⁹⁶ The new structures are built on surplus land that is no longer a factor in productive activity. Virtually all new prisons have been sited in rural areas, where dominant monopoly or oligopoly capitals have either closed down or, through centralization and/or mechanization, reorganized their participation in the economy.

In search of new prison sites, state prison agencies and private prison entrepreneurs (to whom we shall return) present lockup facilities as local economic development drivers. Recent quantitative and qualitative research in the United States⁶⁹⁷ demonstrates that prisons do not produce the promised outcomes for a number of reasons. New prison employees do not live in amenities-starved towns where prisons go, while 60–95 percent of new prison jobs go to outsiders. Prisons have no industrial agglomeration effects. The preponderance of local institutional purchases is for utilities, which are usually extra-locally owned. Locally owned retail and service establishments such as restaurants are displaced by multinational chains, which drain already scant profits from the locality.

When a prison site is authorized, land values increase amid the euphoria of expected growth, but after construction values drop again. Anticipatory development—particularly new and rehabilitated housing—fails, leaving homeowners (especially the elderly) with their sole asset effectively devalued due to increased vacancies. Renters bear higher fixed costs because of hikes during the short-lived construction boom. As a result, prisons can actually intensify local economic bifurcation.

⁶⁹²José Palafox, "Opening up Borderland Studies," *Social Justice* 27.3 (2001): 56–72.

⁶⁹³Alfred Blumstein and Allen J. Beck, "Population Growth in U. S. Prisons, 1980–1996," *Crime and Justice* 26 (1999): 17–61.

⁶⁹⁴United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1976.

⁶⁹⁵Gilmore, "From Military Keynesianism to Post-Keynesian Militarism"; Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*

⁶⁹⁶Sheldon Ekland-Olson, "Crime and Incarceration: Some Comparative Findings from the 1980s," *Crime and Delinquency*, 38.3 (1992): 392–416; Dana Kaplan, Vincent Schiraldi and Jason Ziedenberg, *Texas Tough: An Analysis of Incarceration and Crime Trends in the Lone Star State*, Washington, DC:Justice Policy Institute, 2000.

⁶⁹⁷Gregory Hooks, Clayton Mosher, Thomas Rotolo, and Linda Lobao, "The Prison Industry: Carceral Expansion and Employment in U.S. Counties, 1969–1994," *Social Science Quarterly* 85.1 (2004): 37–57; Gilmore, "From Military Keynesianism to Post-Keynesian Militarism"; Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*.

At the same time, prisons produce a local economy dependent on constant statehouse politicking to maintain inflows of cash. In one mayor's words: "Beds. We're always lobbying for more beds." "More beds" means more prisoners.⁶⁹⁸ Most prisoners come from urban areas, where the combination of aggressive law-enforcement practices⁶⁹⁹ and greater structural strains⁷⁰⁰ produces higher arrest and conviction rates than in rural areas⁷⁰¹; suburbia is following urban trends.⁷⁰²

The movement of prisoners is, in effect, a wealth transfer between poor communities, and there isn't enough wealth in the sending community to create real economic growth in the receiving community.⁷⁰³ Taxes and other benefits that are spatially allocated on a per capita basis count prisoners where they are held, not where they are from.⁷⁰⁴ When prisoners' families make long trips to visit, they spend scarce but relatively elastic funds in motels and eating establishments. Towns disappointed by the lack of prison induced real growth console themselves with these meager rewards, although modest tax subventions and families' expenditures hardly constitute an income tide to lift ships. Prisons also provide localities with free prisoner labor for public works and beautification, which can displace local low wage workers.

Global Implications

Throughout the globalizing world, states at all scales are working to renovate their ability to be powerful actors in rapidly changing landscapes of accumulation. Already-existing capacities, antagonisms, and agreements are the raw materials of political renovation; embedded in renovation work, then, is the possibility (although by no means *certainty*) that already-existing frictions of distance may be intensified. The rise of prisons in the United States is a potentially prime factor in future "globalization circulation models" because prison-building is state-building at its least contested, and the United States is a prime exporter of ideologies and systems. The transfer of social control methods, in times of political-economic crisis, is not new. A century ago, Jim Crow, apartheid, racist science, eugenics, and other precursors to twentieth century hypersegregation, exclusion, and genocide took ideological and material form and globalized in conjunction with technology transfers and dreams of democracy.⁷⁰⁵

In the current period the legitimizing growth of state social control apparatuses productively connects with the needs of those who struggle to gain or keep state power. Such political actors (whether parties, corporations, industrial sectors, or other kinds of interest groups makes no difference) are vulnerable to the arguments of private entrepreneurs and public technocrats about how states *should* function in the evolving global arena, when the norm has become neoliberal minimalism. Increased coercive control within jurisdictions is, as we have seen in the US context, one way to manage the effects of organized abandonment. At the same time, the struggle for *international* sovereignty in the context of "postcolonial" globalization can, and often does, feature a rush to institutional conformity—which today includes expanded criminalization, policing, and prisons. As a result, new or renovated state structures are often grounded in the exact same fatal power

⁶⁹⁸Tracy L. Huling, Yes, in My Backyard. Documentary. Galloping Girls/WSKG Production, 1999.

⁶⁹⁹David H. Bayley, *Patterns in Policing*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1985.

⁷⁰⁰John H. Laub, "Patterns of offending in urban and rural areas." *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 11.2 (1983): 129–142.

⁷⁰¹Gilmore, "From Military Keynesianism to Post-Keynesian Militarism."

⁷⁰²Bureau of Justice Statistics 2000.

⁷⁰³Tracy L. Huling, *Prisons as a Growth Industry in Rural America: An Exploratory Discussion of the Effects on Young African-American Males in the Inner-Cities*, Washington, DC: US Commission on Civil Rights, 2000; Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*.

⁷⁰⁴Tracy L. Huling, "Prisoners of the Census," Mojo Wire, 2000, www.motherjones.com.

⁷⁰⁵Blaut, *The Colonizer's Model of the World*.

difference couplings (for example, racism, sexism, homophobia) that radical anti-colonial activists fought to expunge from the social order.⁷⁰⁶

In other words, structural adjustment—most ordinarily associated with shifts in how states intervene in the costs of everyday-life basic-goods subsidies, wage rules, and other benefits—flags not only what states stop doing, but also what states do instead.⁷⁰⁷ Policing and lawmaking are internationally articulated, via professional and governmental associations,⁷⁰⁸ and the pressures of international finance capitalists (whether commercial or not-for-profit) seeking to secure predictable returns on investments. In short, while not all countries in the world rush to emulate the United States, the very kinds of state-based contingencies and opportunities that help explain US prison expansion operate elsewhere.⁷⁰⁹

US prison expansion has other broad effects. While most US prisons and jails are publicly owned and operated, the trend toward public service privatization means firms work hard to turn the deprivation of freedom for 2,000,000 into profit-making opportunities for shareholders. Success rates differ across jurisdictions, but privatized market share, currently about 6 percent, grew 25–35 percent each year during the 1990s.⁷¹⁰ The largest firms doing this work also promote privatization in such disparate places as the United Kingdom, South Africa, and Australia.⁷¹¹

Public and private entities package and market prison design, construction, and fund-development; they also advocate particular kinds of prison-space organization and prisoner management techniques. The “security housing unit” (SHU), a hyper-isolation “control unit” cell condemned by international human rights organizations, is widely used in the United States. The United States imported the SHU from the former West Germany, which developed it as a death penalty surrogate to destroy the political will and physical bodies of radical activists. The United States has both the death penalty and the SHU and promotes control units abroad.⁷¹² At the end of 2000 more than 10,000 prisoners throughout Turkey participated in a hunger strike to protest spatial reconfiguration from dormitories to cell based “American”-style prison, with a particular focus on the punitive SHU.⁷¹³

Exported structures and relationships can take the form of indirect as well as deliberately patterned effects. In addition to the transfer of wealth between poor places, prison produces the political transfer of electoral power through formal disfranchisement of felons. While elections and politics are not identical, the power to vote has been central to struggles for self-determination for people kept from the polls by the frictions of terror and law throughout the world. In the United States, Black people fought an entire century (1865–1965) for the vote. As of 1998, there were nearly 4 million felony-disfranchised adults in the country, of whom 1.37 million are of African descent.⁷¹⁴ The voter effect of criminalization returns the United States to the era when white supremacist statutes barred millions from decision-making processes; today, lockout is achieved through lockup.

⁷⁰⁶Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*; M. Jacqui Alexander, “Not Just Any(Body) Can Be a Citizen: The Politics of Law, Sexuality, and Postcoloniality in Trinidad & Tobago,” *Feminist Review* 48 (1994): 5–24.

⁷⁰⁷Rarely, if ever, does a delegitimated state, or state-fraction, simply disappear.

⁷⁰⁸See, for example, Bayley, *Patterns in Policing*.

⁷⁰⁹See, for example, Martha Knisely Huggins, *Political Policing: The United States and Latin America*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998; Paul Chevigny, *Edge of the Knife: Police Violence in the Americas*, New York: New Press, 1995.

⁷¹⁰Judith Greene, “The Rise and Fall—and Rise Again—of the Private Prison Industry,” *American Prospect* 12.16 (2001): 23–27; James Austin and Garry Coventry, *Emerging Issues on Privatized Prisons*, Washington, DC: US Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, 2001.

⁷¹¹Julia Sudbury, “Transatlantic Visions: Resisting the Globalization of Mass Incarceration,” *Social Justice* 27.3 (2000): 133–149.

⁷¹²Angela Y. Davis and Avery F. Gordon, “Globalism and the Prison Industrial Complex.”

⁷¹³Prison Focus, Turkey Prisoners Protest SHUs, CPF 14, 2001.

⁷¹⁴Jamie Fellner and Marc Mauer, *Losing the Vote: The Impact of Felony Disenfranchisement Laws in the United States*, New York: Human Rights Watch/The Sentencing Project, 1998.

The 2000 US presidential election, strangely decided by the Supreme Court rather than voters, was indirectly determined by massive disfranchisement. George W. Bush Jr. won Florida, and therefore the White House and the most powerful job on the planet, by fewer than 500 votes. Yet 204,600 Black Floridians were legally barred from voting; additionally, many others of all races who tried to vote could not because their names appeared on felon lists. Had felons not been disfranchised, candidate Bush would have lost; however, candidate Albert Gore's party shares equal responsibility with Bush's for creating widespread disfranchisement and could not protest on that front. Thus, the structural effects of racism significantly shape the electoral sphere with ineluctably global consequences for financial (G8), industrial (WTO and GATT), environmental (Kyoto), and warfare (NATO; Star Wars) policies.

Conclusion

As exercised through criminal laws that target certain kinds of people in places disorganized by globalization's adjustments, racism is structural—not individual or incidental. The sturdy curtain of US racism enables and veils the complex economic, political, and social processes of prison expansion. Through prison expansion and prison export, both US and non-US racist practices can become determining forces in places nominally “free” of white supremacy. Indeed, as with the twentieth, the problem of the twenty-first century is freedom; and racialized lines continue powerfully, although not exclusively, to define freedom's contours and limits.

Section X

Fight the Constitution, Demand a New Republic

Section X: Fight the Constitution, Demand a New Republic

Summary

Section Ten is a culmination of two months of study and over 300 pages of socialist theory and history. It is also the beginning of how that theory and history may and/or should play out in the near or distant future. Earlier in the Reader, early socialist movements took an almost evangelical tone in a calling to action and belief in a better world. This Ninth and ultimate section is not unlike a religious text about the end of the world — a kingdom to come — and how it will take form.

Here, the end means the end of the Constitution, which will usher in a true democratic republic, where socialism can finally be realized. The first reading by Sean Monahan describes how Marx saw the United States, early in its statehood, and how workers were already setting out to expand their political rights in the new republic. The second reading by Jenna Grove explores every route in, around, and through the Constitution before settling on what is needed for proletarian freedom in this country: a new democratic republic.

To go forward, we must first go back. Monahan's article reexamines what was going on politically in the young United States and how it influenced Marx. The economic conditions of the workers in Europe were the same as those in the United States. The difference in how these meager conditions could be overcome was a topic of debate in European socialist circles. Utopian socialists thought a technocratic, apolitical, and scientifically-run economy was the answer. Marx had other ideas which he had gathered partly from the Workingman's Party, also known as "Workies" (1828-1832).

The Workies understood that workers had to exercise their political rights to improve their social and material conditions. The Workies platform had two primary goals: Universal compulsory public education and the total expropriation of the rich, including their factories, foundries, mills, houses, churches, ships, etc. Workers would achieve this by universal suffrage at the ballot box. Unlike all other political parties of the time, the Workies truly meant *universal* suffrage: women and all races were welcome to vote. One of their leaders, Thomas Skidmore, honestly thought that change on such a radical scale could be won at the ballot box rather than through violence. He wrote: "...since three hundred thousand freemen in this state have the power, through their votes at the ballot boxes, to bring it about, without resorting, as most other countries must do, to the use of the bayonet."

Ultimately, the Workies only gathered around 6,000 votes in the New York state assembly race, and the party later dissolved. The Workies' thoughts and actions were far ahead of their time and had a profound influence on Marx, especially their militancy against socialism as a static, apolitical, and inevitable conclusion. Socialism was a dynamic, living, and political project that needed to be fought in the arena of democracy.

This leads to the final reading from Jenna Grove, "Fight the Constitution, Demand a New Republic!" The country is constantly in an economic crisis. Any social or political change must go through institutions created by an outdated and rigid constitution. Quality of life for the average person in the U.S. is in decline and shows no sign of improving.

If the Constitution is going to be the battleground for democracy and socialism, Grove lays out three options for dealing with it: Accept it, rig it, or fight it. If we accept the Constitution and leave it untouched, any reform must go through undemocratic institutions designed to curtail progress. All three branches of government would have to be won simultaneously. Lining up all the electoral paths at the same time to attack the judiciary is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity as is practically impossible. Rigging the Constitution may win some reform. However, it will fail to address the inherent illogical anti-democratic intent of the document. The left could break up California into multiple states, pack the Senate and Supreme Court, and game the system. Reforms may be passed, but this, unfortunately, doesn't solve the issues of voter disenfran-

chisement in the Electoral College and Senate. Breaking up California also leaves the undemocratic judiciary intact. The symptoms would be cured, but the disease would remain.

The final option is to fight the Constitution. What does that entail? Grove writes, “Weak movements need strong demands.” We should call for a New Union Act in Congress that will abolish the presidency, Senate, and Supreme Court. Democracy will be at the fore. Old institutions used to safeguard against the will of the majority will be brought down. Grove concludes with “*Salus populi suprema lex esto — The health of the people is the supreme law.*” Remember what Nixon said: “If the people do it, it’s legal.” Fighting the Constitution won’t always be legal. But if we put our faith in a democratic republic, a better law will prevail. A movement for each other’s common health — physically, politically, democratically, and materially — will bring us a constitution worthy of the fight.

The struggle for the proletariat and its rise to power is directly tied to the struggle for democracy. In order for the workers’ power to be truly realized, the working class must have true political power and freedom. The only way this can be accomplished is for the current undemocratic and illogical Constitution to be done away with. Fight the Constitution! Demand a New Republic!

Study Questions

*Independent Study questions are italicized

1. What lessons regarding political and social freedoms were drawn by socialists from their observations of the United States? Why did some European socialists come to reject democracy entirely after observing the U.S? In contrast, why did American workers turn towards political struggles?
2. How does the US Constitution serve as a “political playing field”?
3. *Why should socialists care about the US Constitution?*
4. *How can we fight the US Constitution?*

The American Workingmen's Parties, Universal Suffrage, and Marx's Democratic Communism

by Sean F. Monahan

The American Workingmen's Parties in the 1828–32 period occupy a distinctive place within the history of socialism: they were the first to embrace a strategy of organizing a working-class political party and seizing the democratic state for their collective self-liberation. With universal suffrage, a working-class majority could take political power electorally and expropriate the rich. Karl Marx read about these workers' parties through works by Thomas Hamilton and Thomas Cooper in the period of his early political development. Like the American workers, he was stringently in favor of robust political rights and conceived of socialism as a democratic mass movement. Unlike the antipolitical socialists predominant in his day, Marx saw the northern United States as uniquely situated for socialism precisely because it had already solved the basic political problem facing Europe: the workers could vote.

Denying that communist ideas had their origin in Hegelian philosophy, the young Karl Marx writes, “Socialism and communism did not emanate from Germany but from England, France and North America.”⁷¹⁵ It is well known that England and France produced a wide range of pre-Marxian socialists, from the Levellers and Diggers; to Babeuf’s Conspiracy of Equals; to the utopian schemes of Robert Owen, Henri de Saint-Simon, and Charles Fourier. But Marx’s suggestion that the United States was one of the origin points of socialism may come as a surprise. Socialism is often taken to be a political tradition that emerged in the specific context of nineteenth-century Europe, always out of place in America, where status inequalities were absent and class conflict was marginal to political life.⁷¹⁶

“Why no socialism in the United States?” famously asked by Werner Sombart, is a twentieth-century question.⁷¹⁷ Throughout the nineteenth, European observers often described the American labor movement as “far more advanced (or threatening, depending on the writer) than its British and Continental counterparts.”⁷¹⁸ This perception was shared by the young Marx, whose writings throughout the 1840s often point to the USA as the country where class struggle is *most* developed. While sharing many ideas and organizational forms with workers in Europe, the Americans had a particular advantage: only in the northern USA did the socialist and labor movements develop in the context of near-universal manhood suffrage.⁷¹⁹ Seizing on this opportunity, journeymen organizers formed Workingmen’s Parties in Philadelphia, New York, and other northern cities in the 1828–32 period, producing what Helen Sumner calls “the first labour party in the

⁷¹⁵ Karl Marx, “Moralising Criticism and Critical Morality” (1847), in *Marx Engels Collected Works* (here after MECW), 50 vols. (Moscow, London, and New York, 1975–2004), 6: 312–40, at 321.

⁷¹⁶ Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York, 1955); Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York, 1992); Seymour Martin Lipset and Gary Marks, *It Didn’t Happen Here: Why Socialism Failed in the United States* (New York, 2000).

⁷¹⁷ Werner Sombart, *Warum gibt es in den Vereinigten Staaten keinen Sozialismus?* (Tübingen, 1906). Sombart’s question was somewhat off-base even then, since until the First World War, “the American Socialist party appeared to rival those in Europe … in mass support and prospects for future growth.” Eric Foner, “*Why Is There No Socialism in the United States?*”, *History Workshop* 17 (1984), 57–80, at 60.

⁷¹⁸ Sean Wilentz, “Against Exceptionalism: Class Consciousness and the American Labor Movement, 1790–1920,” *International Labor and Working Class History* 26 (1984), 1–24, at 14.

⁷¹⁹ Friedrich Lenger, “Die handwerkliche Phase der Arbeiterbewegung in England, Frankreich, Deutschland und den USA: Plädoyer für einen Vergleich,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 13/2 (1987), 232–43.

world.”⁷²⁰ These “Workies” (as they were known) occupy a distinctive place within the history of socialism: they were the first to embrace a strategy of organizing a working-class political party and seizing the democratic state for their collective self-liberation. With universal suffrage, a working-class majority could take political power electorally and expropriate the rich.

Historians of socialism have not always recognized this contribution: G. D. H. Cole’s sweeping history of socialist thought, for instance, omits these early Americans entirely.⁷²¹ But the Workies’ significance for socialist history goes beyond merely having come first. In what follows, I argue that Thomas Hamilton’s *Men and Manners in America* was an important part of the empirical material that originally led Marx to communism in the summer of 1843, an idea first put forward in the early 1960s by Marx scholars Maximilien Rubel and Lewis Feuer.⁷²² Not only did the USA provide a crucial demonstration that political freedom would not itself mean the end of human domination, but it also furnished a form of practice quite distinct from the apolitical varieties of socialism Marx had long resisted: a mass workers’ party aimed at democratic social revolution. Further, I show that Marx knew more about the Workingmen’s Parties than even Rubel and Feuer realized: in 1845 he read a second work that discussed their ideas in detail, Thomas Cooper’s *Lectures on the Elements of Political Economy*, which argued that the only way to ensure a workers’ party never came to power would be to eliminate universal suffrage.⁷²³ Marx incorporated material from this work in his polemics of 1846–7, pieces that marked his decisive break from antipolitical socialism, and offered the first clear expression of the political orientation found in the famous *Manifesto* and later works.

This analysis is significant for understanding not only the place of the Workies in the history of socialist thought, but also the role of political democracy for Marx. One of the oldest and most contentious disputes in Marx scholarship concerns his theoretical orientation towards bourgeois rights, democracy, and politics as such. Even scholars who have recognized the great importance Marx placed on political democracy have struggled to explain this orientation. In what follows, I show that Marx differed from other European socialists in that, for him, the socialist transformation would involve the working class as a whole exercising political power through the democratic state. Hence civil liberties and working-class suffrage were prerequisites for socialism. This idea drew on the example of the Workingmen’s Parties of antebellum America.

⁷²⁰ Helen Sumner, “Part Two: Citizenship (1827–1833),” in John R. Commons et al., *History of Labour in the United States*, vol. 1 (New York, 1966; first published 1918), 167–332, at 169. On the Workingmen’s movement see Frank Carlton, “The Workingmen’s Party of New York City: 1828–1831,” *Political Science Quarterly* 22/3 (1907), 401–15; Louis Arky, “The Mechanics’ Union of Trade Associations and the Formation of the Philadelphia Workingmen’s Movement,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 76/2 (1952), 142–76; Walter Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy and the Working Class: A Study of the New York Workingmen’s Movement, 1827–1837* (Stanford, 1960); David Harris, *Socialist Origins in the United States: American Forerunners to Marx, 1817–1832* (Assen, 1966); Edward Pessen, *Most Uncommon Jacksonians: The Radical Leaders of the Early Labor Movement* (Albany, 1967); Bruce Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia, 1800–1850* (Philadelphia, 1980); Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788–1850* (New York, 1984); Ronald Schultz, *The Republic of Labor: Philadelphia Artisans and the Politics of Class, 1720–1830* (New York, 1993); and Alex Gourevitch, *From Slavery to the Cooperative Commonwealth: Labor and Republican Liberty in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 2015), 67–96.

⁷²¹ G. D. H. Cole, *A History of Socialist Thought*, vol. 1, *The Forerunners, 1789–1850* (London, 1953). Also Morris Hillquit’s *History of Socialism in the United States* (New York, 1903).

⁷²² Thomas Hamilton, *Men and Manners in America*, 2 vols. (London, 1833); Maximilien Rubel, “Notes on Marx’s Conception of Democracy,” *New Politics* 1 (1962), 78–90; Lewis Feuer, “The North American Origin of Marx’s Socialism,” *Western Political Quarterly* 16/1 (1963), 53–67. Feuer, *Marx and the Intellectuals: A Set of Post-ideological Essays* (Garden City, 1969), 215, suggests that he and Rubel made this discovery independently.

⁷²³ Thomas Cooper, *Lectures on the Elements of Political Economy*, 2nd edn (Columbia, SC, 1829).

Socialist Antipolitics and Workers' Democracy

Before turning to Marx, a brief overview of the relationship between pre-Marxian socialism and democratic politics is in order. The American and French Revolutions played an important role in the development of socialist thought, less for their victories than for their failures. As these republics eliminated legal privileges, they revealed an enduring stratification of wealth and power that seemed to thrive in an environment of political equality. This was the basis of the idea that modern oppression stems not from political sources but from the distribution of property. The USA served as a continuing example of this after the Restoration eliminated most political freedom in Europe.⁷²⁴ As early as 1805, English socialist Charles Hall speaks of a “rising aristocracy” of wealth in the democratic “American States.”⁷²⁵ As John Francis Bray writes, “if the working classes of the United Kingdom should obtain any or all of the political changes [already implemented in America], they would remain in almost the same condition of poverty and ignorance and misery as they are at present.”⁷²⁶ The “negative example” of enduring inequality in the American republic, as Gregory Claeys puts it, played an important role in Robert Owen and his followers’ belief that “representative institutions and popular sovereignty were incapable of resolving the complex and deeply divisive problems of a market-oriented and industrialising society.”⁷²⁷ Consequently, many socialists concluded that political change was irrelevant.

Further, the tumult of revolution led many of the early socialists to reject democracy entirely – as the reign of ignorance or tyranny of the majority – in favor of apolitical technocratic administration. Saint-Simon famously held that government must be treated as a matter of expert administration, a “positive science” to be restricted “exclusively to a special class of scientists.”⁷²⁸ Robert Owen called the “elective principle” of government “equally defective” as the “despotic” principle, and advised against universal suffrage on the ground that the “existing generation … is not prepared for a government in accordance with all the laws of nature.”⁷²⁹ This Platonic authoritarianism was shared even by the anarchistic tendency in early socialism. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon agreed with Saint-Simon that “political truth or science” is “as independent of our approval as is mathematical truth,” and therefore any imposition of mere “will as law” – even a “vote of the majority” – must be considered “illegal and absurd.”⁷³⁰ Consequently, the antipolitical socialists rejected both the ideal of democratic self-rule and revolutionary methods of change.⁷³¹ Convinced that they had determined a form of a harmonious order that everyone would consent to, they either counseled the voluntary establishment of harmonious communities or sought to

⁷²⁴ Gregory Claeys, “The Origins of the Rights of Labor: Republicanism, Commerce, and the Construction of Modern Social Theory in Britain, 1796–1805,” *Journal of Modern History* 66/2 (1994), 249–90, at 285–7; Claeys, *Citizens and Saints: Politics and Anti-politics in Early British Socialism* (Cambridge, 1989), 152–61.

⁷²⁵ Charles Hall, *The Effects of Civilization on the People in European States* (London, 1850; first published 1805), 197

⁷²⁶ John Francis Bray, *Labour's Wrongs and Labour's Remedy; or, The Age of Might and the Age of Right* (Leeds, 1839), 18.

⁷²⁷ Claeys, *Citizens*, 2, 158.

⁷²⁸ Henri Saint-Simon, *Selected Writings on Science, Industry, and Social Organization*, trans. and ed. Keith Taylor (New York, 1975), 230.

⁷²⁹ Robert Owen, *Robert Owen's Opening Speech, and his Reply to the Rev. Alex. Campbell, in the Recent Public Discussion in Cincinnati ...* (Cincinnati, 1829), 43.

⁷³⁰ Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *What Is Property?*, trans. Donald R. Kelley and Bonnie G. Smith (Cambridge, 1993; first published 1840), 207–10.

⁷³¹ Keith Taylor, *The Political Ideas of the Utopian Socialists* (London, 1982); K. Steven Vincent, *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism* (New York, 1984).

convince existing rulers to implement their enlightened schemes through a mere appeal to reason, an approach which later earned them the label "utopian."

Alongside this current of socialism was an expressly revolutionary variety, which in its own way remained nonetheless apolitical. This was a form of insurrectionary communism inspired by the example of the Conspiracy of Equals as described in Philippe Buonarroti's famous 1828 memoir, which became known as "Blanquism" after its leading exponent, Louis Auguste Blanqui.⁷³² Despite their republican language, the Blanquists were nearly as indifferent as the utopians towards political reforms, and for similar reasons. If only a select few know the true principles of society – and possess the incorruptible virtue necessary to carry them out – then the only worthwhile objective is for that small group to seize power in a coup, followed by a dictatorship in which the masses would be reeducated and prepared for life in the new system.⁷³³ Utopians and Blanquists alike conceived of poor workers not as political agents but as merely suffering beings that needed saving.⁷³⁴ Democratic politics could play little role in such an understanding of social change.

If most European socialists saw in the democratic republic only the impotence of politics, their American counterparts came to an opposite view. When Robert Owen toured the USA in the mid-1820s, the journeymen's trade union movement gave a warm reception to his economic ideas, but took issue with his apolitical approach to change, which sought the cooperation of rich property owners as both investors and leaders in his experimental communities. Disillusioned by years of conflict with their employers and disappointment with bourgeois politicians, the American workers had learned to take their interests into their own hands. In an influential 1826 work, Philadelphia printer Langton Byllesby argues against Owen, "History does not furnish an instance wherein the depository of power voluntarily abrogated its prerogatives, or the oppressor relinquished his advantages in favour of the oppressed." Quite the contrary: whenever "a radical alteration has taken place ... it has uniformly been impelled, prosecuted, and finally adjusted by the sufferers."⁷³⁵ To impel such an alteration, the workers turned to politics.

Whereas property qualifications disenfranchised their counterparts in the constitutional monarchies of Europe, most wageworkers in the northern states had attained suffrage by the late 1820s.⁷³⁶ The founder of the Philadelphia Workingmen's Party, journeyman cordwainer William Heighton, writes that workers possess "*the means* of ... attaining ... real

⁷³² Philippe Buonarroti, *Histoire de la conspiration pour l'égalité dite de Babeuf* (Brussels, 1828), published in English by Brontier O'Brien in 1836. See Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The First Professional Revolutionist: Filippo Michele Buonarroti, 1761–1837* (Cambridge, MA, 1959).

⁷³³ Richard N. Hunt, *The Political Ideas of Marx and Engels: Marxism and Totalitarian Democracy, 1818–1850* (Pittsburgh, 1974), 152–6; Hal Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution*, vol. 3, The "Dictatorship of the Proletariat" (New York, 1986), 28–44.

⁷³⁴ David Lovell, "Early French Socialism and Class Struggle," *History of Political Thought* 9/2 (1988), 327–48.

⁷³⁵ Langton Byllesby, *Observations on the Sources and Effects of Unequal Wealth ...* (New York, 1961; first published 1826), 23.

⁷³⁶ Most northern states had achieved "universal suffrage" in the sense that property qualifications had been removed de jure or de facto to the point where almost all wageworkers could vote. The crucial exception is women, who would be denied the ballot for nearly another century. Additionally, with the rise of scientific racism, racial restrictions were being added in the mid-nineteenth century, although in 1828 free blacks could still vote in four New England states, Pennsylvania, and New York (though facing a higher property qualification in New York). When the Workies, Hamilton, and Cooper speak of "universal suffrage" in America, these limitations should be kept in mind. Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States* (New York, 2000), 22–60; Donald Ratcliffe, "The Right to Vote and the Rise of Democracy, 1787–1828," *Journal of the Early Republic* 33/2 (2013), 219–54.

liberty and universal independence” in “the right of *universal suffrage*,” the “power to choose our own legislators.”⁷³⁷ Unlike the European socialists who rejected politics as the mere imposition of will, the American workers turned to politics precisely because they understood their social emancipation as requiring imposing their will on their oppressors. The rich and powerful would certainly oppose the workers’ efforts to transform society. But, as machinist and leader of the New York party Thomas Skidmore writes, universal suffrage effectively puts it “out of the power of a few, to defeat, frustrate, or delay, for any considerable time, the wishes of the many.”⁷³⁸ All they needed to do, Heighton writes, is elect “men of our own *nominating*, men whose interests are in unison with ours.”⁷³⁹ By taking the power of law – legitimate coercion – away from their oppressors and appropriating it for themselves, the workers could transform society in spite of powerful opposition.

Beyond supporting a range of immediate reforms such as a mechanics’ lien law and the abolition of debt imprisonment, the Workingmen’s Parties put forward proposals of two sorts for radically remaking society. One, championed by Frances Wright and Robert Dale Owen, aimed at making the “means of equal knowledge … the common property of all classes” through universal, compulsory public education.⁷⁴⁰ The other was a much more radical idea: the total expropriation of the rich. Thomas Skidmore and Alexander Ming Sr. called for a “State-Convention” in New York elected by truly universal suffrage – by “woman” as well as “the red man, the black man, and the white man” – that would “claim all property … both real and personal,” and “order an equal division of all this property among the citizens.”⁷⁴¹ After this initial “general division,” redistribution would become an automatic mechanism of intergenerational inheritance: all property of those dying in a given year would be divided equally among all those reaching maturity.⁷⁴²

The terms “socialism” and “communism” were not yet in use in the 1820s; instead, Skidmore and Ming’s proposal was dubbed “agrarianism,” a term referring to the Gracchi’s agrarian laws of land limitation and redistribution in the ancient Roman Republic.⁷⁴³ Although he invokes the Roman example himself, Skidmore’s concept of productive property extends well beyond land.⁷⁴⁴ The workers’ convention will “appropriate… the cotton factories, the woolen factories, the iron

⁷³⁷ “A Fellow Labourer” [William Heighton], *An Address to the Members of Trade Societies and to the Working Classes Generally* … (London [Philadelphia], 1827), 27; *An Operative Citizen* [William Heighton], *The Principles of Aristocratic Legislation* … (Philadelphia, 1828), 5. On Heighton see Philip S. Foner, *William Heighton: Pioneer Labor Leader of Jacksonian Philadelphia* (New York, 1991).

⁷³⁸ Thomas E. Skidmore, *The Rights of Man to Property!* … (New York, 1829), 11.

⁷³⁹ Heighton, *An Address to the Members of Trade Societies*, 27, original emphasis.

⁷⁴⁰ Report of the Working Men’s Committee, *Mechanics’ Free Press*, 16 March 1830, in John R. Commons, Ulrich B. Phillips, Eugene A. Gilmore, Helen L. Sumner, and John B. Andrews, eds., *A Documentary History of American Industrial Society*, vol. 5 (Cleveland, 1910), 99.

⁷⁴¹ Skidmore, *Rights of Man to Property*, 137, 146, 159.

⁷⁴² *Ibid.*, 141, 319.

⁷⁴³ Arthur E. Bestor Jr., “The Evolution of Socialist Vocabulary,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 9/3 (1948), 259–302, at 262–3. The idea of the Agrarian Law was also prominent among the revolutionary sans-culottes. See R. B. Rose, “The ‘Red Scare’ of the 1790s: The French Revolution and the ‘Agrarian Law’,” *Past and Present* 103 (1984), 113–30; P. M. Jones, “The ‘Agrarian Law’: Schemes for Land Redistribution during the French Revolution,” *Past and Present* 133 (1991), 96–133. In honor of the famous tribunes, Babeuf adopted the pseudonym “Gracchus.” R. B. Rose, *Gracchus Babeuf: The First Revolutionary Communist* (Stanford, 1978), 137.

⁷⁴⁴ Skidmore, *Rights of Man to Property*, 20–26.

*foundries, the rolling mills, houses, churches, ships, goods, steam-boats, fields of agriculture, &c ... as is their right.*⁷⁴⁵ When the New York party approved this plan, they described it as nothing less than a “revolution” against the rich, but one that could be “civil ... since three hundred thousand freemen in this state have the power, through their votes at the ballot boxes, to bring it about, without resorting, as most other countries must do, to the use of the bayonet.”⁷⁴⁶ This was the first articulation of the idea that socialism would involve a working-class majority exercising constituent power to expropriate the rich and reorganize property.

It is sometimes alleged that the Workies were not socialists, since they did not propose abolishing private ownership.⁷⁴⁷ But by that criterion, Saint-Simon, Fourier, and Proudhon were not socialists either. The Workies’ economic ideas overlapped with those of English socialists in the goal of eliminating social classes and the relations of exploitation and domination that constitute them. Skidmore held that after equalizing property, “there shall be no lenders, no borrowers; no landlords, no tenants; no masters, no journeymen; no Wealth, no Want.”⁷⁴⁸ Overall, they shared a form of socialist analysis common to the early labor movement on both sides of the Atlantic.⁷⁴⁹ But in their ideas about class organization and political activity, they struck out into new territory. To William Heighton belongs the idea of organizing a political party of wageworkers as a class, and to Thomas Skidmore that of a general expropriation through the exercise of worker-led popular sovereignty. This was far more communistic in the Marxian sense than anything on offer from European socialism at the time.⁷⁵⁰ It is with respect to politics that Harris is right to refer to the Workies as “American forerunners of Marx.”⁷⁵¹

In the 1829 elections, the agrarian leaders Skidmore and Ming each received over six thousand votes, falling just short of being elected to the New York state assembly.⁷⁵² Unsurprisingly, this caused something of a red scare among the American propertied classes, as we will see reflected in the writings of Hamilton and Cooper. “By throwing open the polls to every man that walks,” the New York *Journal of Commerce* howled, the republic is left defenseless against the “Agrarian party.”⁷⁵³ Although at first unanimously adopted, the agrarian platform was so controversial that Robert Dale Owen saw the need to resort to underhanded maneuvers to marginalize and ultimately oust Skidmore and Ming, splitting the movement and contributing to its early demise.⁷⁵⁴ Although the parties disintegrated in the early 1830s, the Workies’ ideas lived

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid., 384, original emphasis.

⁷⁴⁶ [Thomas Skidmore], “Report and Resolutions of the Committee of Fifty,” *Working Man’s Advocate*, 31 Oct. 1829, 1; in Commons et al., *Documentary History*, 150.

⁷⁴⁷ Lipset and Marks, *It Didn’t Happen Here*, 20.

⁷⁴⁸ Skidmore, *Rights of Man to Property*, 386.

⁷⁴⁹ Lenger, “Handwerkliche Phase,” 241–2.

⁷⁵⁰ Even those French socialists who embraced democratic politics in the 1840s did so while rejecting class struggle and the confiscation of property. For example, Étienne Cabet, *Credo Communiste*, 3rd edn (Paris, 1841), 11: “there is no system more opposed than that of Community to the agrarian law, to pillage, to spoliation.” Christopher Johnson, “Étienne Cabet and the Problem of Class Antagonism,” *International Review of Social History* 11/3 (1966), 403–43. Also Leo Loubère, *Louis Blanc: His Life and His Contribution to the Rise of French Jacobin-Socialism* (Evanston, 1961).

⁷⁵¹ Harris, *Socialist Origins*.

⁷⁵² *Working Man’s Advocate*, 14 Nov. 1829, 2–3; Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, 198–201; Schultz, *Republic of Labor*, 231–2.

⁷⁵³ *Journal of Commerce*, 7 Nov. 1829; in Commons, *Documentary History*, 154–5.

⁷⁵⁴ On this “coup” in the party see Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, 201–8.

on, in part by passing into new organizations such as the National Reform Association of the 1840s, and in part by crossing the Atlantic.⁷⁵⁵ Perhaps the most significant of the Europeans who learned from the Workies' example was Marx.

Hamilton and American Democracy

Marx first came across the story of the American Workingmen's Parties in the summer of 1843, the period of his transition from simple democratic republicanism to communism, perhaps the most important months of his intellectual life.⁷⁵⁶ He had spent the previous two years as a crusading journalist, polemicizing against conservative newspapers and Prussian state censors from the radical republican standpoint of Young Hegelianism.⁷⁵⁷ Holding that "the state [is] the great organism, in which legal, moral, and political freedom must be realised," young Marx differed from Hegel only in that this required a democratic republic.⁷⁵⁸ The law is "the conscious expression of the popular will" and "the positive existence of freedom," but only if the legislature consists of "the people's *self-representation*."⁷⁵⁹ Denied a free press and democratic rights, the German people were dehumanized, reduced to philistines concerned only with private gain, meekly submitting to the powers that be.⁷⁶⁰

Marx was by no means a socialist in this period, and it was not for lack of exposure.⁷⁶¹ Starting in the fall of 1842 he worked alongside Moses Hess – the first of the Young Hegelians to embrace French socialism – and began attending the latter's socialist discussion group (though Marx admits he did not devote "long and profound study" to socialist works at that time).⁷⁶² Hess espoused an antipolitics akin to Proudhon's, and given Marx's devotion to the cause of political freedom, it should hardly be surprising that he kept socialism at arm's length. Marx had nothing but contempt for those shirking the necessity of challenging "those in power" and undertaking "the laborious task of winning freedom step by step," and this certainly described the antipolitical socialists.⁷⁶³ If anything, his journalism was pushing him away from Hess's views. The Prussian state's reliance on "expert opinion" in dismissing the distressed Mosel winegrowers' pleas for aid convinced Marx that technocracy is nothing but "a one-sided and arbitrarily established point of view" incapable of understanding "the real

⁷⁵⁵ On the National Reformers see Mark Lause, *Young America: Land, Labor, and the Republican Community* (Chicago: 2005). Robert Owen had some of the Workies' writings reprinted in London, including an address by Heighton. Harris, *Socialist Origins*, 82 n.

⁷⁵⁶ Rubel, "Notes on Marx's Conception of Democracy," 83

⁷⁵⁷ David McLellan, *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx* (London, 1969); Warren Breckman, *Marx, The Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory: Dethroning the Self* (New York, 1999); Douglas Moggach, *The Philosophy and Politics of Bruno Bauer* (Cambridge, 2003).

⁷⁵⁸ Karl Marx, "Leading Article in No. 179 of *Kölnische Zeitung*" (1842), in *MECW*, 1: 184–202, at 202.

⁷⁵⁹ Karl Marx, "Debates on Freedom of the Press" (1842), in *MECW*, 1: 132–88, at 162; Marx, "On the Commissions of the Estates in Prussia" (1842), in *ibid.*, 292–306, at 306, original emphasis; Marx, "The Divorce Bill" (1842), in *ibid.*, 307–10, at 309.

⁷⁶⁰ On Arnold Ruge's contrast between philistines and republican citizens, shared by Marx, see Breckman, Marx, 236, 255.

⁷⁶¹ Breckman, Marx, 221–83, convincingly shows that Marx and Ruge should be considered "social republicans" in this period. But he exaggerates their convergence with French socialism; the issue of politics remained a considerable gulf.

⁷⁶² Marx, "Communism and the Augsburg Allgemeine Zeitung" (1842), in *MECW*, 1: 215–21, at 220; David Gregory, "Karl Marx's and Friedrich Engels' Knowledge of French Socialism in 1842–1843," *Historical Reflections* 10/1 (1983), 143–93, at 161–2.

⁷⁶³ Marx, "Letter to Dagobert Oppenheim" (Aug. 1842), in *MECW*, 1: 391–3, at 392; "Letter to Arnold Ruge" (Nov. 1842), in *ibid.*, 393–5, at 395.

nature of the world" as the multitude of citizens see it.⁷⁶⁴ This critique of state administration challenged Hegel's idea that an independent state bureaucracy can adequately tend to general affairs, and solidified Marx's view that rational rule can only be popular self-government.⁷⁶⁵ This deeply democratic outlook was antithetical to technocratic socialism, shared in its anarchist variety by Hess.

When the Prussian censors shut down his newspaper, Marx took a break from journalism and spent the summer of 1843 in Kreuznach working on a critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, in which he planned to reveal "constitutional monarchy" as "a hybrid which from beginning to end contradicts and abolishes itself."⁷⁶⁶ As Leopold argues, this was not an abandonment of empirics for philosophy, but instead "a movement away from the anachronistic German polity and towards a critical engagement with the modern state," the essential features of which Marx believed Hegel had captured.⁷⁶⁷ This required extensive empirical research. Since the "correct theory must be made clear and developed within the concrete conditions and on the basis of the existing state of things," Marx immersed himself in works of world history at Kreuznach, filling eight notebooks with excerpts from twenty-four books.⁷⁶⁸

Alongside revolutionary France, a particularly important object of study was the United States, since this was the only democratic republic that still survived.⁷⁶⁹ At Kreuznach, Marx read three works on the country: Alexis de Tocqueville's famous *Democracy in America*; Gustave de Beaumont's *Marie: or Slavery in the United States*; and a German translation of *Men and Manners in America*, the log of Scotsman Thomas Hamilton's tour in 1830-31, shortly before Tocqueville and Beaumont.⁷⁷⁰ Marx references all three works in "On the Jewish Question," which debuts his radically revised understanding of modern politics developed at Kreuznach.⁷⁷¹ On the eve of this retreat, Marx still espoused the view that the "French Revolution" had "restored man," and that achieving a "democratic state" would overturn "the *dehumanised world*" and "transform society into a community of human beings united for their highest aims."⁷⁷² However, in the course of Marx's

⁷⁶⁴ Karl Marx, "Justification of the Correspondent from the Mosel" (1843), in *MECW*, 1: 332–60, at 343. David Leopold, *The Young Karl Marx: German Philosophy, Modern Politics and Human Flourishing* (New York, 2007), 234–77, rejects the common misinterpretation that Marx shared Saint Simon's view of technocratic administration.

⁷⁶⁵ G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge, 1991; first published 1820), 328–36.

⁷⁶⁶ Marx, "Letter to Arnold Ruge" (March 1842), in *MECW*, 1: 382–3, original emphasis.

⁷⁶⁷ Leopold, *Young Marx*, 34.

⁷⁶⁸ Marx to Oppenheim, 392. The notebooks are reprinted in *Marx Engels Gesamtausgabe* (hereafter MEGA), prospectively 114 vols. (Berlin, 1972–), 4/2: 9–278.

⁷⁶⁹ On Marx's readings on France see Maximilien Rubel, "The French Revolution and the Education of the Young Marx," *Diogenes* 37/148 (1989), 1–27.

⁷⁷⁰ Elizabeth Deis and Lowell Frye, "British Travelers and the 'Condition-of-America Question': Defining America in the 1830s," in Christin DeVine, ed., *Nineteenth-Century British Travelers in the New World* (New York, 2013), 121–50. The translation Marx read is Thomas Hamilton, *Die Menschen und die Sitten in den vereinigten Staaten von Nordamerika*, trans. L. Hout, 2 vols. (Mannheim, 1834).

⁷⁷¹ The following analysis examines together Marx's three pieces composed at Kreuznach—"Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law" (1843), in *MECW*, 3: 3–129 (hereafter "Kreuznach Critique"); "On the Jewish Question" (1843), in *ibid.*, 146–74 (hereafter "OtJQ"); and "Letter to Arnold Ruge" (Sept. 1843), in *ibid.*, 141–5—and follows the common view that Marx composed Part One of OtJQ in Kreuznach and Part Two in Paris.

⁷⁷² Karl Marx, "Letter to Arnold Ruge" (May 1843), in *MECW*, 3: 134–41, at 137, original emphasis.

empirical research, he discovered a key flaw within the modern republic, and concluded that true emancipation would require the abolition of private property. The United States plays a crucial role in that analysis.

In “On the Jewish Question,” Marx considers Bruno Bauer’s idea that religious belief has lost its historical vitality and would disappear if the continental monarchies’ religious censorship were swept away. To evaluate that claim, Marx turns to “the North American states,” since these are the only places where “the political state exists in its completely developed form,” in other words, where the state is most secular and “political emancipation” is most “complete.”⁷⁷³ Marx cites “Beaumont, Tocqueville, and the Englishman Hamilton” to demonstrate that the USA is “pre-eminently the country of religiosity.” Where the state has lost its religious character and religion has become a strictly private affair, religious thought does not fade away. On the contrary, it “displays a *fresh and vigorous vitality*.”⁷⁷⁴

But Marx holds that religion is merely “the *theory*” of an earthly “distorted reality,” and so it “should be criticised in the framework of criticism of political conditions.”⁷⁷⁵ The fact that religion spread vigorously in America therefore suggests that something of political reality remains distorted even in the democratic republic. Marx finds this distortion in the contrast between the political equality and common interests of citizenship, and the social inequality and conflicting interests in the private sphere.

As Marx now sees it, political emancipation in the democratic republic effects a split within the individual, on the one hand raising them to “a *communal being*” as an equal part of the sovereign body in the state, and on the other hand reducing them to a “*private individual*” in civil society.⁷⁷⁶ By raising the state to “the *general concern* of the nation, ideally independent of [all the] *particular elements* of civil society,” the political revolution effectively depoliticizes and privatizes people’s “sensuous, individual, *immediate existence*.”⁷⁷⁷ Civil society’s organizing principle is therefore “the right to enjoy one’s property and to dispose of it at one’s discretion … without regard to other men, independently of society,” which makes it a “sphere of egoism, of *bellum omnium contra omnes*.”⁷⁷⁸ Having expected to find “thinking beings, free men, republicans” in a democracy,⁷⁷⁹ Marx quotes “Captain Hamilton” to depict a people instead enslaved to abstract wealth:

*[the New Englander] is a sort of moral Laocoön, differing only in this, that he makes no struggle to be free. Mammon has no more zealous worshipper than your true Yankee. His homage is not merely that of the lip, or of the knee; it is an entire prostration of the heart; the devotion of all powers, bodily and mental, to the service of the idol. He views the world but as one vast exchange, on which he is impelled, both by principle and interest, to overreach his neighbours if he can.*⁷⁸⁰

⁷⁷³ Marx, “OtJQ,” 150–51.

⁷⁷⁴ Ibid., 151, original emphasis.

⁷⁷⁵ Marx to Ruge (Nov. 1842), 394–5, original emphasis.

⁷⁷⁶ Marx, “OtJQ,” 154, original emphasis.

⁷⁷⁷ Ibid., 166, 167, original emphasis.

⁷⁷⁸ Ibid., 155, 163. See Marx’s excerpt of Duport’s May 1791 speech criticizing this absolute right to property: Wilhelm Wachsmuth, *Geschichte Frankreichs im Revolutionszeitalter*, 4 vols. (Hamburg, 1840–44), 1: 590–91; Karl Marx, “Exzerpte aus Wachsmuth” (1843), in MEGA 4/2: 163–74, at 169–70.

⁷⁷⁹ Marx to Ruge (May 1843), 134.

⁷⁸⁰ Hamilton, Men and Manners in America, 1: 213. Quoted in Marx, “OtJQ,” 170–71. For Marx’s note book excerpt see Karl Marx, “Exzerpte aus Hamilton” (1843), in MEGA 4/2: 266–75, at 267. Hereafter, references to Hamilton will be accompanied by the corresponding page from these notes, where Marx took excerpts.

The narrow, servile, philistine egoism that had dismayed Marx in absolutist Germany not only endured in America but seemed to flourish. Further, his readings show this selfish pursuit leading to great inequalities of wealth and power. As Hamilton writes, "It is the fashion to call the United States the land of liberty and equality ... [But this] is mere nonsense. There is quite as much practical equality in Liverpool as New York. The magnates of the Exchange do not strut less proudly in the latter city than in the former."⁷⁸¹ This view contradicts that of Tocqueville and Beaumont, who describe America as a "society of perfect equality" where "a protracted conflict between the different classes" is impossible.⁷⁸² As Marx quotes Hamilton in his notebook, "In America there exists but one kind of aristocracy (that of money), and the impulse it awakens is, of course, violent in proportion to its concentration."⁷⁸³ Unlike in Europe, the American aristocracy rules not through legal privileges but through apolitical economic coercion. Hamilton observes that although "in (the Northern) States" no one can "claim property in the thews and sinews of another" any longer, "the power of compulsory labour" nonetheless remains in another form. Despite their "enjoyment of equal rights," those without productive property are forced to offer themselves up to "the most rigorous and iron-hearted of despots," whose motto is "submit or starve." Consequently, chattel slavery has disappeared only to be replaced by "the vassalage of stomach." Hamilton describes the free wageworker as "*a masterless slave.*"⁷⁸⁴

Thus the sorts of domination and servility Marx had seen under absolutism are not abolished by political democracy, but let loose in the private realm of civil society. This alleged sphere of individual liberty reveals itself as one in which man "regards other men as a means, degrades himself into a means, and becomes the plaything of alien powers."⁷⁸⁵ To complete the depravity, "political life," the sphere containing the promise of democratic self-determination and republican freedom, "declares itself to be a mere *means*" for securing the rights of private property in civil society, in effect subordinating itself to the predatory egoism of the rich.⁷⁸⁶

From this analysis, Marx concludes that "political emancipation is not a form of *human* emancipation which has been carried through to completion and is free from contradiction."⁷⁸⁷ In the "*political revolution*" that established political equality and freed civil society from politics, "man was not freed from religion, he received religious freedom. He was not

⁷⁸¹ Hamilton, *Men and Manners in America*, 1: 109; Marx, "Exzerpte aus Hamilton," 267.

⁷⁸² Gustave de Beaumont, *Marie, or Slavery in the United States: A Novel of Jacksonian America*, trans. Barbara Chapman (Baltimore, 1958; first published 1835), 107–8; Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Henry Reeve (New York, 2002; first published 1835, 1840), 515. Jonathan Sperber's emphasis of Tocqueville here is off-base: Jonathan Sperber, *Karl Marx: A Nineteenth-Century Life* (New York, 2013), 130. Marx mentions Tocqueville only once, without substantive comment.

⁷⁸³ Hamilton, *Men and Manners in America*, 1: 366; Marx, "Exzerpte aus Hamilton," 272. Marx also encountered the "aristocracy of property" in the ideas of the French enrages (Wachsmuth, *Geschichte*, 2: 191; Marx, "Exzerpte aus Wachsmuth," 168). Parallels appear in Marx's notes on the sans-culottes and the Workies in terms of both social criticism and political demands.

⁷⁸⁴ Hamilton, *Men and Manners in America*, 1: 95–6, 156–7; Marx, "Exzerpte aus Hamilton," 266. Marx's insert in parentheses, emphasis Hamilton's.

⁷⁸⁵ Marx, "OtJQ," 154; compare Marx, "Letter to Ruge" (May 1843).

⁷⁸⁶ Marx, "OtJQ," 164, original emphasis. This subordination is not merely symbolic. Marx notes that on the day the Constituent Assembly was formed, "the public debt was consolidated, or declared holy (to reassure and win over the capitalists)," and that it later undertook the confiscation of church property primarily "in order to avoid state bankruptcy, to satisfy the state creditors." C. F. E. Ludwig, *Geschichte der letzten fünfzig Jahre*, vol. 2 (Altona, 1834), 103, 197; Marx, "Exzerpte aus Ludwig," in *MEGA* 4/2: 84–7, at 85, 86. This is the first appearance of the word "capitalist" in Marx's existing writings.

⁷⁸⁷ Marx, "OtJQ," original emphasis.

freed from property, he received freedom to own property.”⁷⁸⁸ The democratic republic not only resolves the contradictions of monarchy but contains contradictions of its own: contradictions whose resolution would involve overcoming the separation between state and civil society. Though nowhere directly stated in the Kreuznach writings, the clear implication is that this change involves transcending the core component of civil society: private property.⁷⁸⁹

But how precisely is this transcendence to be carried out? The only possibility that “On the Jewish Question” explicitly considers is one it rejects: Jacobin terror. Here, the political authority, positing itself as the “real species-life of man,” attempts to impose its own abstract image upon “religion, private property, and all the elements of civil society.” In doing so, it “seeks to suppress its prerequisite, civil society,” which can only bring it into “violent contradiction with its own conditions of life.” It pursues “the abolition of property” in its own way, but this merely leads to “the maximum [price fixing], to confiscation [of church and émigré property], to progressive taxation,” all measures that nonetheless presuppose and reaffirm private property.⁷⁹⁰ The rise of the Jacobins involved the suppression of not only the royalists but also the sans-culottes. Marx’s notebooks take special notice that all discussion of an agrarian law had been banned “since the National Convention on 18 March 1793 set the *death penalty* on proposals of the kind.”⁷⁹¹

If not Jacobin terror, then what?⁷⁹² In the Kreuznach writings we only find allusions to some transformative potential in universal suffrage: “*Electoral reform* within the *abstract political state* is … the demand for [the state’s] *dissolution*, but also for the *dissolution of civil society*.⁷⁹³ The abstractness of these passages has caused considerable debate. Avineri’s interpretation, that the “act of the state in granting universal suffrage will be its last act as a state,” is clearly inconsistent with Marx’s description of the USA as “the political state … in its completely developed form.”⁷⁹⁴ Other writers offer the more promising interpretation that “universal suffrage would *lead* to the dissolution of the state,” but it remains nonetheless unclear why this would be the case.⁷⁹⁵ By pairing Marx’s Kreuznach writings with material from Hamilton, we can construct a plausible narrative of what he may have had in mind: suffrage as the instrument of lower-class revolutionary agency.

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid., 167, original emphasis.

⁷⁸⁹ See Shlomo Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (Cambridge, 1971), 34; Hunt, *The Political Ideas of Marx and Engels*, 79. Alexandros Chrysis, “True Democracy” as a Prelude to Communism: *The Marx of Democracy* (New York, 2018), refers to the Kreuznach Critique as a “pre-communist” work, but his analysis is nonetheless consistent with this point.

⁷⁹⁰ Marx, “OtJQ,” 156, original emphasis.

⁷⁹¹ Wachsmuth, *Geschichte Frankreichs*, 2: 268; Marx, “Exzerpte aus Wachsmuth,” 168, Marx’s emphasis. On Marx’s view of the Jacobins see Draper, *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, 361–3.

⁷⁹² The lack of a straightforward answer to this question in the Kreuznach writings has led many commentators to see Marx’s initial adoption of communism as philosophical or ethical, only to be given an empirical historical basis afterwards (e.g. Avineri, *Political Thought*, 38; Hunt, *The Political Ideas of Marx and Engels*, 131). Against this, Chrysis, “True Democracy”, 177, original emphasis, suggests that Marx arrives at true democracy not as “an ideal to be imposed on reality,” but instead a “historical response to the deeper needs of socialised human beings, a response that is realised as a concrete possibility offered by the dialectical motion of modern society.”

⁷⁹³ Marx, “Kreuznach Critique,” 121, original emphasis.

⁷⁹⁴ Avineri, *Political Thought*, 37; Marx, “OtJQ,” 150. See also Gary Teeple, *Marx’s Critique of Politics*, 1842–1847 (Toronto, 1984), 90.

⁷⁹⁵ David McLellan, *Karl Marx: His Life and Thought* (New York, 1973), 75, my italics. Leopold, *Young Marx*, 259, points out that the key word is the “demand” for their dissolution, not yet the realization.

The Workers' Party

Just before his Kreuznach studies, Marx wrote that he placed all hope in identifying “the existence of suffering human beings, who think,” a mass constituency for change.⁷⁹⁶ In his view, conflict between antagonistic forces is what drives all historical transformations: “Without parties no development, without division no progress.”⁷⁹⁷ This is precisely what Hamilton sees developing within American democracy: “In [New York City] a separation is rapidly taking place between the different orders of society. The operative class have already formed themselves into a society, under the name of ‘The Workies,’ in direct opposition to those who, more favoured by nature or fortune, enjoy the luxuries of life without the necessity of manual labour.” This passage is the only excerpt from Hamilton that Marx underlined in his notes, demonstrating that he saw special importance in it.⁷⁹⁸ Such worker self-organization was accompanied by political claims against class distinctions. The Workies “make no secret of their demands,” Hamilton relates. Since private schooling creates “an aristocracy of knowledge, education, and refinement, which is inconsistent with the true democratic principle of absolute equality,” the first among these demands is “*equal and universal education*.⁷⁹⁹ “But,” Hamilton continues, “those who limit their views to the mental degradation of their country, are in fact the moderates of the party”:

*There are others who go still further, and boldly advocate the introduction of an Agrarian Law, and a periodical division of property. These unquestionably constitute the extrême gauche of the Worky Parliament, but still they only follow out the principles of their less violent neighbours ... Only equalize property, they say, and neither [rich nor poor] would drink Champagne or water, but both would have brandy, a consummation worthy of centuries of struggle to attain.*⁸⁰⁰

As Hamilton sees it, the issue of education is just the tip of the iceberg; the working-class political program logically concludes in the demand to equalize property. It may be this section of Hamilton which Marx has in mind when he writes that in the democratic republic, “the individual members of the nation are *equal* in the heaven of their political world, but unequal in the earthly existence of *society*,” by which “[m]oney and *education* are the main criteria.”⁸⁰¹ These are precisely the two aspects of social inequality that the Workies’ program politicized, and they reappear in his famous Paris “Critique,” which debuts the idea of the proletariat as revolutionary agent.⁸⁰² In Kreuznach, Marx suggests that the emancipatory limit of the “*political revolution*” is that it merely “resolves civil life into its component parts, without *revolutionising* these components themselves or subjecting them to criticism.”⁸⁰³ Revolutionizing the components of civil society – education

⁷⁹⁶ Marx to Ruge (May 1843), 141.

⁷⁹⁷ Marx, “Leading Article,” 202, translation amended.

⁷⁹⁸ Hamilton, *Men and Manners in America*, 1: 299; Marx, “Exzerpte aus Hamilton,” 271.

⁷⁹⁹ Hamilton, *Men and Manners in America*, 1: 299–300, original emphasis; Marx, “Exzerpte aus Hamilton,” 271.

⁸⁰⁰ Hamilton, *Men and Manners in America*, 1: 301–2; Marx, “Exzerpte aus Hamilton,” 271. This demand also appears in Marx’s notes on the enrágés, who advanced the “idea of introducing complete equality of goods (the agrarian law); that is, making all the rich poor,” Wachsmuth, *Geschichte Frankreichs*, 2: 268; Marx, “Exzerpte aus Wachsmuth,” 168, Marx’s emphasis.

⁸⁰¹ Marx, “Kreuznach Critique,” 79–80, original emphasis. He also excerpts a speech by Girondin orator Vergniaud defending the abstractness of formal rights: “Equality for the social man is only that of rights. It is no more than that of fortunes than that of sizes, that of forces, spirit, activity, industry, or work.” Wachsmuth, *Geschichte Frankreichs*, 2: 104 n.; Marx, “Exzerpte aus Wachsmuth,” 168, Marx’s emphasis.

⁸⁰² Marx, “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law: Introduction” (1844), in *MECW*, 3: 175–87, at 184 (hereafter “Paris Critique”).

⁸⁰³ Marx, “OtJQ,” 167, original emphasis.

and property – was precisely the Workies’ aim. By repoliticizing this depoliticized sphere on a democratic basis, the atomization of civil society would be abolished as well as the division between state and society itself.

Far from considering these plans an idle fantasy, Hamilton instead makes the startling claim that their enactment will in the long run be inevitable. The workers’ party may not yet be “so numerous or so widely diffused as to create immediate alarm. In the elections, however, for the civic offices of the city, their influence is strongly felt,” and as the country industrializes, “the strength of this party must be enormously augmented.”⁸⁰⁴ The USA is “destined to become a great manufacturing nation,” and eventually “the great majority of the people will be without property of any kind.”⁸⁰⁵ So, Hamilton assures his readers, “the great struggle between property and numbers” will inevitably come – the only “doubt regards time, not destination.”⁸⁰⁶

The future working-class majority poses this threat only because of universal suffrage: “The institutions of the United States afford the purest specimen the world has yet seen, of a representative government; of an executive, whose duties are those of mere passive agency; of a legislative, which serves but as the vocal organ of the sole and real dictator [*Herrn*], the people.”⁸⁰⁷ Popular election renders the representatives “abjectly dependent on the people,” and so they are “compelled to adopt both the principles and the policy dictated by their constituents … They are slaves, and feel themselves to be so.”⁸⁰⁸

This situation means that the merchants, “the great capitalists of New York, Boston, and Philadelphia … [are] effectually excluded from political power.”⁸⁰⁹ Although the workers are subjugated within civil society, the tables are turned in democratic elections where wealth counts for nothing and each person has an equal vote. Losing direct control over the state leaves the rich at the mercy of the majority whose labor they live on – and Hamilton predicts that this will be their ruin.

Marx describes it as a momentous advance when “the *property qualification* for the right to elect or be elected is abolished, as has occurred in many states of North America.”⁸¹⁰ For him, the free society of the future will not, as Proudhon thinks, end majority rule, but instead will be a “true democracy,” which raises the “representative system from its political form to the universal form” so that everyone takes part in “*deliberating and deciding on the general affairs*” in their “everyday life.”⁸¹¹ Although falling short of this, political emancipation is nevertheless “a big step forward,” in that it

⁸⁰⁴ Hamilton, *Men and Manners in America*, 1: 302.

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid., 304–5.

⁸⁰⁶ Ibid., 309–10.

⁸⁰⁷ Ibid., 371; Hamilton, *Die Menschen und die Sitten*, 1: 183; Marx, “Exzerpte aus Hamilton,” 272.

⁸⁰⁸ Hamilton, *Men and Manners in America*, 2: 113–14; Marx, “Exzerpte aus Hamilton,” 275. Also see Marx’s lengthy excerpt of Carnot’s speech on representation: Wachsmuth, *Geschichte Frankreichs*, 2: 716–17; Marx, “Exzerpte aus Wachsmuth,” 174. It is a common idea that Marx criticized representation in favor of direct democracy, but there is little evidence for this. Instead, as Hunt, *The Political Ideas of Marx and Engels*, 82, points out, “Marx wanted directly elected deputies to be instructed by and bound to their constituents.” Self-representation requires the representative to be dependent upon the will of the represented. William Clare Roberts, *Marx’s Inferno: The Political Theory of Capital* (Princeton, 2017), 250–55, rightly highlights the republican thematic at work in this thought.

⁸⁰⁹ Hamilton, *Men and Manners in America*, 2: 76–77; Marx, “Exzerpte aus Hamilton,” 274. This idea, that universal suffrage obstructs the political rule of the bourgeoisie, appears also in Michael Chevalier’s work on American democracy, which Marx read a few years later, *Lettres sur l’Amérique du Nord*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1836), 1: 55, 135–6, 239, 268–9; 2: 356, 374–5.

⁸¹⁰ Marx, “OtJQ,” 153.

⁸¹¹ Marx to Ruge (Sept. 1843), 144; Marx, “Kreuznach Critique,” 30, 117, original emphasis; Marx, “OtJQ,” 168. On the young Marx’s understanding of communism as true democracy see Hunt, *The Political Ideas of Marx and Engels*; Hal Draper, *Karl Marx’s Theory of Revolution, vol. 1, State and*

realizes (albeit in a partial way) the masses' desire "to give themselves a *political being*," to become "actual (active) members of the state," and remake the law as their own "free product."⁸¹² Whereas apolitical socialists consider the question of universal suffrage "altogether unworthy of attention," Marx sees it as expressing "in a political way the difference between rule by man and rule by private property."⁸¹³ That this difference is not merely symbolic is shown in the property-owning classes' fierce opposition to suffrage reform "in France [and] England."⁸¹⁴ The opposition has only been overcome in the northern USA: "*Hamilton quite correctly interprets [universal suffrage] from a political point of view as meaning: 'the masses have won a victory over the property owners and financial wealth.'*" It was only through victory in political class conflict that the "nonproperty owner has become the legislator for the property owner" in America.⁸¹⁵ Marx excerpts a lengthy quote in his notebook as Hamilton expresses the American property-owning classes' anxieties over universal suffrage:

Let it be remembered that in this suffering class will be practically deposited the whole political power of the state; that there can be no military force to maintain civil order, and protect property; and to what quarter, I should be glad to know, is the rich man to look for security, either of person or fortune? There will be no occasion however for convulsion or violence. The Worky convention will only have to choose representatives of their own principles, in order to accomplish a general system of spoliation, in the most legal and constitutional manner ... whenever a numerical majority of the people shall be in favour of an Agrarian law, there exists no counteracting influence to prevent, or even to retard its adoption.

Hamilton has heard "many of the most eminent Americans of the Union" confide their belief that such a "period of trial ... is according to all human calculation inevitable." If universal suffrage came to industrialized England, "the journey would be performed with railway velocity. In the United States ... it may continue a generation or two longer, but the termination is the same."⁸¹⁶ As Hamilton describes it, a capitalist economy and a political democracy conjoin to make social revolution unavoidable. On the one hand, current property relations create a growing number of oppressed and impoverished wageworkers, eventually becoming the majority of society. On the other, universal suffrage will enable that class to take control of the state and expropriate the rich.

It is a commonplace that Marx's "discovery of the proletariat" occurred in Paris in the months after his Kreuznach retreat. It is certainly the case that he first explicitly identifies the proletariat with the coming social revolution in his famous

Bureaucracy (New York, 1977); and Leopold, *Young Marx*. For an alternative perspective see Maximilien Rubel, *Marx, théoricien de l'anarchisme* (Geneva, 2011; first published 1983). Against the anarchist interpretation see Chrysis, *True Democracy*, 180, 197, 211–12.

⁸¹² Marx, "Kreuznach Critique," 29, 118, original emphasis; Marx, "OtJQ," 155. Stathis Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution from Kant to Marx* (London, 2018), 295–8, explains Marx's "true democracy" as constituent power.

⁸¹³ Marx to Ruge (Sept. 1843), 144, original emphasis. Gareth Stedman Jones, *Karl Marx: Greatness and Illusion* (Cambridge, MA, 2016), 135, presents Marx's conclusions in Kreuznach as their exact opposites: that there are only "inessential" differences between Prussian absolutism and the American republic, and that the struggle for suffrage warrants "dismissal."

⁸¹⁴ Marx, "Kreuznach Critique," 120.

⁸¹⁵ Marx, "OtJQ," 153, original emphasis. This quote follows the German translation, Hamilton, *Die Menschen und die Sitten*, 1: 146, but deviates somewhat from the English original, Hamilton, *Men and Manners in America*, 1: 288. Chrysis, "True Democracy," 165, rightly argues that Marx is interested in the qualitative, not quantitative, aspect of representation. But he does not directly connect this to the extension of suffrage. Marx's often overlooked comments here show that the apparently quantitative expansion in fact ushers in a qualitative change: the enfranchisement of the "non-property owner" opens the transition from "rule by private property" to "rule by man." This may help elucidate Marx's unfinished thought about examining suffrage reform "from the point of view of interests." Marx, "Kreuznach Critique," 121. While the property-owners' interests are particular and tend to reaffirm civil society, those of the nonowners are universal and tend toward its negation.

⁸¹⁶ Hamilton, *Men and Manners in America*, 1: 306–9, original emphasis; Marx, "Exzerpte aus Hamilton," 271–2.

“Paris Critique.” But most of the literature misses that the premonition of this is contained in his Kreuznach writings, prior to any direct exposure to the Parisian workers’ or socialist movements. In these pieces Marx identifies the “non-property owners” as the agents who brought about universal suffrage in America, and connects this extension of suffrage to the coming abolition of the modern state and civil society.⁸¹⁷ Hamilton offered a vision of the future of the United States in which these non-owners would destroy the regime of property simply by exercising their democratic rights and turning the state to their own ends. This is what drew Marx’s attention in Hamilton’s writings.

Cooper and Working-Class Rule

As we have seen, Marx’s conversion to communism emerged from close analysis of struggles for democratic self-determination and the limits of the bourgeois state and private property in France and America. Hal Draper correctly writes that Marx came “to an acceptance of the socialist idea through the battle for the consistent extension of democratic control from below.”⁸¹⁸ But the abstract analysis in the 1843-4 writings lends itself to misinterpretation. The critiques of the “rights of man”⁸¹⁹ and the limits of “political emancipation” have led to a long tradition of interpreting Marx as an antipolitical socialist.⁸²⁰ Identifying his idea of communism not with popular self-government but with technocratic administration or anarchic, spontaneous cooperation *à la* Saint-Simon, Fourier, or Proudhon, many have seen Marx’s immediate demand for democracy as a mere transitional measure, radically disconnected from the principles of the society to come.⁸²¹ More extreme authors allege that Marx had no “concept of democracy other than one of illusion or mystification,” or even attribute to Marx a “hostility towards the modern representative state” that blinded him to “the significance of manhood suffrage and the democratic republic.”⁸²² As we shall see, when Marx publicly clarified his own understanding of politics in 1846-7, it was in polemics against approaches of precisely these sorts.

Upon arriving in Paris in late 1843, Marx devoted himself to a new intellectual project with Moses Hess and (starting in late 1844) Friedrich Engels, focusing on a materialist critique of idealism, the study of political economy, and a theory of alienation in capitalism. But through the trio’s early collaboration, an important difference remained in the background. Hess and Engels were apolitical socialists in the French style: for them, democracy was neither means nor end. Hess argues that since the basic source of inequality is “not political but social … [no] form of government has created this evil, none

⁸¹⁷ “Marx would not have been able to ‘discover’ the proletariat and its role in Paris if he had not already ‘found’ it, in a certain sense, in 1843, in the still vague form of ‘suffering human beings,’ ‘propertylessness,’ etc.” Michael Löwy, *Theory of Revolution in the Young Marx* (Chicago, 2003), 51. Compare Marx’s claim that the proletariat is “forced by its immediate condition, by material necessity, by its very chains” to bring about “general emancipation” (Marx, “Paris Critique,” 186) to Hamilton’s description of propertyless workers who will “choose legislators under the immediate pressure of privation” and be driven to the agrarian law by necessity (Hamilton, *Men and Manners in America*, 1: 304, original emphasis).

⁸¹⁸ Draper, *State and Bureaucracy*, 59.

⁸¹⁹ See Igor Shoikhedbrod, “Re-Hegelianizing Marx on Rights,” *Hegel Bulletin* 40/2 (2017), 281–300.

⁸²⁰ See, for instance, Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago, 1958); and Robert Pranger, “Marx and Political Theory,” *Review of Politics* 30/2 (1968), 191–208.

⁸²¹ Avineri, Political Thought, 8–64, 185–249; Joseph Schwartz, *The Permanence of the Political: A Democratic Critique of the Radical Impulse to Transcend Politics* (Princeton, 1995), 104–45; Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision* (Princeton, 2004), 406–53; Alan Ryan, *On Politics* (London, 2012), 770–806.

⁸²² François Furet, *Marx and the French Revolution*, trans. Deborah Kan Furet, ed. Lucien Calvié (Chicago, 1986) 27; Stedman Jones, Karl Marx, 307.

will heal it.”⁸²³ Similarly, Engels cautions the English workers, “Social evils cannot be cured by People’s Charters.”⁸²⁴ Further, he praises Proudhon for “having proved that every kind of government is alike objectionable, no matter whether it be democracy, aristocracy, or monarchy, that all govern by force; and that, in the best of all possible cases, the force of the majority oppresses the weakness of the minority,” even endorsing the “conclusion: ‘*Nous voulons l’anarchie!*'”⁸²⁵ Both Hess and Engels agreed that the coming change would be “social” and not “political,” dealing with economic organization alone and superseding elections, the state, and law.⁸²⁶

During their period of collaboration in 1844 and 1845, Marx had not yet determined his own orientation with much clarity, for instance, suggesting the possibility that a mass uprising of the proletariat in Germany might bypass a purely political revolution and advance right to socialism, an idea he would soon reject.⁸²⁷ But in this time, he still reiterates the idea that the question of “*Suffrage*” involves “the fight for the *abolition [Aufhebung]* of the state and of civil society.”⁸²⁸ This tension with the other socialists remained in the background as long as Marx focused on criticizing the Berlin Young Hegelians. However, over the course of writing with Engels and Hess in 1845–6 the manuscripts later dubbed “The German Ideology,” Marx came to regard antipolitical socialism as a more pressing concern.⁸²⁹ This involved a serious conflict with his coauthors in early 1846, after which Engels for the most part adopted Marx’s political stance.⁸³⁰ Marx’s turn against antipolitical socialism was partially precipitated by the proliferation of a vulgarized form of the trio’s ideas, “True Socialism,” which took Proudhonian antipolitics to its most reactionary conclusions.⁸³¹

While a political campaign to wrest a liberal constitution from the Prussian monarchy was heating up in the mid-1840s, the True Socialists took up pen and podium to oppose these efforts. Like some recent scholars, Karl Grün interprets Marx’s analysis of the USA in “On the Jewish Question” as exposing the futility of political action.⁸³² “In the political world everyone is dependent, each is a slave,” Grün writes. “Where is dependence greater than in North America?”⁸³³ For editor

⁸²³ Moses Hess, “Die Tagespresse in Deutschland und Frankreich” (1842), in Hess, *Sozialistische Aufsätze*, 1841–1847, ed. Theodor Zlocisti (Berlin, 1921), 19–27, at 25; translated in McLellan, *Young Hegelians*, 144.

⁸²⁴ Friedrich Engels, “The Condition of England: Past and Present by Thomas Carlyle, London, 1843” (1844), in *MECW*, 3: 444–68, at 450.

⁸²⁵ Friedrich Engels, “Progress of Social Reform on the Continent” (1843), in *MECW*, 3: 392–408, at 399.

⁸²⁶ See Friedrich Engels, “Speech in Elberfeld” (15 Feb. 1845), in *MECW*, 4: 256–64; Engels, “The Condition of the Working Class in England” (1845), in *MECW*, 4: 295–583, at 547, 581–3. Gregory Claeys, “The Political Ideas of the Young Engels, 1842–1845,” *History of Political Thought* 6/3 (1985), 455–78. Scholars sometimes write that Marx and Engels had independently arrived at the same general political orientation by the beginning of their collaboration (e.g. Hunt, *The Political Ideas of Marx and Engels*, 124), but this is mistaken.

⁸²⁷ Marx, “Paris Critique”; Karl Marx, “Critical Marginal Notes on the Article ‘The King of Prussia and Social Reform, by a Prussian’” (1844), in *MECW*, 3: 189–206.

⁸²⁸ Karl Marx, “Draft Plan for a Work on the Modern State” (1844), in *MECW*, 4: 666, original emphasis.

⁸²⁹ Terrell Carver and Daniel Blank, *The Political History of the Editions of Marx and Engels’s “German Ideology Manuscripts”* (New York, 2014).

⁸³⁰ Sperber, *Karl Marx*, 177–8.

⁸³¹ J. Strassmaier, “Karl Grün: The Confrontation with Marx, 1844–1848” (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Loyola University, 1969); Renate Birdenthal, “The ‘Greening of Germany,’ 1848: Karl Grün’s ‘True’ Socialism,” *Science and Society* 35/4 (1971), 439–62.

⁸³² Karl Grün, *Bausteine* (Darmstadt, 1844), xxvii–xxix. See Strassmaier, *Karl Grün*, 47, 60.

⁸³³ Karl Grün, *Ueber wahre Bildung* (Bielefeld, 1844), 21.

Otto Lüning, “bourgeois freedom” is useless, since it merely trades the “slavery of the nobility” for the “rule of capital.”⁸³⁴ The next revolution would not be a political one, Grün says, but instead a “revolution against politics itself.”⁸³⁵ Consequently he urged his readers against political agitation and instead toward the “practical instruction for immediate peaceful, legal, inviolable association” offered by Proudhon.⁸³⁶ Unsurprisingly, the Prussian censors did not give the True Socialist newspapers much trouble.

Marx’s polemics in 1846-7 are often ad hominem, and this has led some scholars to overlook the political stakes involved.⁸³⁷ It was in these arguments against Proudhonian antipolitics that Marx and Engels clarified and publicly set forth their signature brand of revolutionary, democratic communism. Against the preachers of harmony and voluntary association, they stress the need for mass politics: communism must be a “self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority.”⁸³⁸ Workers’ movements of this kind – namely “the Chartist in England and the Agrarian Reformers in America” – can only develop in certain political conditions, in particular “the freedom of the press and the freedom of association,” and only with universal suffrage can they rise to the “position of the ruling class.”⁸³⁹ In the monarchies of Europe, therefore, the first step would be “a democratic reconstruction of the Constitution on the basis of the People’s Charter,” which they expected to require a “democratic revolution by force.”⁸⁴⁰ And so, as Marx and Engels set about battling the Proudhonists within the German émigré workers’ movement in 1846-7, they could appropriately refer to themselves as “democratic communists.”⁸⁴¹ Their main programmatic objective was to turn this movement toward winning political freedom.

In articulating this position, Marx again employed material from the USA. In the summer of 1845 he read the work of Thomas Cooper, a former English Jacobin who had moved to South Carolina and become a professor of political economy and public apologist for nullification and slavery.⁸⁴² Feuer missed Marx’s second encounter with the Workies because he

⁸³⁴ Otto Lüning, “Anmerkung,” *Das westphälische Dampfboot*, April 1845, 175.

⁸³⁵ Karl Grün, *Die soziale Bewegung in Frankreich und Belgien* (Darmstadt, 1845), 447.

⁸³⁶ Karl Grün, “Zur Literatur,” *Kölnische Zeitung*, 21 Oct. 1847, cited in Strassmeier, Karl Grün, 92.

⁸³⁷ E.g. Sperber, *Karl Marx*, 181–185; Stedman Jones, *Karl Marx*, 210–22.

⁸³⁸ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party” (1848), in *MECW*, 6: 477–519, at 495; Marx’s example of union struggles developing into a nationwide political movement is the English Chartists; see Karl Marx, “Poverty of Philosophy: Answer to the Philosophy of Poverty by M. Proudhon” (1847), in *MECW*, 6: 105–212, at 210–11.

⁸³⁹ Marx and Engels, “Manifesto,” 518; Marx, “The Communism of the *Rheinischer Beobachter*” (1847), in *MECW*, 6: 220–34, at 222–5. Lause, *Young America*, 1, 9, 130, highlights the link between the National Reformers and Marx and Engels in the 1840s.

⁸⁴⁰ Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Philippe Gigot, “Address of the German Democratic Communists of Brussels to Mr. Feargus O’Connor” (1846), in *MECW*, 6: 58–60, at 58; Friedrich Engels, “Letter to the Communist Correspondence Committee” (23 Oct. 1846), in *MECW*, 38: 81–6, at 82. As Hunt, *The Political Ideas of Marx and Engels*, 146, explains, this emphasis on force was common for democrats in mid-nineteenth-century Europe, when overthrowing a monarchy often required “three days of violent street demonstrations.”

⁸⁴¹ Marx, Engels, and Gigot, “Address.”

⁸⁴² Marx filled over thirteen pages of his notebook with 150 excerpts from Cooper. *MEGA*, 1/6: 604; Karl Marx, “Exzerpte aus Thomas Cooper” (1845), in *MEGA* 4/4: 72–98. On Cooper see Dumas Malone, *The Public Life of Thomas Cooper: 1783–1839* (New Haven, 1926); and Joseph Dorfman, *The Economic Mind in American Civilization, 1606–1865*, vol. 2 (New York, 1966), 527–39, 844–8.

consulted only the 1826 first edition of Cooper's *Lectures*.⁸⁴³ This material is contained in an extra chapter added in the 1830 reprint, which features an extended criticism of socialist views.⁸⁴⁴

Beginning this section with an argument against the English socialists Thomas Hodgskin and William Thompson, Cooper goes on to discuss Mr. "Byllesby, Messrs. Al. Ming, Tho. Skidmore, and the mechanic Political Economists."⁸⁴⁵ Like Hamilton, he describes the New York Workies as having both a moderate wing focused on public education and an *extrême gauche* focused on property:

*I see gleams of Mr. Hodgskin's reasoning, not merely in the proposals of Mr. Byllesby, and Messrs. Ming and Skidmore's writings in New-York, but in some of the proposals of Frances Wright, who insists on the propriety of not merely educating the children of the poor, but of feeding and clothing them also, during the period of their gratuitous education ... Still more extravagant are the propositions of Messrs. Ming and Skidmore, (Free Enq. New York, Jan. 1830,) viz: at the death of any member of the community, to abolish the exclusive claims of his widow and children, and to divide his property among all the members of society who have just arrived at adult age!*⁸⁴⁶

Whereas Feuer writes that "Marx [probably] never heard of Thomas Skidmore," we see that Marx indeed encountered the names of several important Worky leaders through Cooper.⁸⁴⁷ In fact, in the bibliography of political economy that Marx was compiling, he wrote down the names Ming, Skidmore, and Byllesby and described them as "American radicals against property."⁸⁴⁸ It is precisely this group Marx refers to when he writes, against Karl Grün's presumption that German philosophers will bring the Americans socialism, that they "have had, since 1829, their own socialist-democratic school, against which their economist Cooper was fighting as long ago as 1830."⁸⁴⁹ As Marx sees it, the "most consistent republicans" are the first to discover the social question "at the moment when the constitutional monarchy is eliminated." "Socialism and communism" first arose in "England, France and North America," precisely because it was these three countries that first undertook modern republican revolutions.⁸⁵⁰ Self-important philosophers like Karl Grün, Marx suggests, lag far behind these real historical movements. Cooper, like Hamilton, rejects universal suffrage, a system in which "a majority may, and if there be no check, always will oppress a minority."⁸⁵¹ But he goes beyond Hamilton in his practical suggestions. Since the government could so easily fall into the hands of the "roguish portion of society" seeking to enact "the proposals that the mechanics combine to carry into effect," Cooper urges "those who have property to lose ... to combine in self

⁸⁴³ Feuer, "The North American Origin of Marx's Socialism," 56 n.

⁸⁴⁴ The edition is wrongly dated 1829.

⁸⁴⁵ Cooper, Lectures, 351.

⁸⁴⁶ Ibid., 352. Additionally, Cooper mentions Byllesby's Observations on the Sources and Effects of Unequal Wealth by name in an earlier chapter (at 335).

⁸⁴⁷ Feuer, "The North American Origin of Marx's Socialism," 66.

⁸⁴⁸ MEGA, 4/3: 27.

⁸⁴⁹ Karl Marx, "Karl Grün: Die soziale Bewegung in Frankreich und Belgien, or the Historiography of True Socialism" (1847), in MECW, 5: 484–530, at 489, translation amended.

⁸⁵⁰ Marx, "Moralising Criticism," 321–2, original emphasis.

⁸⁵¹ Cooper, Lectures, 361.

defence.”⁸⁵² To stop the agrarian threat, we must abrogate the alleged “right of every human creature in society, to give his assent by himself or his representative, to every law by which he is to be bound.”⁸⁵³ Marx quotes Cooper’s arguments against universal suffrage at length in an 1847 article:

*One of the most famous North American political economists, Thomas Cooper, who is also a radical, proposes:
1. To prohibit those without property from marrying. 2. To abolish universal suffrage, for, he exclaims:*

‘Society was instituted for the protection of property ... What reasonable claim can they have, who by eternal economic laws will eternally be without property of their own, to legislate on the property of others? What common motive and common interest is there between these two classes of inhabitants? Either the working class is not revolutionary, in which case it represents the interests of the employers, on whom their livelihood depends. At the last election in New England, the master-manufacturers, to ensure votes for themselves, had the candidates’ names printed on calico, and each of their workers wore such a piece of calico on their trouser-fronts. Or the working class becomes revolutionary, as a consequence of communal living together, etc., and then the political power of the country will sooner or later fall into its hands, and no property will be safe any more under this system.’⁸⁵⁴

Here, in a much more direct way than he had with Hamilton, Marx cites the case of the USA to demonstrate the revolutionary potential of universal suffrage for workers’ self-emancipation. Thanks to having already won the democratic republic, Marx writes, the American workers now “form a political party” whose “battle-cry” is no longer “rule of the princes or the republic, but rule of the working class or the rule of the bourgeois class.”⁸⁵⁵ Cooper remarks that the working class’s ascent to power is “now exultingly expected by the mechanic meetings of New-York and Pennsylvania.”⁸⁵⁶ Painting precisely the same picture of America’s future as Hamilton does, Cooper makes it the cornerstone of his argument against universal suffrage:

*I do not believe the mischief of that tyrannical and absurd maxim, “The will of the majority ought to govern,” is yet sufficiently understood among us ... If [we accept it], then the minority has no right. If so, then the minority has no privileges, no property, no safety. Let but the majority determine uncontrolled, what is for their own good, and decree it, then are the minority, in the strictest sense of the word, slaves ... Suppose the representatives of the mechanics, who are now openly advocating an equal division of property among adults, under the auspices of Messrs. Alex. Ming and Thomas Skidmore, in their prospectus and defense of it, (*Free Enquirer, N. York, for Dec. 1829, and Jan. 1830,*) to become the efficient legislative majority? What a glorious range of rapine and of plunder, would present itself to the benevolent advocates of the right of robbery!⁸⁵⁷*

Cooper’s vision of “the political power of the country” in the hands of “the labouring classes” being used to “legislate the property of the wealthy into the pockets of the idle and needy” is precisely Marx and Engels’s vision for Europe’s

⁸⁵² Ibid., 352–3.

⁸⁵³ Ibid., 362.

⁸⁵⁴ Marx, “Moralising Criticism,” 323–24; Cooper, Lectures, 363–4. Marx makes some major changes from Cooper’s wording here. See also the notebook excerpt: “Exzerpte aus Cooper,” 97.

⁸⁵⁵ Marx, “Moralising Criticism,” 324, original emphasis.

⁸⁵⁶ Cooper, Lectures, 364.

⁸⁵⁷ Ibid., 365; Marx, “Exzerpte aus Cooper,” 97.

republican future.⁸⁵⁸ This is the infamous “dictatorship of the proletariat.”⁸⁵⁹ They describe “the political rule of the proletariat” as a government resulting from the achievement of a “*democratic constitution*,” which will undertake to wrest “by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie.”⁸⁶⁰ Their coy characterization of this process of democratic expropriation as “despotic inroads on the rights of property” reflects that the property-owning class consider such measures to be, as Cooper put it, “tyrannical,” nothing but bare “robbery,” “rapine and plunder.”⁸⁶¹ However tongue-in-cheek, the phrase also encapsulates an essential distinction between Marx and Engels’s view and that of antipolitical socialism. They, like the American Workies, held that socialism would not be brought about through universal consensus, or the private, voluntary actions of individuals. Instead, it would require the oppressed majority enforcing its will upon the privileged minority through a democratic state. Marx and Engels agreed with conservatives like Hamilton and Cooper that universal suffrage would be the means with which the working class would abolish private property. The tyranny of the majority experienced by the property owners would be democratic self-emancipation for the workers.

Conclusion

Contrary to a widespread misreading, Marx was stringently in favor of robust political rights and conceived of communism as essentially a democratic mass movement. As a growing body of scholarship argues, he is best understood as a theorist of the struggle for republican freedom and democracy in the conditions of modern capitalism.⁸⁶² Unlike the antipolitical socialists, Marx saw the northern USA as uniquely situated for socialism precisely because it had already solved the basic political problem facing Europe: the workers could vote. Despite trailing far behind England in industrialization, “in a democratic, representative state like North America class conflicts have already reached a form which the constitutional monarchies are only just being forced to approach.”⁸⁶³ This observation stands twentieth-century ideas of American exceptionalism on their head. As Rubel writes, the Workingmen’s Parties showed Marx something many others missed: the “revolutionary implications of American democracy.”⁸⁶⁴

The failed revolutions of 1848 taught Marx that universal suffrage could accompany state repression of the workers’ movement, and underscored the importance of the broader political and social *conditions* of such suffrage.⁸⁶⁵ He also revised his views about the proximity of a socialist revolution in the USA. In his 1840s zeal, Marx had glossed over Hamilton

⁸⁵⁸ Cooper, Lectures, 364; Marx, “Exzerpte aus Cooper,” 97.

⁸⁵⁹ Draper, *The “Dictatorship of the Proletariat”*, exhaustively demonstrates that this term simply means democratic government led by the working class, carrying out measures to transform society.

⁸⁶⁰ Friedrich Engels, “Principles of Communism” (1847), in MECW, 6: 341–57, at 350, original emphasis; Marx and Engels, “Manifesto,” 504.

⁸⁶¹ Max and Engels, “Manifesto,” 504; Cooper, Lectures, 365.

⁸⁶² Jason Schulman, “Socialism: Liberal or Democratic-Republican?”, in Michael Thompson, ed., *Rational Radicalism and Political Theory* (Lanham, MD, 2011), 189–206; Roberts, *Marx’s Inferno*; Chrysis, “True Democracy”; Michael Thompson, “The Radical Republican Structure of Marx’s Critique of Capitalist Society,” *Critique* 47/3 (2019), 391–409.

⁸⁶³ Karl Marx, “Saint Max” (1846), in MECW, 5: 117–450, at 347.

⁸⁶⁴ Rubel, “Notes on Marx’s conception of Democracy,” 83.

⁸⁶⁵ Karl Marx, “The Class Struggles in France” (1850), in MECW, 10: 45–146, at 65; Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte” (1852), in MECW, 11: 99–197, at 114–19, 180, 193 n.

and Cooper's remarks that they expected it would take at least "a generation or two," or "half a century," before the working class would form a majority and their doomsday scenarios would become an immediate concern.⁸⁶⁶ Marx's writings in the 1850s suggest that the conflict between capitalists and workers would not fully emerge in the United States until western settlement had ceased and chattel slavery had been abolished.⁸⁶⁷

Although Marx complicated his early view of America, he continued to claim throughout his political career that it is in the "*democratic republic* ... that the class struggle has to be fought out to a conclusion," and that under the conditions of "universal suffrage, direct legislation, popular rights, a people's militia, etc." the working class can make its right to vote "an instrument of emancipation."⁸⁶⁸ And this meant that while in despotic countries "it is force which must be the lever of our revolution," certain countries "like America, England," and others offered the possibility that the workers could "seize political supremacy to establish the new organisation of labour ... by peaceful means."⁸⁶⁹ And so through the end of his life Marx continued to see real insight in Thomas Hamilton's remark that the democratic state offers workers the chance "to accomplish a general system of spoliation, in the most legal and constitutional manner."⁸⁷⁰ This was precisely the opportunity that Heighton, Skidmore, and the other American workers saw when they formed the first socialist parties in the 1820s.

⁸⁶⁶ Hamilton, *Men and Manners in America*, 1: 309; Cooper, Lectures, 363.

⁸⁶⁷ Karl Marx, "Bastiat and Carey" (1857), in *MECW*, 28: 5–16, at 6; Marx, "Letter to Joseph Weydemeyer" (March 1852), in *MECW*, 39: 60–66, at 62. On Marx's Civil War writings see Robin Blackburn, *An Unfinished Revolution: Karl Marx and Abraham Lincoln* (New York, 2011).

⁸⁶⁸ Karl Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Program" (1875), in *MECW*, 24: 81–99, at 95–6, original emphasis; Marx, "Preamble to the Programme of the French Workers' Party" (1880), in *ibid.*, 340.

⁸⁶⁹ Marx, "On the Hague Congress" (1872), in *MECW*, 23: 254–6, at 255.

⁸⁷⁰ Hamilton, *Men and Manners in America*, 1: 306.

Fight the Constitution! Demand a New Republic!

by Jenna Grove

March 25, 2021

Jonah Martell proposes a radical New Union Act to throw the antiquated US Constitution into the dustbin of history.

It's October 1917 in Petrograd. The Bolsheviks have given marching orders to an insurrectionary mob. It descends on the Winter Palace, the center of state power in Russia. The defenders melt away, barely even putting up a fight. The Provisional Government has fallen.

What do the revolutionaries do? They are sweatshop workers and peasant soldiers – hungry, ravaged by war, and now surrounded by unimaginable luxury. Do they trash the building? Steal things? Brutalize security?

The looting begins, but then a nameless voice cries out: ‘Comrades! Don’t touch anything! Don’t take anything! This is the property of the People!’ The mob picks up on the call and repeats it, echoing across the palace: “Revolutionary discipline! Property of the people!”⁸⁷¹

Everything is put back in place. Just for good measure, a committee spontaneously organizes to prevent further looting.⁸⁷²

Here in America, we’ve historically had our own law-abiding insurrectionists. Take old John Brown for an example. Before he launched his daring raid on Harpers Ferry, he held a convention with dozens of supporters to adopt a Provisional Constitution. This fascinating document opens with a sharp legal justification for war on slavery. It lays out basic rules of engagement and sets up institutions to govern everyone taking part in Brown’s revolt.⁸⁷³

The Provisional Constitution displays many signs of Brown’s Calvinist faith. It bans all “profane swearing,” “filthy conversation,” and “unlawful intercourse of the sexes.” Yet it also gives women the right to vote and bear arms, requires every citizen to work, and promises common ownership of all confiscated slaveholder property. There is no Senate in Brown’s political system, only a simple unicameral House of Representatives. The Electoral College is also abandoned – instead, the people directly elect the President and the Supreme Court.⁸⁷⁴

The paintings make John Brown look like a wild insurrectionary tornado. Yet he and the Bolshevik mob understood something that the modern left often forgets: revolutionaries are *lawmakers*. They demolish the old order, but they also establish a new one.

Brown also understood⁸⁷⁵ that America’s established Constitution is riddled with aristocratic features. The gilded gentry who wrote it in 1787 made atrocious concessions to their slaveholder constituency. The Fugitive Slave Clause required that escaped slaves be “delivered up” to their masters, no matter what state in the Union they fled to. Meanwhile, the Three-Fifths Clause allowed Southern states to count 60% of their slave populations for representation purposes, using their human chattel to inflate their power in the federal government.

⁸⁷¹ “The Bolsheviks Storm the Winter Palace, 1917” EyeWitness to History, www.eyewitnesstohistory.com (2006).

⁸⁷² Ibid.

⁸⁷³ Robert L Tsai, “John Brown’s Constitution,” 2010, pp187-204, https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/schools/law/bclawreview/pdf/51_1/04_tsai.pdf

⁸⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁷⁵ Ibid p158.

The Electoral College builds on this sinister project. As James Madison himself explained, the convoluted system proved necessary “on the score of the Negroes.” With their massive nonvoting slave populations, slave states would have been disadvantaged under a national popular vote. By instead having statewide slates of electors choose the president, the plantation overlords dodged this democratic threat, propelling their allies into the White House for nearly seventy years. Lincoln broke that cycle in 1860, but to this day the Electoral College leaves Black Southerners almost voiceless in presidential elections. Under the winner-take-all system, their strong support for Democratic presidential candidates typically counts for nothing, with white majorities handing all of their states’ electors to the Republican ticket.

The Framers of the Constitution adopted the Electoral College not only to appease slaveholders, but also to throttle popular democracy. They viewed the people as “unruly steeds,” unfit for self-government. That is why only one branch of the government, the House of Representatives, is elected directly.⁸⁷⁶ The Senate is a thoroughly elitist body, just as the Framers intended.⁸⁷⁷ Its members serve staggered, six-year terms, with two-thirds left in place after each election cycle. Every state gets two senators, despite population trends that make this arrangement more unrepresentative with every passing year. It is essentially affirmative action for conservative white voters.

Political science hacks like to call the Senate “the world’s greatest deliberative body.” In reality it is the world’s greatest obstructionist body, where “grim reapers” like Mitch McConnell can tank desperately-needed reforms on a whim. It approves all cabinet appointments, treaties, and judicial nominations, locking the House out of countless policy decisions. These absurd privileges have allowed the GOP to pack the federal judiciary with right-wing judges – judges who serve for life, who can strike down any legislation as they see fit.

This rigged system is locked in place by an amendment process so onerous that the Constitution is almost impossible to change. Two-thirds of both houses of Congress followed by three-quarters of the state legislatures must sign off on any change to the Constitution. No other modern country has such a rigid constitutional order.

Both capitalist parties would have us believe that the Constitution is a Heavenly Charter, ordained by Providence to save us from the Tyranny of the Riotous Majority. We know full well that this is Vain and Perfidious Bullshit. The Constitution protects the tyranny of the elite minority, blocking “wicked” left-wing projects like a “rage for paper money … an abolition of debts … [or] an equal division of property.”⁸⁷⁸ By creating a fragmented, convoluted, and geographically vast political system, the Framers made it almost impossible for popular movements to build a majority and decisively win political power. They invented a government that is structurally indifferent to the needs of the many.

James Madison summed up the spirit of the Constitution with an old Latin motto: *divide et impera*.⁸⁷⁹

Divide and conquer.

The Wages of Division

Now Madison’s machine is sputtering. America’s most fanatical “patriots” have stormed the nation’s center of constitutional government. No powdered wigs and Latin mottos for that crowd. They had simpler words: “hang Mike Pence!”

⁸⁷⁶ See Woody Holton, *Unruly Americans and the Origins of the Constitution* New York 2007, pp5-10.

⁸⁷⁷ Ibid p251.

⁸⁷⁸ See Federalist No. 10, <https://billofrightsinstitute.org/primary-sources/federalist-no-10>

⁸⁷⁹ See Woody Holton, p10.

Among them were cops, state lawmakers, and real estate brokers. Coddled lapdogs of the Old Order. What drove them to betray the rule of law and form a bloodthirsty lynch mob?

There were warning signs even before the pandemic. American society is demographically shifting; it is politically gridlocked and rudderless. Quality of life has been stagnant for years. Working-age whites without college degrees feel these changes acutely: they are suffering from staggering levels of chronic pain, addiction, and suicide.

Even the relatively well-off can see the decay and react to it with fear. For centuries the Constitution has catered to the whims of white reactionaries. Now, amid all the chaos, their special status is being challenged. Working class riots tear through the streets, socialists walk in the halls of Congress – and their orange Emperor has fallen. None of these things pose an imminent threat to the Old Order, but Fox News and the growing cesspool of far-right media make them look frightening enough.

MAGA wingnuts may be delusional, but they see something real moving beneath the water. A section of society is *fed up* with Old America. It wants to wipe out the callous conservatism that dominates our culture, and replace it with something very new. For reactionaries, this future is unthinkable. Their interpretation of the Constitution has one underlying spirit: “All power to the true conservative Americans. *All power to myself.*”

Christ said that it is better to maim the body than let your spirit be destroyed in hell. As good Christians, wingnuts were happy to embrace this logic with the Constitution. If “saving America” meant overturning the wishes of the majority, then so be it. After all, the Constitution is against majority rule.

If saving America meant attacking voting rights, then so be it. After all, voting *is not a universal right* under our Constitution.

If saving America meant lynching the vice president, then grab the rope. After all, there is still no federal law against lynching. Efforts by the House to pass one have repeatedly died in the Senate, once in 1922 and again *just last summer*.

Gridlock and division are inevitable in a divide-and-conquer republic. We will find no easy exit. The question for us on the Left is not how to reverse the country’s institutional decay, but how to push through it and come out victorious.

Option One: Accept the Constitution

One option is to climb the dunghill: accept the Constitution and try to attain power within its framework. To implement desperately-needed measures like Medicare for All, labor reform, or the Green New Deal, the Left would simultaneously contest the presidency, the Senate, and the House of Representatives.

This task would require a sweeping electoral supermajority for socialists that is difficult to envision in any country, let alone the United States. Even the Republican antislavery victory of 1860 – the closest thing we have ever had to a “political revolution” in America – did not win a clean trifecta. It took only the House and the presidency. Unwilling to share power, the Southern states rebelled, forfeiting their control of the Senate.

Such an outcome is extremely unlikely under modern circumstances. We do not have the clean regional division that sliced the Union in half; we have a partisan divide that spans from coast to coast. Shallow platitudes about “ditching the culture war” will not eliminate that division. If the Left abandons its commitment to egalitarian values such as racial equality and reproductive rights, our existing base will view us as traitors. Reactionaries will also see right through the pandering and dismiss us as two-faced politicians.

If our strategy bows to the slaveholder constitution, we can expect that path to lead us into divided government. Socialists would not be able to pass any legislation without the approval of one of the entrenched capitalist parties. Bernie certainly would have struggled with this reality had he emerged victorious. Ugly compromises would have to be made.

Why does that matter? If the Establishment blocks our policies, couldn't we place the blame on them, "keep building the movement," and fight for a trifecta in the next round? After all, it's not our fault that we have an obstructionist Constitution.

Unfortunately, voters are unlikely to blame these deep structural challenges. They will see yet another progressive politician who won a popular mandate only to "sell out," just like all the others. They will blame the movement that made big promises and failed, not the senators behind the scenes who forced the failure. "Nothing really changes," they sigh – and power swings back to the Right. This is exactly what happened when Barack Obama won the presidency in 2008: a wave of populist excitement was squashed by right-wing obstruction. Hope and change were put on hold, and in 2010 the Democrats received an electoral massacre.

Obama left his supporters completely unprepared. He had no interest in rallying his constituency to insist that the wishes of the majority be respected. But that is exactly what the Left should do: instead of *whining* about the Electoral College or the Senate or the filibuster, we should attack these roadblocks head-on by demanding an accountable democracy.

Option Two: Rig the Constitution

Oh, but *now* Obama *does* have an interest in democracy. In the summer of 2020, just months after his frantic phone calls helped secure Joe Biden's nomination, Obama watched as cities across America descended into chaos. At John Lewis's funeral in early July, he urged lawmakers to build on the congressman's legacy by passing a new Voting Rights Act – and to grant statehood to Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C. If doing that takes eliminating the filibuster, a "Jim Crow relic," to "secure the God-given rights of every American, then that's what we should do."

Clever. Even if he is only making a halfhearted effort to manage social decay, Barack Obama is thinking about institutional reform. If Congress enacted the Obama Program, would it give us an accountable majoritarian democracy?

Not really. A new voting rights act is certainly needed. But what would it do for Black Southerners whose presidential votes get wiped out by the Electoral College, who have almost no representation in the Senate because of the demographic compositions of their states? "You can go anywhere in [South Carolina]," Lindsey Graham croons to his black constituents. "You just need to be conservative, not liberal."

Abolishing the filibuster is a no-brainer, and D.C. residents certainly deserve statehood, as do Puerto Ricans if they so choose. However, even a 52-state Senate would retain a high level of racial bias. In the words of a recent Data for Progress memo, it is an "irredeemable institution," structurally hostile to democracy.⁸⁸⁰

Some pundits have suggested more aggressive solutions. Political scientist David Faris has called for Democrats to "play hardball" against the GOP, not only killing the filibuster and packing the courts, but also dividing California into seven states. This would give Democrats 14 new senators to "fix" their underrepresentation.

What would this fix look like in practice? Faris describes it as a democratizing reform, but the public is unlikely to perceive it this way. Power is not shifted to a unified national people. It is shifted to the lucky Democrats who happen to live in the Seven Californias. Will Democrats in Wyoming, New York, and Mississippi feel liberated? How will the residents of large Republican states react when Faris denies them the same partition treatment?

You'll stare at your television as enraged Texans sack Los Angeles with weaponized bulldozers. "It's so sad that we've come to this," says your grandmother. "I like that Joe, but I never thought partitioning California was a good idea."

⁸⁸⁰ Data for Progress, "The Senate is an Irredeemable Institution," pp2-13. <https://www.filesforprogress.org/memos/the-senate-is-an-irredeemable-institution.pdf>

Fun stuff. The point is simple: Faris's "hardball" solutions do not create an accountable democracy. They just slice up the People in a new way that happens to favor Democrats. The Electoral College remains in place (even with the partial modifications that Faris supports). Senators continue to serve staggered terms in gigantic winner-take-all districts. Brett Kavanaugh still sits on the Supreme Court for life. Packing the Senate and the courts is bound to enrage the Right, but these cynical power grabs are unlikely to energize a mass base on our side. It's just more *divide et impera*.

Mass politics is not even on Faris's agenda. His goal is to convince Democratic party operatives to embrace his "hardball" tactics – not a grassroots political movement. Most Democratic leaders, however, are not as clever as Faris and Obama. Just consider Diane Feinstein, who gave Lindsey Graham a hug after he rammed Amy Coney Barrett through Senate confirmation hearings.

The *Harvard Law Review* recently published an anonymous proposal that is far more interesting than Faris's. Titled "Pack the Union," it suggests that Congress grant statehood to every neighborhood in Washington, D.C. for the sole purpose of amending the constitution. Then these 127 new states would ratify constitutional amendments to effectively abolish the Senate, expand the House of Representatives, implement a national popular vote for the president, and create a new majoritarian amendment process.⁸⁸¹

A brilliant plan! Yet at this point, I think it is fair to say that a line has been crossed. Efforts to "pack the Union" with D.C. microstates are unlikely to be judged solely on their legal merits. It is not really an incremental plan to reform the Constitution. It's just overthrow with extra steps.

Option Three: Fight the Constitution

So let's do it. Ditch the silly microstates. Fight the Constitution; demand a New Republic!

There are some reforms within the Constitution that socialists can and should demand. The Supreme Court, for example, can be remade with term limits, judge rotation, and jurisdiction stripping. We can fight not just to "pack" it, but to eliminate its godlike power to determine the law.

But to convince our target constituency that these reforms are legitimate, we must attack the entire ideology of Old America. This stodgy, conservative worldview is relentlessly drilled into the American psyche. From kindergarten to our graves, we learn that equal rights is mob rule, that gridlock is better than progress, that the Founders always know best, and so on. Challenging these assumptions means developing an incisive message of our own:

"Down with the Old Order. We're sick of this divided republic. It slices up our institutions to make them unaccountable. It lets Mitch McConnell and the Electoral College and nine old men stomp on the needs of the people. It locks the working class majority out of power; it gives us no say in the future of the country."

John Brown fought for a new constitution. Now the Chilean masses are doing the same. Why shouldn't modern Americans give it a try? Women had no say in the writing of the existing Constitution; black people had no say; no one alive today has had a say in the system they live under. We deserve a New Union, a unified democratic republic that answers to the working class majority. A constitution that reflects modern principles of fairness and equality, that guarantees healthcare, education, and economic rights.

The Right says all power to the landlords, to the cops, to the dead Founding Fathers. We say *all power to the living, all power to the people, all power to the New Union!*

⁸⁸¹ See Harvard Law Review, "Pack the Union: A Proposal to Admit New States for the Purpose of Amending the Constitution to Ensure Equal Representation." <https://harvardlawreview.org/2020/01/pack-the-union-a-proposal-to-admit-new-states-for-the-purpose-of-amending-the-constitution-to-ensure-equal-representation/>

But who would take us seriously? Socialists are weak right now. Isn't it too soon to demand something so bold? Too soon? *Look behind you!* Two centuries of sham democracy. Half a million dead from COVID in a system that denies us healthcare, sick leave, basic human dignity. Years of economic turmoil and discontent ahead. Will there ever be an easy time to raise such a transgressive demand? Rip off the band-aid and raise it now.

Demanding a new constitution will alienate many. Yet it may also strike a chord with a growing progressive constituency that is exhausted with endless gridlock and elitist institutions like the Electoral College. Zoomers and Millennials are far more willing to question their country's past than previous generations. When a recent Fox News poll asked voters under 30 for their views on the Founding Fathers, 51% chose "villains" or "it depends."

Leave the technocratic tinkering to Obama. Weak movements *need* strong demands. They shock and capture the imagination; they give meaning to our short-term projects; they forge our supporters into a revolutionary oppositional counterculture.

Back in the 1960s, the Black Panthers demanded a nationwide plebiscite to establish black self-determination in the United States. How many members did they have when they raised that demand? Ten thousand? Twenty thousand?

Two. It was just Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale sitting in a dining room, drafting a founding document. That audacity – that strategic insanity – won them the respect of millions. For all its shortcomings, they built a nationwide revolutionary organization that captivates the American Left to this day.

Towards a New Union Act?

How could modern socialists convincingly raise the demand for a new constitution? It is hard to imagine introducing the idea door-to-door, persuading one person at a time. Such a shocking idea needs shows of collective support: street parades, rallies, and electoral campaigns.

It is also hard to imagine two-thirds of Congress and 38 *separate state legislatures* signing off on a major constitutional amendment. The Constitution does offer an additional path to reform, the Article V "convention of states." Yet for our purposes, this process is equally bankrupt. States, rather than the people as a whole, would be represented in this convention, and its proposals would have to be ratified by an outrageous 38 states, just like the conventional process. Only the most pigheaded conservative demands would be up for debate. Article V conventions are a Koch brothers scheme, tailor-made for our enemies.

State-by-state amendment is hopeless. The path is grown over with weeds and thorns, and we will achieve nothing if we try to crawl through it. But there is an alternative approach: instead of crawling, we could point out the absurdity of the system and demand that the federal government clear a new path to constitutional reform. If it refuses to open the door and stand aside, the Old Order will have to be swept away by extraordinary means.

Let's get imaginative. Let's imagine that America's fledgling socialist movement continues its tentative growth. Let's imagine that the Democratic Socialists of America learns some new tricks. Even if it doesn't immediately adopt its own ballot line, it starts recruiting all of its electoral candidates from within its ranks. It runs them in unified slates and has them vote as an independent bloc, against both capitalist parties.

Suppose that it places a special emphasis on running candidates for the House of Representatives. During those electoral campaigns, and on the House floor, these fiery socialist agitators could demand that Congress pass a *New Union Act*.

What would this New Union Act do?

It could open with something along these lines: "An Act of Congress and the Sovereign People. Not subject to judicial review."

It could acknowledge that the federal government has failed to establish justice, promote the general welfare, or secure the blessings of liberty as promised in the Preamble of the Constitution. It would also acknowledge that the federal government has systematically violated the universal human rights established under the Declaration of Independence. It has subjected the people to spiraling inequality, a climate apocalypse, vicious police brutality, and unrelenting racial oppression.

Therefore, the people of the United States have a right to alter or abolish the Constitution as they see fit, by a simple majoritarian mechanism. Even under ordinary circumstances, a free society has every right to do this, as the Framers themselves acknowledged.

The Act would grant instant amnesty and citizenship to all long-term residents of the United States. It would also facilitate self-determination for all oppressed, indigenous, and colonized peoples in the U.S. – from Puerto Rico to Standing Rock. When we bury the old order’s constitution, we will bury the Empire with it.

Alongside this decolonization process, the Act would organize a nationwide election for a National Assembly. This Assembly would be empowered to propose constitutional reforms and place them on the ballot for ratification by the people, by a simple electoral majority.

This election would be conducted by the federal government, not the states. The US Postal Service and other federal agencies would be reorganized to manage the process. Voting could be carried out by universal mail-in ballot, with proportional representation in the Assembly to guarantee multiparty democracy.

Meanwhile, the federal government would fund thousands of small-scale conventions so that all citizens could participate in the reform process. Volunteers and repurposed federal employees would be sent to canvass across the country, inviting citizens to get involved. Online and electronic options would be offered free of charge to anyone unable to attend physical meetings. Employers would be required to give their workers paid time off to take part in the conventions. The conventions would collaborate directly with the Assembly and be empowered to call a new national election at any time.

At the end of the process, the Assembly would place its proposals on the ballot for final ratification. Before voting, citizens would be asked to affirm that they have read the proposals and contributed in some way to the convention process. They would also promise to respect the outcome of the referendum no matter the results, as equal citizens of the Union.

And of course, we would be quite clear about what socialists would advocate throughout this assembly process. We will propose that the new republic be as radically democratic as the process that created it. Abolish the presidency, abolish the Senate, abolish the judiciary as we currently know it. All power to an expanded, improved House of Representatives.

“We demand that Congress initiate this process,” our leaders would declare. “But *one way or another*, the working people of this country must clear the path to a new republic.”

Objections Answered

This is the kind of solution that socialist leaders should advance. The New Union Act is incisive and principled; it does not pack, partition, or gerrymander. Instead, it calls for the working class to unite in struggle for a decisive break with the past. It encourages a new form of polarization, not just over flags and statues, but between those who support the Old Order and those who do not. At the same time, it advances a new era of universal citizenship, based on mutual obligations and respect.

The demand also transforms those who raise it. In a country consumed by greed and amorality, it ignites a nationwide struggle for freedom. It lifts the American Left out of petty localism and onto a grand fighting arena that spans from coast to coast.

“But we’ll never win,” some might protest. “It’s a beautiful dream, but even if the House got on board, the Senate and Supreme Court would strike it down in a heartbeat.”

Yes, the barriers are profound. We can’t win a new republic next week or next year. But we can wear the demand on our chests as we struggle to organize the working class, block by block, store by store, and district by district. And as we grow, as the conditions around us continue to deteriorate, perhaps what is impossible right now will start to look more plausible. If we win a majority mandate for the New Union, we will be fully justified as a free people to enact it by any means necessary. Let the Senate and the Supreme Court overrule us: we will appeal to the masses and overturn their decision in the streets.

“But even if you win this National Assembly, the Right could use it too!” others will warn. “What’s to stop them from forcing through an abortion ban or a balanced budget amendment?”

Certainly, they could try. In Madison’s words, these are improper and wicked projects. But thankfully, the New Union Act would initiate a majoritarian process – and whatever the far right believes, it is not a majority. Most Americans have reasonably progressive sentiments, and even Fox News pollsters know it. Demographic trends are also on our side. Put the People together in a disciplined, well-organized process, and we can encourage their best impulses. The National Assembly will not convene tomorrow morning. Winning it will require many years of struggle that will transform the country in ways we could never predict.

If majority rule serves conservative interests, then why do conservatives oppose it so fervently? Reactionaries have no interest in joining socialists to pursue an egalitarian multiracial democracy. From day one, their goal will be to smash our treasonous conspiracy to “destroy America.” At best, they will give us free publicity with their hysterical denunciations.

Then there is a final objection: that the demand I suggest is illegal. It would plunge the country into bloodshed and constitutional crisis. If we raise it, what makes us any better than the MAGA mob?

There’s only one honest response to this: we already have bloodshed; we already have crisis, and we already have lawlessness. Warlord cops parade the streets and terrorize working class communities; insurance companies gouge prices, leaving countless patients to rot and die; the President of the United States incites a violent mob, attacking the will of the people, and gets off scot-free.

The MAGA mob was driven by selfishness, bigotry, and willful ignorance. They fought to destroy democracy; we will struggle and suffer to expand it. When our time comes, we will not be wearing devil horns. We will not smear our shit in the hallways. Our goal will always be to advance a just, orderly replacement of the U.S. Constitution.

That project will be fraught with challenges. But laws are made for people, and there will be no real healing in this country until the people win a democratic republic that sets them free. There’s another Latin principle that sums it up: *Salus populi suprema lex esto* – The health of the people is the supreme law.

In modern practice:

Fight the Constitution! Demand a New Republic!

Supplemental Readings

Section X: Fight the Constitution, Demand a New Republic

A Constitutional Convention - Daniel Lazare (short)

<https://jacobin.com/2017/01/constitution-trump-democracy-electoral-college-senate>

Labor and Republican Liberty - Alex Gourevitch (short)

The proletarianization of 19th-century American workers in a rapidly expanding industrial capitalist economy led many to question the meaning of republican freedom. Predecessors of later socialist movements, the 'labor republicans' argued that the wage system was a new form of domination.

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1CHX8JZKpgD4N3QFAXMYM0Yij8qfW2J-R?usp=sharing>

Labor Republicanism and the Transformation of Work - Alex Gourevitch (short)

Due to key blindspots, contemporary neo-republicans fall below the level of working class movements of the Antebellum United States which looked to extend republican values into the workplace.

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1CHX8JZKpgD4N3QFAXMYM0Yij8qfW2J-R?usp=sharing>

Toward a Marxist Interpretation of the US Constitution - Bertell Ollman (short)

The introductory piece for a much larger collection edited by Ollman and Jonathan Birnbaum. The U.S. Constitution defines the realm of politics and shapes popular (though false) conceptions of reality. By facilitating the development of capitalism, perhaps the Constitution has also facilitated the necessary basis for socialism.

<https://jacobin.com/2017/07/founding-fathers-constitutional-convention>

Marx on Democratic Forms of Government - Hal Draper (short)

Marx's socialism is the complete democratization of society. In the early 1840s, he analyzed various constitutions and found them lacking for want of making the state subordinate to society. The 'democratic swindle,' meanwhile, utilized democratic forms to frustrate genuine democratic control from below.

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/draper/1974/xx/democracy.html>