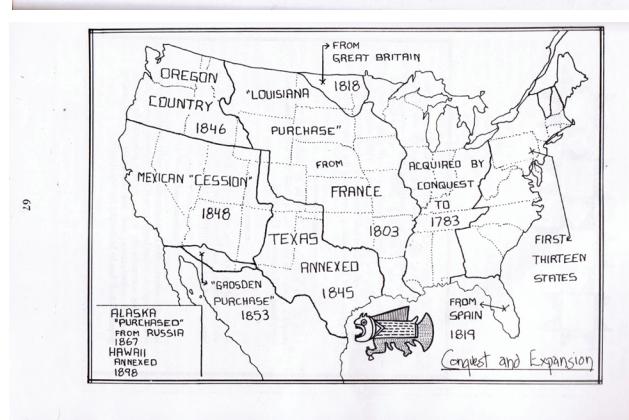
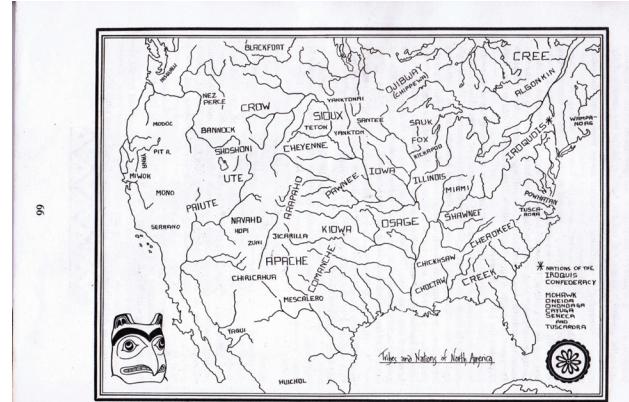


Bill Ayers, continued from page 1

are and where we stand by joining the struggle. We had two guiding principles: One was align yourselves with the most oppressed; the second was learn what to do

always has limits. It is needed because without it you are always floating along in a bubble of experience and you can't understand how one thing links to another. We



Tribes and Nations Conquer and Expand: This pair of hand-drawn images illustrating the supersession and displacement of Native American peoples by an expansive capitalist settler colonialism appears on opposite pages of the Weather Underground's 1974 political Statement, *Prairie Fire*.

by acting on the world not by sitting in the armchair and thinking about the world, which we thought Michael Harrington was doing. No, we had to act on the world; we were impatient. We could not stand the Kennedys and the Democratic Party. We were impatient with the socialist left and absolutely fabbergated by the Communist left. We didn't want to be Communists in that sense. So we called ourselves small "c" communists and created what we called the New Left. The New Left had the great strength of not being weighed down by the chains of the communist experience of the twentieth century, but its great weakness was its unwillingness or inability to learn from history. That was a contradiction. Both were true: We didn't feel the weight of that history, nor could we learn from that history and that was fatal also.

SL: Let me ask about ideology, because, of course, eventually [beginning in the late 1960s] the New Left had its confrontation with Marxism and the legacy of the Old Left. For instance, speaking of the early formation of the Weather Underground in *Fugitive Days*, you mention someone you term CW, someone who "found the movement through his involvement with a tight little leftist sect he'd joined as a teenager." Because of this background, you continue, "CW had something of a 'head start' in relation to the rest of you. He knew how to win debates inside those dark and suffocating halls, and he had mysterious friends he could call on who knew Marx and Lenin and Mao, chapter and verse" [165]. In what way did the Weather Underground represent a form of left sectarianism in the 1970s comparable to other sects coming out of the Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM) such as Klonksy and the others? What is missing from a Todd Gitlin-style of critique, an anti-ideology critique, which considers both of the dominant factions of SDS in 1969, Progressive Labor and RYM, to have somehow "imported" ideology into SDS? How does this distort something, however fraught and uncomfortable, about the "radicalization" of the New Left in the late 1960s and 1970s?

BA: I refer to Todd Gitlin, who was a friend of mine, as the self-appointed CEO of The 60s Incorporated, the worst iteration of the mythologizing of that period. Gitlin is the person who sees all the "mistakes" with 20/20 hindsight and can dissect every experience and illuminate each circumstance. To me, it is a fool's errand. It also is an inauthentic search for a true history.

My sense of what happened is that, as I said a minute ago, we started off in the early mid-60s devoted to learning through action and to developing our ideology through action. We hoped to learn our principles through acting in the world. The Civil Rights and anti-war movements took us a long way. But then we reached the crisis beyond which it became difficult to know how to move forward.

We had done everything we knew to do, and still we couldn't end the war. We couldn't even stop other wars from starting. Our simplest and most straightforward goal was mysteriously beyond our ability to accomplish. That was the immediate source of the crisis and that it then led us to wonder: How can we better understand what is going on?

At that point, we turned to study, trying to learn more. I spent a summer in a tutorial with Stanley Aronowitz to discover how Marx might help us figure out where we were. This was a complicated moment for me.

While it is true that there was for many at least a return to Marxism in the late 1960s, it is also true that we always had Socialists and Communists in the Civil Rights movement, the Black Freedom movement, in SNCC, and in SDS. Our position on that in the early mid-60s was pretty much: So what? The anti-communists like Michael Harrington were trying to tell us to be careful. In SDS we had an open conversation in which we decided that if the Communists tried to join us we would subvert them. We'd force them to get over their conservative hang-ups. We were a little arrogant and a little crazy, but we were also serious. And our view was, in effect, why should we debate our movement by placing ideology-tests on it from the outset. We said let the people decide. And, certainly, we were not going to exclude people from the bottom of society on such grounds, since we knew that such people would prove indispensable in transforming society.

So, we began with the notion that experience is the best teacher for the Left, but in the end we came back to ideology. I think it was a necessary step. Ideology is both needed and dangerous. It is dangerous because it

of the United States. This, to us at the time, was an energizing and exciting and wonderful thing. It seems untenable to think that way now and for a lot of the same reasons why the model of the Russian Revolution went up in flames. The model of the Third World Revolution being the "engine of History" has also reached a kind of endpoint. It was subverted from within by corruption, repression, and deceit. Certainly, nobody can quite imagine "Two, three, many Vietnams!" as a strategy today.

SL: In *Fugitive Days* you mention at a couple of points your encounters and affinities with anarchists. Nowadays, Marxism has very largely vanished as an ideology on the Left, while anarchism seems to carry on. For instance, it was in the forefront of both the anti-globalization movement of a dozen-plus years ago as well as, of course, the more recent Occupy movement. As you note in *Public Enemy*, you and your wife and comrades of many years, Bernardino Dohrn, found yourselves at the recent protests against NATO and the G-8 Summit in Chicago "drifting over to the Black Bloc," because, as you say, "you liked their militancy." You note their slogan at that march was the "most unifying" [though perhaps less than clarifying politically]: "Shit's Fucked Up." Do you see the Weather Underground as a historical precursor to contemporary militant anarchism? If we allow that the legacy of, say, the Weather Underground is somehow visible in black bloc anarchism, what is distinctive about both that this comparison might lose sight of? Certainly one can't imagine the Weather Underground could ever raise a slogan that politically vague.

BA: I like its vagueness in part because of its harmony and inclusiveness. Who can't join in under the slogan "Shit's Fucked Up"? Whether you can't pay your student loans, your healthcare is a mess, your cousin got deployed in an imperial war, your uncle's doing life in Statesville, or you can't get a job, shit is definitely fucked up!

More seriously, I can't judge whether the Weather Underground was a precursor of today's anarchists, but I will say we thought of ourselves as influenced by Marx, but also as anarchist in both style and to some extent in substance. We often thought not just to Marx but to Proudhon, Bakunin and others. We learned from the Wobblies. Certainly, we thought of ourselves as homegrown as apple or as cherry pie, as H. Rap Brown said. We didn't think of ourselves as importin' anything.

Of course, the question might be: Is Marx relevant? Of course he is. You cannot understand the crises buffeting imperialism without reading Marx. So, Marx should be read. I participated in Occupy. Actually I participated in a dozen different cities and at Occupy I found myself enormously drawn to the Marxists, just as I was drawn to the Black Bloc.

Occupy had a different temperament and a different culture everywhere I went. So, in Chicago, it was just a street corner. In Detroit, it was almost like a homeless center. In Boston, it was a giant expanded public library just as you would expect. At these different Occupy sites I was asked again and again to do a workshop on the *Communist Manifesto*. That strikes me as not odd at all. Here are these anarchists. They are action freaks doing their thing. But there is not a single action in the history of the world in the last hundred years of a progressive nature in which people didn't reach for the *Communist Manifesto*. These anarchists want to understand what's going on, and there's no place better to study the *Communist Manifesto* than in an occupation or a sit-in or a demonstration.

SL: In reply to repeated calls for you to disavow your past, you have said that you would be willing to answer any and all questions, to account even apologize for any mistakes you may have made, if only others, prosecutors

In holding alternative institutions for women, we must not forget ourselves into thinking that one clinic or schools have solved the problem of health care and education for the mass of women. We must be aware of who are the ones who benefit from these clinics and schools. The most important basis for a fight against the mass social institutions, on behalf of women, is to demand that they be free, accessible, and public, housing, food stamp lines, and public schools.

Without power, reform can be turned into a weapon against us.

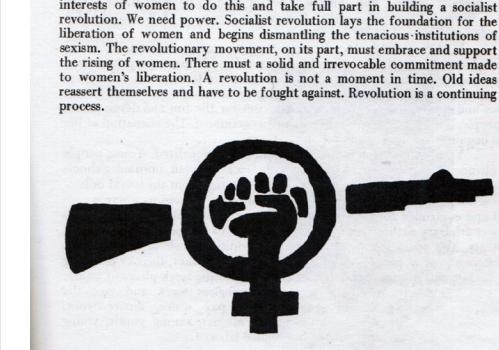
Reforms are important for every sector of the economy, public schools, birth control, social security and trade unions—become their own institutions. Women must be able to work and earn money and not at the expense of our sisters. Women have fought for abortion rights, a right to work, and a right to education. Women have fought for the burgeoning abortion and find ways to make sure that poor women can afford the cost of the procedure. Women have struggled long for safe effective birth control. Women have fought for the right to work and Third World women are routinely used for medical experimentation and paid little or nothing. Women have fought for the right to work and the obligation to fight to stop the wholesale genocidal use of sterilization and forced sterilization.

It is only the reforms which we have fought for that make our lives better. We must struggle around conditions of work, welfare, life, health care, the environment, education, and so on. We must do it all. Together these elements make up a good program of struggle.

Without power, reform is devoured by overlords. Sexism will not destroyed until imperialism is overthrown. It is in the collective struggle of the working class that imperialism is overthrown.

We need power. Socialist revolution lays the foundation for the international struggle of the working class and the struggle of the sexes.

The revolutionary movement, on its part, must embrace and support the struggle of women. There must a solid and uncompromising attitude to women's issues. Women must be a movement. Old ideas must renounce themselves and have to be fought against. Revolution is a continuing process.



Distinctive in the manner in which it drew together leading questions of 70s radicals, *Prairie Fire* insisted upon the need for militancy within the women's movement. It stated,

There is a particular importance in women learning to fight. For us – much the same as for women who join liberation struggles in Third World countries – actually confronting the enemy and fighting in demonstrations, acts of resistance or armed attacks is tearing off the veil, a rejection of the passivity and acceptance for which we are bred...

Without power, reforms can be turned into weapons against us. Reforms which were fought for every inch of the way – such as public schools, birth control, social security, and trade unions – become their opposite in the hands of the ruling class. [132-133]

of the Vietnam War, would do the same. You claim that such a Truth and Reconciliation Committee on Vietnam would in some sense allow for history to be excoriated of certain specters haunting the present. But in what sense is such a reckoning possible? And haven't we had hundreds, even thousands of books and films about the 60s and the Vietnam War, never mind how many academic discussions? Robert McNamara even (sort of) apologized! So, I'm interested what exactly does our existing public sphere discussion fail to accomplish as regards historical "truth and reconciliation?"

BA: It's not simply a matter of having a lot of opinions and treatises and perspectives on the table—a truth and reconciliation process requires a critical mass of people committing themselves to a dialogue in which they face one another without masks, listening with the possibility of being changed and speaking with the possibility of being heard. This can happen sometimes under a compelling moral leadership, sometimes in concert with organized and recognized authority, often in the noise of the crisis or the blast of the whirlwind. It happens when enough folks find it necessary to do something in the hope of becoming unstuck—not true here, not now, and not yet. But someday, possibly. History of course is in continual creation and recreation, not just what happened, but what is said to have happened and what all the happenings mean. There are no neat boundaries here, but a flow and a contested space. We are all actors and narrators and meaning-makers, and as the crisis deepens here we may see an urgency to go on that quest together. Truth and reconciliation—not an end-point, but an exciting and immense journey.

SL: Again—on this question of coming to terms with the past—it seems to me that when you were first politicized in the mid-1960s, you were then wading into a history scarred by innumerable defeats and betrayals. There was much that was "irreconcilable" in the postwar world. History was already pretty "dishonest" then, it seems to me. And I don't just mean that the right conventionally understood and controlled the narrative, but that the history of the Left was perhaps the deepest problem your generation faced. Does not the present inherit that problematic history, too? A history that the New Left can be said to have only partially come to terms with?

BA: Yes, surely. So there's a lot of work to do.

SL: Much of *Public Enemy* is taken up with the 2008 Presidential campaign and the way in which you were dragged into that as a supposed "domestic terrorist" with whom Barack Obama had at one time "paled around." You describe the outcome of that election, Obama's victory as marking something of the end of an epoch. Presumably you meant by that the epoch that began with the civil rights movement had, in some sense, come to an end, even if racism persists. However, unlike the time in which you were first politicized, in this new epoch, for the rising generation, there isn't really an Old Left to react against: The New Left is the only "old left" this generation knows and that past has itself become quite opaque, as I think your comments here about the overcoming of the legacy of the New Left in the way that is needed to constitute a left adequate to these new, and in many ways unprecedented times? While, as you point out, there have in the past always been lulls in leftist activity—how do we view the exhaustion of both the Old and New Left with nothing yet emerging capable of taking their place? Is this unprecedented in your view?

BA: When I say that Obama's victory represents a shift, what I mean is that his election is a blow against white supremacy, not a fatal blow to be sure, but a blow nonetheless. That said, a lot of people make a lot of mistaken assumptions about Obama. But what this liberal disappointment with Obama misunderstands is that he always was (and always said he was) a moderate, middle-of-the-road, pragmatic politician. The right said, "No he's a secret Muslim–closet socialist palling around with terrorists." The Left said in effect, "He's winking at me!" But he wasn't winking.

I think we spend too much time worrying about the Presidency and Congress, sites of power we have little or no access to. What we ought to be doing is spending our time focusing on the sites of power we have ready and absolute access to: the street, the workplace, the school, the community, the classroom, the neighborhood. That's where we ought to go. As for what comes next I have no idea. There are always mountain times and valley times in any social movement. Incidentally, nobody living at the end of feudalism could see that feudalism was ending. Everybody saw its decline, but nobody could predict the institutions that would take the place of feudalism. Nobody could really map out capitalism. So, we ought to be somewhat humble about what's coming. Is a new world coming? Absolutely, without a doubt it is racing towards us. Is imperialism in decline? Fatal decline. The terrifying thing about US imperialism being in decline is that I don't have any confidence that Chinese imperialism will improve anything. Still, in our moment now the U.S. remains the dominant political, cultural, and economic power. Its military grip is unprecedented and unrivaled. Thus, we are in a very difficult, very treacherous situation. Our job is as always to open our eyes to reality. Ideology can help with that but it can also blind us. That's why we have to be careful as we move along. We need to open our eyes to the reality around us and make concrete analyses of concrete conditions. We need to act on whatever the known demands of us. In my view, we should be fighting for more peace, more global justice, and more democracy at every level. We should fight for racial justice and an end to mass incarceration. These are movements that can link up and can be built into mass movements with transformative power. I don't know exactly what direction that will take. I could not have predicted Occupy the moment before it happened, though the day after it happened it seemed utterly inevitable. As for Occupy being a failure. In what ways was it a failure? Do you really think a tent city can overthrow the state? I don't think so. It did succeed in changing the conversation in dramatic and unprecedented ways. Occupy gives me confidence that new things are on the horizon. At the same time, we can be sure that the change that is coming isn't necessarily for the better. We could have slave camps, nuclear war, and a lot worse. That's why it is up to us to get up, open our eyes, and get busy.

SL: In reply to repeated calls for you to disavow your past, you have said that you would be willing to answer any and all questions, to account even apologize for any mistakes you may have made, if only others, prosecutors

Transcribed by Miguel Ángel Rodríguez

1. William Ayers, *Fugitive Days: A Memoir of an Antiwar Activist* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009), 309–10.
2. Spencer A. Leonard and Atiya Khan, "You Don't Need a Marxist to Know Which Way the Wind Blows: An Interview with Mark Rudd," *Platypus Review* 24 (June 2010).

Gender and the new man, continued from page 2

always require protection—which means first that they won't be able to defend themselves, and second that this group will always appear as an appropriate target for violent attacks—is regarded as ahistorical by Lenin, and its antithesis thus is utopian. This conceals the "systematic struggle against a definite section of the population" by which the gendered class is "kept down," produced, and affirmed—not unlike the economic class,

slowly, their will weakened." While there is something to this critique of the "slavery of the kitchen sink" (Maria da Costa), it should strike us as odd that on the other hand factory work, disciplined and militarized as it is, is portrayed as a glorious undertaking. How odd as well is it that menial and backward tasks will either be rendered superfluous by the state or a group that has been traditionally reserved for such tasks (this group is

malities, while in the Islamic regions of the central-Asian Soviet Union such "anomalies" were seen as yet another proof of the region's economic and cultural backwardness. In contrast to discourse in the twenty-first century, yet in accordance to the European Orientalist discourse of the 19th and early 20th century, Islam was seen as unmodern and backwards precisely because it was too homo-friendly. This discourse predominated to such extents that the central-Asian regions not only retained the Tsarist laws against sodomy; indeed, the 1923 law against sexual harassment of women was extended to include adult males in Uzbekistan. This measure was supposed to protect boys from being forced into prostitution, while we can justly assume that some of the Russian male commissars intended to fend off the Uzbek men that were making passes at them.

Another norm also proved relevant for Semaschko's expert commission, which culminated in an obvious imbalance of how transgender movements would be assessed: While trans-femininity (i.e. gay effemimation) was regarded as a sign of bourgeois decadence and hence a threat to the military, trans-masculinity, on the other hand, may have been criticized as an exaggerated form of gender-equality; those that did embrace such identities, however, were respected as revolutionary Bolsheviks, and useful members of the Red Army and socialist society. The discussion on the famous "case" of the trans-gendered person Evgenia Fedorova M./Evgeni Fedorovich was referenced several times in the committee: In 1922, Fedorovich married a female post-office worker, but the legitimacy of this marriage was soon challenged. Yet the accusation that involved parties were committing "acts against nature" was soon dropped amidst the liberal climate of the early Soviet Union. A Soviet court deemed the marriage between a cis-woman and trans-man/butch legal—regardless if it was a homosexual or transsexual marriage—pointing to the fact that both parties entered into the union amicably. Evgeni Fedorov had not only gotten married, though: as a matter of fact, he was also member of the Cheka. This was no exception. There were scores of persons like her/him employed by the Red Army, in the factories, and in party organizations. Commissar Nikolai Semaschko himself had realized seven years prior in 1922 that the "masculinized" woman—with her disheveled, oily hair, a cigarette sticking out of the corner of her mouth, intentionally acting rude and speaking with a deep voice—proved to be a mass phenomenon in Soviet Russia.¹¹ The true enemies were those women of the class-antagonistic milieu that powdered their faces, applied rouge, and polished their nails. Bolshevik "women" that exhibited toughness, efficiency, cold rationality, and recklessness as central characteristics of their political subjectivity were not just a mass phenomenon; they also represented the ideal Soviet subject. The New Man was a drag king.

Limitations

In essence, this "communist" society was no society of men, but a male society—a society of masculinity. People in the early Soviet Union conceptualized genders as successive phases of human evolution; the former would be superseded by the latter. Once again, the old slogan of universal brotherhood became in vogue, while no one would dare to act on their brotherly love in a literal manner. Hence the socialist model of emancipation took over the liberal one. The latter, after all, had coined the rhetoric that invoked brotherhood. But the former liberated "brotherhood" of its particularistic limitations, which had defined brotherly equality literally as the equality of brothers. The hierarchy of gendered attributions, as it is reproduced during the revolution, would then serve a different purpose than it did in societies with heterosexist modes of production which constituted specific subjectivities along prescribed social divisions of labor. In the socialist model, gender opposition is transposed from the spatial sphere (private/public) into a temporal one (conservative/progressive). Consequently, we would no longer be confronted with the opposition of home/outside world or

called "women" will have to take care of them. In this context, Lenin turned out to be the undogmatic, anti-idealist thinker that he usually was when it came to practical revolutionary politics. He would primarily attack those male comrades who thought it "contrary to the 'right and dignity of a man'" to do so-called "woman's work."¹² The Bolsheviks agreed with Lenin's conclusion that socialist women's politics would include to a great extent revolutionary work among men, and that "men" should "help" "women" with home chores [!]. In the socialist theory of emancipation, these politics acquire little significance, however. The idea was that emancipation would come through the state and through wage labor. It became a norm that determined in which way progress should occur.

Gender

In the spring of 1929, health commissar Nikolai Semaschko summoned a committee of "experts"—forensic gynaecologists, clinical psychiatrists, and biologists—to help the commissariat of justice to determine whether the request by the citizen Kamenev for an operative and lawful sex change should be granted.¹³ This had not been the first occurrence of such kind. Already in 1923, a trans-man had contacted officials with a similar request. Since Soviet intellectuals experimented on themselves to find out whether the elderly could be rejuvenated with blood transfusions by the young, and since there were demands to resurrect the dead or to colonize Mars, the medical transformation of a material

In essence, this "communist" society was no society of men, but a male society—a society of masculinity. People in the early Soviet Union conceptualized genders as successive phases of human evolution; the former would be superseded by the latter. Once again, the old slogan of universal brotherhood became in vogue, while no one would dare to act on their brotherly love in a literal manner. Hence the socialist model of emancipation took over the liberal one. The latter, after all, had coined the rhetoric that invoked brotherhood. But the former liberated "brotherhood" of its particularistic limitations, which had defined brotherly equality literally as the equality of brothers. The hierarchy of gendered attributions, as it is reproduced during the revolution, would then serve a different purpose than it did in societies with heterosexist modes of production which constituted specific subjectivities along prescribed social divisions of labor. In the socialist model, gender opposition is transposed from the spatial sphere (private/public) into a temporal one (conservative/progressive). Consequently, we would no longer be confronted with the opposition of home/outside world or

called "

Gender and the new man

Emancipation and the Russian Revolution

Bini Adamczak

IN 1968 THE SOCIALIST GERMAN STUDENT LEAGUE

(SDS) of Stuttgart printed a poster that said: "Everyone talks about the weather. Not us." This slogan was originally used by Deutsche Bahn, the national railway. Instead of the depiction of an electric locomotive of the original poster, the SDS printed portraits of Marx, Engels, and Lenin below the caption. This alone should have raised some concern. To this day, Deutsche Bahn is incapable of not talking about the weather, which so often disrupts their stereotypically German concern with strict punctuality. A leftist student group at the University of Frankfurt was therefore probably on to something when in 2002 it changed the slogan to: "Everyone talks about the weather. We're doing something about it." The text was illustrated with a blueprint for a utopian weather machine. Thus temperature, cloudiness, and precipitation do play a certain role in politics and its history; politics is not only all about shabby clothes but also about bad weather. This is true for revolutions, too. In his memoir *Defying Hitler*, the conservative anti-fascist Sebastian Haffner wrote about the German Revolution of 1918: "That the Great War broke out when the sun shone gloriously over Germany and the revolution in the fog of a cold and wet November day was a tremendous handicap for the latter"—and indeed it failed. Haffner noted: "The fate of the revolution seemed sealed when the workers and sailors dispersed after a successful street battle on December 24 to go home and celebrate Christmas Eve."¹ The climate proved more advantageous to the Russian Revolution, on the other hand, which had begun in February of 1917. As historian Orlando Figes suspects, it probably erupted because so many people were on the streets enjoying the beautiful weather. After all it seemed like spring when the temperature in Petrograd had risen to 23° F.²

Misunderstandings

The sunny day on which the Russian Revolution began was February 23, 1917, or March 8 after the Western calendar—International Women's Day. While Women's Day had been previously celebrated on different days, four years after the revolution began March 8 was determined as its definite date. Though the reason has since been obscured, the date was selected because of the event of the Russian Revolution. After all, it was members of the group of people to whose gender this day is dedicated who first demonstrated for equality, then struck for bread, only to finally march to the city's center chanting "Down with the Tsar." They wore pants, short hair, and often guns. A few days and confrontations later, the Tsar abdicated. A few weeks later the news had reached the villages, where the majority of Russians lived at the time. At first wailing peasants streamed to the churches, unsure of what would become of them with their beloved Tsar—nothing less than a human god—gone. Shortly afterward, when local authorities and the regional police had lost their power too, the same peasants thanked god for their peoples' triumph and prayed for the new government. Then they seized church land, disposed of the priests, and refused to continue paying for church service.

Not only in the villages but across the country reactions to the revolution varied extremely. Some Russians thought it to be a "national rising" against the Tsar's court, which had been suspected for some time to actually be dominated by the Germans; others greeted each other with a slight variation on the Easter greeting, "*"Russia is risen!"*" Some were even of firm belief that lying, gambling, theft, cursing, and above all drunkenness had been overcome at once. These misunderstandings cannot be overcome nor can they be put into a temporal or factional order; not only do the same people want different things at different times, but different people want different things at the same time, and the same people want different things at the same time. Next to other complications, a revolution consists of an ensemble of varied misunderstandings, only to be surpassed by the one true misunderstanding—that all

understand one another. On the realization of their freedom the peasants put on their best clothes, kissed, and celebrated for three days straight.

After all the revolution is, among other things, the experience of mutual understanding, and at the same time a misunderstanding multiplied a million fold. The provisional government in Petrograd, which had attempted to govern Russia between February and October 1917, intended to let the Constituent Assembly make a decision about what was possibly the most important question of the revolution—land distribution. It was for this reason that the government prepared the first general elections. Until then, so the government said to the impatient peasants, it would consider the expropriation of the nobility's land to be against the law. Driven by its thirst to learn how to practice democracy, the peasantry looked past the government's hesitation and passed laws of its own legitimizing these expropriations. While bourgeois officers meant the entire nation when they spoke of "the people," the peasants, on the other hand, did not see the officers as part of the people. They therefore wouldn't understand it as contradictory to the peoples' democracy to threaten to kill the gentlemen officers if they were to order a march. Similar misunderstandings also haunted the thought of the communists. A high-ranking officer, General Brusilov, described the "foxhole-Bolshevism" of common soldiers thus: "All they wanted was this: Peace to go home, rob the landholders and to live free, without paying taxes or accepting any authority. They neither understood who the parties involved were, nor did they understand anything about communism or the division into workers and peasants. Yet they dreamed of living without law or landholders. It was this anarchist freedom they termed Bolshevism."³

Many soldiers seemed to believe that annexations, of which the slogan, "Peace without annexations" spoke, meant appropriations of land in the Balkans; some even mistook the International for yet another divinity. In the early twenties Henry Ford, the anti-Semitic and anti-communist industrialist, gained a similar reputation in Russia after the "socialist" rationalization and Taylorization of the productive process: many people thought of Ford as a god backing Lenin and Trotsky's actions. Despite the arrogance of conservative historians and the aristocrats they represented, they were indeed right: The term "the people," understood in a national sense, had always hardly been revolutionary, not to mention emancipatory. And Ford was indeed an idol of the Bolshevik fetishization of the productive apparatus. Most of all, gaining land by "wild" expropriations and peace by desertions did constitute the quintessence of the revolution of 1917, to which Bolshevism lent its political name during a brief historical moment. Yet it is less important to correct the misunderstanding in hindsight by taking sides and by bringing order into the chaos; rather, it is key to comprehend that this misunderstanding can, in fact, not be corrected. Or it may, but only at the cost of the revolution.

It is thus that we can understand the Bolshevik model of politics: namely, as an attempt to mute the polyphony of the revolution. After having barely called for all power to the Soviets, they outlawed all bourgeois parties, then the social-democratic ones, and finally the social revolutionary and anarchist ones. After this, the Bolsheviks suppressed all opposition within the party and prohibited all differing opinions. This effort to bring the entire polyphony of the revolution into line was revealed by Lenin already in 1918: "Large-scale machine industry... calls for absolute and strict unity of will... But how can strict unity of will be ensured? By thousands subordinating their will to the will of one.... The revolution has only just smashed the oldest, strongest and heaviest of fetters, to which the people submitted under duress. That was yesterday. Today, however, the same revolution demands—precisely in the interests of its development and consolidation, precisely in the interests of socialism—that the people unquestioningly obey the single will of the leaders of labour."⁴



International Working Women's Day strike sparked the Russian Revolution on March 8, 1917. Banner reads: "Elections are a woman's right." Clara Zetkin at the second International Conference of Women Socialists in 1910 in Copenhagen suggested that March 8 become International Working Women's Day. It was intended as a day to mobilize working women against capitalism.

Karl Kautsky, Lenin's former teacher, theorized that the position of the workers would be pressed below their level under capitalism. He was probably not the only one who must have felt misunderstood; the revolutionary Victor Serge, on his arrival in Russia in 1918, heard similar declarations by Grigori Zinoviev, leader of the Petrograd Soviet, and discovered in them a "theory of the suppression of all freedom."⁵ Most of all, all the workers who had risen against the authorities with the demand for "workers' control" must have felt seriously foiled by such an outbreak of authoritarianism.

All kinds of affects blended during the revolution: hatred for all authority, a desire for freedom as well as for vengeance, and many more. The peasants arrested their priests, domestic servants moved into the biggest rooms of their masters' mansions while banishing the latter into tiny chambers, so-called women shaved their heads and demanded equal pay, waiters demonstrated against tipping, sex-workers struck, and soldiers called for the eight-hour day at the front in solidarity with the striking workers; at the same time, nobles were raped, thieves lynched, and those looking foreign or rich beat up. It's this that characterizes the event of revolution, and not the appointment of a provisional government—February—or its removal—October. Yet expropriations of big estates, which had been happening for months as "wild" expropriations, increased after a social revolutionary became minister of agriculture, and increased more so after the Bolshevik government had "legalized" them. The memory of the brutal vengeance the tsarist regime had taken out on the peasants after the attempted revolution of 1905 was still present. Hence they knew how difficult it would be to defend local revolutions against an organized counterrevolution. As it is desirable to leave the center of power empty in the first steps of revolution, precautions would need to be taken to ensure that this power would not be seized by anyone else. But a vacuum tends to collect all kinds of dirt. Too many revolutions (from France in 1848 to Spain in 1936 to Egypt in 2011) should be a warning to us not to underestimate the importance of continuing the struggle for and against state power. The molecular social processes and the larger event remain interdependent.

This is so irrespective of the theater of representation—the abdication of the tsar, the storming of the Winter Palace—within both the propaganda spread by the revolutionary government as well as among hegemonic histories of the Russian Revolution, which had overshadowed those smaller social processes.

Yet even this great event, the seizure of state power—which is so often reduced to its historico-logical term—remains haunted by uncertainty, in spite of the precise military organization that it originally required. On the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution, Eisenstein memorably depicted it in his movie *October* as the collective rising of the masses. However a more nuanced view reveals to us that, in fact, it was more of a coup brought about by conspiracy and aided by a series of mishaps and misunderstandings. Lenin had ordered it, despite his party's resistance, for October 25 at noon.⁶ For that was when the collective soviet was to be in session, and it would have likely put into practice the old call for "all power to the soviets," including the removal of the provisional government. But the conquest of the Winter Palace, which was intended to preempt the soviets and secure strategic advantage for the Bolsheviks, had to be postponed several times; at first to three in the afternoon, then to six, until no fixed time was ordered anymore. At the deciding moment, the revolutionaries realized that the red lamp that was supposed to give the signal to begin the assault was missing. The commissar that had been ordered to fetch the lamp had got lost in the darkness. When he returned, he brought a lamp that could neither be attached to the flag pole nor did it turn out to be red in the first place. Finally, Lenin, not wanting to let the opportunity for his party's dictatorship pass, simply claimed the government had been overthrown, while nothing of the sort had occurred. Later that night, when the Mensheviks and the right social revolutionaries had left the council of soviets in protest against the violent removal of the provisional government, the assault on the Winter Palace was still not over. Barely had the ministers been arrested, however, when the Bolshevik workers discovered the enormous wine cellar. Upon this discovery they initiated a binge that no discipline could stop. Even the commissars, who had been ordered to protect this treasure, got drunk. After the wine was poured into the streets, workers sucked it out of curbstones. Hence, in hindsight this glorious conquest of the Winter Palace could appear as yet another big misunderstanding—namely, as the conquest of a poorly protected wine cellar.

Necessities

In this context it is arguable that the most misunderstood theoretician of revolution, next to Marx, was probably Alexandra Kollontai. That is to say that her polemics against repressive sexual morals were interpreted in all kinds of ways. A case in point was the demand for free love, which, after all, was a demand for freedom

from economic necessity, patriarchal violence, and intrusions by the clergy and by the state—the welfare office in Saratov interpreted these calls by publishing a "decree for the nationalization of women," abolishing marriage and awarding so-called men the right to visit authorized brothels. In the town of Vladimir the "Bureau of Free Love" released a proclamation calling on all unmarried women between 18 and 50 to register so that it could select appropriate sexual partners for them.⁷ Kollontai wanted to keep the state out of its subjects' sex lives, and yet so-called men should receive the right to pick partners for procreation among those registered—all in the interest of the state. At the same time, the Marxist Kollontai, supposedly having replaced class struggle with the struggle of the sexes, was accused by a comrade from the communist women's organization Zenotel of being a "communist polluted with a solid dose of feminist garbage."⁸ When in 1926 members of the communist youth organization Komsomol participated in a gang rape, this was explained by influences they had been set under by Kollontai's theory of sexual liberation. The influential pedagogue and theoretician of sublimation Aron Zalkind had previously attacked Kollontai in his "Twelve Sexual Commandments." Kollontai, Zalkind argued, had withheld some important information: namely that the female protagonist of her famous novella *Loves of Three Generations*, who had demanded equal sexual rights that were usually reserved for so-called boys, was indeed suffering from satyriasis, the male equivalent to nymphomania.⁹ These soviet ideologues regarded permissive and active sexuality as an unhealthy waste of energy; especially thought of as an un-communist distraction from labor. Lenin may have added to this "anti-Kollontai" frenzy. In an interview with the German social democrat Clara Zetkin, he made a noteworthy comment on the "glass of water" theory, which is ascribed to Alexandra Kollontai. Lenin claimed that "this glass of water theory has made our young people mad, quite mad." It stated that sexuality was just as much a basic need as was hunger or thirst, and that it could be satisfied without further romantic complications. Lenin responded: "Of course, thirst must be satisfied. But will the normal person in normal circumstances lie down in the gutter and drink out of a puddle, or out of a glass with a rim greasy from many lips?... But in love two lives are concerned, and a third, a new life, arises, it is that which gives it its social interest, which gives rise to a duty towards the community."¹⁰ In this tracing back of sexuality to the reproduction of the species and its definition as a social duty Lenin concurred with his feminist adversaries, including the biopolitical and eugenic implications of such beliefs. By picturing non-monogamous or uninhibited sexuality as a glass whose edge was greasy with the traces of many lips, Lenin thus not only referenced the hygiene discourse that was popular in the early Soviet Union; much more so, he referenced the classic heterosexist figure of thought that linked (and still links) free female sexuality to the loss of a certain "honor" or "purity," and thus to the loss of a respectable attractiveness.

Lenin had already revealed his understanding of sexual domination and liberation in *The State and Revolution*—his last text written before the revolution—which was, at the same time, his most critical of the state:

Only communism makes the state absolutely unnecessary, for there is nobody to be suppressed—"nobody" in the sense of a class, of a systematic struggle against a definite section of the population. We are not utopians, and do not in the least deny the possibility and inevitability of excesses on the part of individual persons, or the need to stop such excesses. In the first place, however, no special machine, no special apparatus of suppression, is needed for this: this will be done by the armed people themselves, as simply and as readily as any crowd of civilized people, even in modern society, interferes to put a stop to a scuffle or to prevent a woman from being assaulted.¹¹

Communism, Lenin thus argued unintentionally, would be just as free of the state as capitalism is free of sexist violence. With this prognosis he came very close to the hardly-utopian truth of actually existing socialism, more so than with his more optimistic predictions. The rejection of utopia—a term only used pejoratively in Lenin's discourse of "scientific Marxism"—occurred in two ways: On the one hand, a paradisiacal imago of communism is undermined by the claim that some violence was "inevitable" as was the necessity of its suppression. On the other hand, the possibility of this suppression is realized in the present society, which thus contains moments of the future one. But the hardly-innocent example of the 'woman requiring protection by men' points to the premise of the argument of a violence exerted by the few, as if it occurred without preconditions. The assumption that a specific group of people would



Rabotnitsa editorial board in 1917. Clockwise from top left: Nikolaeva, Kudelli, Samoilova, Bonch-Bruevich, Kollontai and Elizarova.