1917–2017

Chris Cutrone, Bryan Palmer, Leo Panitch

German and Russian soldiers dance in celebration of the December 1917 Armistice that led to the signing of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty the following year.

On April 8, 2017, for the closing plenary of its 9th Annual International Convention, the Platypus Affiliated Society organized a panel discussion, 1917–2017, *at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago. Tasked with reflecting on the historical significance of 1917 for the Left, the panel brought together Bryan Palmer, Chair of the Canadian Studies Department at Trent University and author of numerous histories of the Left; Leo Panitch, Professor of Political Science at York University, author, and co-editor of the* Socialist Register*; and Chris Cutrone, President of the Platypus Affiliated Society. Pamela Nogales, of Platypus, moderated. What follows is an edited transcript of their discussion.*

Opening remarks

Bryan Palmer: I'll begin with a very modest proposal: In a non-revolutionary period, which is certainly what we live in now, the main task is to cultivate socialist consciousness within the working class, but also within society more broadly. The question of exactly what forms, organizations, and institutions should then arise from those efforts can be suspended for the moment. Right now, a certain humility is necessary in terms of the tasks that are required.

I want to address the distinctive heritage of 1917. "A spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of communism," Marx famously wrote in 1848. This was a statement guided by optimism of the will. Over the next half-century, socialists were forced increasingly to adopt a pessimism of the intellect. Chartism faded as a mass mobilization of working people in the late 1850s; the insurrectionary substance of the movement disappeared from view under the dark clouds, though perhaps silver lined, of incremental legislation such as the 1867 Reform Act. The Communards of Paris promised a realization of Marx and Engels' prediction of the inevitable abolition of class rule, only to be drowned in blood. With the massacre of revolutionaries in 1871, the Left could no longer harbor illusions of peaceful transition to socialism. William Morris polemicized against his Fabian opponents in the late 1880s, insisting that a gradual, peaceful, and parliamentary transition to social democracy through extension of the franchise, as was advocated by socialists such as George Bernard Shaw, was little more than an illusion.

In the United States—where Engels predicted in 1886 that a vibrant workers movement would soon shake society to its very foundations—the country's first Red Scare demonized anarcho-communism, sending revolutionaries to prison and the gallows in the aftermath of the Haymarket events. A decisive working-class defeat, such as the Homestead Strike of 1892, also played a part in driving labor's great upheaval in the late 1880s into retreat and consolidated a somewhat tepid and inward-looking craft unionism. Revolutionary socialism's pessimism deepened with the fracturing of social democracy on the outbreak of World War I. Formed in 1889, the Second International continued the work of Marx and Engels's First International, uniting socialists and labor parties. Anti-militarist from its conception, the Second International opposed capitalist war and endorsed the necessity of class war, but, as World War I tested the organization, social democratic leadership lapsed into social patriotism. Separate, nationally organized socialist parties failed to maintain the united front against the war, opting instead to align with their respective national bourgeoisies. The Second International consequently dissolved in 1916. A socialist future seemed unlikely indeed.

Then, suddenly, the demoralizing pessimism of the intellect lifted. Revolutionary Russia, under the leadership of Lenin and the Bolsheviks, catapulted revolutionaries into power, displacing Tsarism and proclaiming the world's first proletarian state. This successful revolution contradicted the evolutionary thinking of many European socialists, fixated as they were on the logic of capitalist development as the decisive material factor in revolution. A rigid and economistic Second International Marxism could not grasp the revolutionary possibilities, the transformative dialectic inherent in global capitalism's contradictory character. The Bolshevik Revolution, conceptually orchestrated by Lenin and Trotsky's deft application of Marxism, linked the analysis of capitalism in Russia with the rule of working-class leadership in a backward, peasant-dominated economy, thus rewriting the script of revolutionary possibility. It shocked the least imaginative and the most mechanical among the world's socialists into rethinking the boundaries of revolutionary possibility, in which the prerequisites of revolution, and understandings of how such revolution would be made, had previously been far too restrictive.

Forged at the weakest link of capitalism's combined and uneven development, the Soviet Workers' Republic was thus a world-historic victory for the possible realization of socialism and the probable emancipation of labor that would follow in its wake. It fused Marxist understandings of capitalist development and overthrowing its exploitative regime of accumulation, with lessons of socialism; it wrestled with the crucial recognition of addressing state power, and linked struggles in the political sphere to the militant, often syndicalist wars of position within the productive arena. It stressed the importance of sustaining organization, reflected in the building of a class struggle party, and ultimately a Communist International, upon which sympathetic traditional sections of revolutionaries could build. With the revolution of 1917, communism then became more than a spectre—it now haunted the world, not as a threatening phantom, but as an actual alternative.

"I belong to the generation tied by an almost unbreakable umbilical cord to the hope of the world revolution, and of its original home, the October Revolution," wrote Eric Hobsbawm in his autobiography, *Interesting Times: A 20th Century Life*.[1] No generation, then, of revolutionary Leftists has confronted so starkly the possibilities posed by the revolution of 1917, and the limitations of its considerable promise, more than our own. As Geoff Eley writes in the preface to his substantial history of the Left in Europe, "Revolutions no longer receive a good press. The calamity of Stalinism and the ignominious demise of the Soviet Union have been allowed to erase almost entirely the Russian Revolution's emancipatory effects."[2] For much of the Left today, the failures of 1917 loomed large, to the point that they perhaps dwarf its tremendous transformative accomplishments.

Well before 1917, in the 1880s, William Morris captured something of what I want to address tonight in his defense of revolution. His agitational forays into the making of socialists always entailed a refusal to collapse the container of popular antagonisms and revolutionary aspirations into a restrictively small time or space. He wrote,

> I see it as the plain duty of those who believe in the necessity of social revolution, quite irrespective of any date they may have to give to the event, first to express their own discontent and hope when and where they can, striving to impress it upon others. Secondly, to learn from books, and writing, and from living people who are willing to teach them, in as much detail as possible, what are the ends and the hopes of social

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Chris Cutrone
Bryan Palmer
Leo Panitch

www:
Slavoj Žižek, Donald Trump, and the Left

Leonie Ettinger

The Platypus Review

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Statement of purpose

Taking stock of the universe of positions and goals that constitutes leftist politics today, we are left with the disquieting suspicion that a deep commonality underlies the apparent variety: What exists today is built upon the desiccated remains of what was once possible.

In order to make sense of the present, we find it necessary to disentangle the vast accumulation of positions on the Left and to evaluate their saliency for the possible reconstitution of emancipatory politics in the present. Doing this implies a reconsideration of what is meant by the Left.

Our task begins from what we see as the general disenchantment with the present state of progressive politics. We feel that this disenchantment cannot be cast off by sheer will, by simply "carrying on the fight," but must be addressed and itself made an object of critique. Thus we begin with what immediately confronts us.

The *Platypus Review* is motivated by its sense that the Left is disoriented. We seek to be a forum among a variety of tendencies and approaches on the Left—not out of a concern with inclusion for its own sake, but rather to provoke disagreement and to open shared goals as sites of contestation. In this way, the recriminations and accusations arising from political disputes of the past may be harnessed to the project of clarifying the object of leftist critique.

The *Platypus Review* hopes to create and sustain a space for interrogating and clarifying positions and orientations currently represented on the Left, a space in which questions may be raised and discussions pursued that would not otherwise take place. As long as submissions exhibit a genuine commitment to this project, all kinds of content will be considered for publication.

Submission guidelines

Articles will typically range in length from 750–4,500 words, but longer pieces will be considered. Please send article submissions and inquiries about this project to: *review_editor@platypus1917.org*. All submissions should conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

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this was in the form of its perpetual civil-war footing, in which the party was at war with society's spontaneous tendency towards capitalism, and indeed the party was constantly at war with its own members as potential if not actual traitors to the avowed socialist mission. As such, Stalinism confessed not merely to the on-going continuation of the "revolution" short of its success, but indeed its—socialism's—infinite deferral. Stalinism was what became of Marxism as it was swallowed up by the historical inertia of on-going capitalism.

So we must disentangle the revolution from its results. Does 1917 have a legacy other than its results? Did it express an unfulfilled potential, beyond its failure?

The usual treatment of 1917 distorts the history. First of all, we would need to account for what Lenin called the "spontaneity of spontaneity," that is, the prior conditions for the masses' apparently spontaneous action. In the February Revolution, one obvious point is that it manifested on the official political socialist party holiday of International Working Women's Day, which was a relatively recent invention by Marxists in the Socialist or Second International. So, the longstanding existence of a workers' movement for socialism and of the international political party of that struggle for socialism was a prior condition of the apparently spontaneous outbreak of revolution in 1917. This much was obvious. What was significant, of course, was how in 1917 the masses seized the socialist holiday for revolution to topple the Tsar.

The October Revolution was not merely the planned coup d'état by the Bolshevik Party—not alone, but in alliance, however, we must always remember, with the Left Socialist Revolutionaries or SRs. This is best illustrated by what took place between February and October, namely the July Days of 1917, in which the masses spontaneously attempted to overthrow the Provisional Government. The Bolsheviks considered that action premature, both in terms of lack of preparation and, more importantly, in terms of the Provisional Government not yet having completely exhausted itself politically. But the Bolsheviks stood in solidarity with the masses in July, while warning them of the problems and dangers of their action. The July uprising was put down by the Provisional Government, and indeed the Bolsheviks were suppressed, with many of their leading members arrested. Lenin went into hiding—and wrote his pamphlet *The State and Revolution* in his time underground. The Bolsheviks actually played a conservative role in the July Days of 1917, in the sense of seeking to conserve the forces of the working class and broader masses from the dangers of the Provisional Government's repression of their premature—but legitimate—rising.

The October Revolution was prepared by the Bolsheviks—in league with the Left SRs—after the attempted coup against the Provisional Government by General Kornilov, which the masses had successfully resisted. Kornilov had planned his coup in response to the July uprising by the masses, which to him showed the weakness and dangers of the Provisional Government. As Lenin had put it at the time, explaining the Bolsheviks' participation in the defense of the Provisional Government against Kornilov, it was a matter of "supporting in the way a rope supports a hanged man." Once the Provisional Government had revealed that its crucial base of support was the masses that it was otherwise suppressing, this indicated that the time for overthrowing the Provisional Government had come.

But the October Revolution was not a socialist revolution, because the February Revolution had not been a democratic revolution. The old Tsarist state remained in place, with only a regime change, the removal of the Tsar and his ministers and their replacement with liberals and moderate "socialists," namely the Right Socialist Revolutionaries, of whom Kerensky, who rose to the head of the Provisional Government, was a member. To put it in Lenin's terms, the February Revolution was only a regime change—the Provisional Government was merely a "government" in the narrow sense of the word—and had not smashed the state: the "special bodies of armed men" remained in place.

The October Revolution was the beginning of the process of smashing the state—replacing the previously established (Tsarist, capitalist) "special bodies of armed men" with the organized workers, soldiers, and peasants through the "soviet" councils as executive bodies of the revolution, to constitute a new revolutionary, radical-democratic state, the dictatorship of the proletariat.

From Lenin and the Bolsheviks' perspective, the October Revolution was merely the beginning of the democratic revolution. Looking back several years later, Lenin judged the results of the revolution in such terms, acknowledging the lack of socialism and recognizing the progress of the revolution—or lack thereof—in democratic terms. Lenin understood that an avowedly "revolutionary" regime does not an actual revolution make. The events of 1917 exhibited this on a mass scale.

Most of the Bolsheviks' political opponents claimed to be "revolutionary" and indeed many of them professed to be "socialist" and even "Marxist," for instance the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries.

The Bolsheviks' former allies and junior partners in the October 1917 Revolution, the Left Socialist Revolutionaries, broke with the Bolsheviks in 1918 over the terms of the peace the Bolsheviks had negotiated with Germany. They called for overthrowing the Bolsheviks in a "third revolution": for soviets, or workers', soldiers', and peasants' councils, "without parties," that is, without the Bolsheviks. As Engels had correctly observed, opposition to the dictatorship of the proletariat was mounted on the basis of so-called "pure democracy." But, to Lenin and the Bolsheviks, their opponents did not in fact represent a "democratic" opposition, but rather the threatened liquidation of the revolutionary democratic state and its replacement by a White dictatorship. This could come about "democratically" in the sense of Bonapartism. The opponents of the Bolsheviks thus represented not merely the undoing of the struggle for socialism, but of the democratic revolution itself. What had failed in 1848 and threatened to do so again in 1917 was democracy.

Marx had commented that his only original contribution was discovering the necessity of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The dictatorship of the proletariat was meant by Marxists to meet the necessity in capitalism that Bonapartism otherwise expressed. It was meant to turn the political crisis of capitalism indicated by Bonapartism into the struggle for socialism.

The issue of the dictatorship of the proletariat, that is, the political rule of the working class in the struggle to overcome capitalism and achieve socialism, is a vexed one, on many levels. Not only does the dictatorship of the proletariat not mean a "dictatorship" in the conventional sense of an undemocratic state, but, for Marxism, the dictatorship of the proletariat, as the social as well as political rule of the working class in struggling for socialism and overcoming capitalism, could be achieved only at a global scale, that is, as a function of working-class rule in at least several advanced capitalist countries, but with a preponderant political force affecting the entire world. This was what was meant by "world socialist revolution." Nothing near this was achieved by the Russian Revolution of 1917. But the Bolsheviks and their international comrades, such as Rosa Luxemburg in Germany, thought that it was practically possible.

The Bolsheviks had predicated their leading the October Revolution in Russia on the expectation of an imminent European workers' revolution for socialism. For instance, the strike wave in Germany of 1916 that had split the Social-Democratic Party there, as well as the waves of mutinies among soldiers of various countries at the front in the World War, had indicated the impending character of revolution throughout Europe, and indeed throughout the world, for instance in the vast colonial empires held by the European powers.

This had not happened—but it looked like a real, tangible possibility at the time. It was the program that had organized millions of workers for several decades prior to 1917.

So what had the October Revolution accomplished, if not "socialism" or even the "dictatorship of the proletariat"? What do we make of the collapse of the 1917 revolution into Stalinism?

As Leo Panitch remarked at a public forum panel discussion that Platypus held in Halifax on "What is Political Party for the Left?" in January 2015,[7] the period from the 1870s to the 1920s saw the first as well as the as-yet only time in history in which the subaltern class organized itself into a political force. This was the period of the growth of the mass socialist parties, around the world, of the Second International. The highest and perhaps the only result of this self-organization of the international working class as a political force was the October Revolution in Russia of 1917. The working class, or at least the political party it had constituted, took power, if however under very disadvantageous circumstances and with decidedly mixed results. The working class ultimately failed to retain power, and the party they had organized for this revolution transformed itself into the institutionalized force of that failure. This was also true of the role played by the Social-Democratic Party in Germany in suppressing the revolution there in 1918–19.

But the Bolsheviks had taken power, and they had done so after having organized for several decades with the self-conscious goal of socialism, and with a high degree of awareness, through Marxism, of what struggling towards that goal meant as a function of capitalism. This was no utopian project.

The October 1917 Revolution has not been repeated, but the February 1917 Revolution and the July Days of 1917 have been repeated, several times, in the century since then.

In this sense, from a Marxist perspective what has been repeated—and continued—was not really 1917 but rather 1848, the democratic revolution under conditions of capitalism that has led to its failure. For Marx, the Paris Commune of 1871 had been the repetition of 1848 that had however pointed beyond it. The Paris Commune indicated both democracy and the dictatorship of the proletariat, or, as Marx had put it, the possibility for the "revolution in permanence." 1871 re-attained 1848 and indicated possibilities beyond it.

In this sense, 1917 has a similar legacy to 1871, but with the further paradox—actually, the contradiction—that the political agency, the political party or parties, that had been missing, from a Marxist perspective, leading to the failure of the Paris Commune, which in the meantime had been built by the working class in the decades that followed, had, after 1917, transformed itself into an institutionalization of the failure of the struggle for socialism, in the failure of the world revolution. That institutionalization of failure in Stalinism was itself a process—taking place in the 1920s and continuing up to today—that moreover was expressed through an obscure transformation of "Marxism" itself: avowed "Marxists" (ab)used and distorted "Marxism" to justify this institutionalization of failure. It is only in this self-contradictory sense that Marxism led to Stalinism—through its own failure. But only Marxism could overcome this failure and self-distortion of Marxism. Why? Because Marxism is itself an ideological expression of capitalism, and capitalism must be overcome on its own basis. The only basis for socialism is capitalism. Marxism, as distinct from other forms of socialism, is the recognition of this dialectic of capitalism and the potential for socialism. Capitalism is nothing other than the failure of the socialist revolution.

So the legacy of 1917, as uniquely distinct from other revolutions in the era of capitalism, beginning at least as early as in 1848 and continuing henceforth up to today, is actually the legacy of Marxism. Marxism had its origins in taking stock of the failed revolutions of 1848. 1917 was the only political success of Marxism in the classical sense of the Marxism of Marx and Engels themselves, and their best followers in the Socialist or Second International such as Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg and Trotsky, but it was a very limited and qualified "success"—from Lenin and his comrades' own perspective. And that limited success was distorted to cover over and obscure its failure, and so ended up obscuring its success as well. The indelible linking of Marxism with 1917 exhibits the paradox that its failure was the same as in 1848, but 1917 and so Marxism are important only insofar as they might point beyond that failure. Otherwise, Marxism is insignificant, and we may as well be liberals, anarchists, Utopian Socialists, or any other species of democratic revolutionaries. Which is what everyone today is—at best—anyway.

1917 needs to be remembered not as a model to be followed but in terms of an unfulfilled task that was revealed in historical struggle, a potential that was expressed, however briefly and provisionally, but was ultimately betrayed. Its legacy has disappeared with the disappearance of the struggle for socialism. Its problems and its limitations as well as its positive lessons await a resumed struggle for socialism to be able to properly judge. Otherwise they remain abstract and cryptic, lifeless and dogmatic and a matter of thought-taboos and empty ritual—including both ritual worship and ritual condemnation.

In 1918, Rosa Luxemburg remarked that 70 years of the workers' struggle for socialism had achieved only the return to the moment of 1848, with the task of making it right and so redeeming that history. In *Results and Prospects*, on the 1905 Revolution in Russia, Trotsky had observed that it was only because of Marxism that the 19th century had not passed in vain.

Marx's concept of Bonapartism resonates today because it depicts politics and society absent the working-class struggle for socialism. The masses remain, but the working class and its political party for socialism are missing. The "spectre" not of proletarian socialism but of the petite bourgeoisie's and lumpenproletariat's Bonapartism is what haunts the world today, a century after the failure of 1917—just as it did after the failure of 1848.

Today, in 2017, on its hundredth anniversary, we must recognize, rather, just how and why we are so very far from being able to judge properly the legacy of 1917: It no longer belongs to us. We must work our way back towards and reattain the moment of 1917. That task is 1917's legacy for us.

Responses

BP: To Leo, I would raise the question of just how successful was the appeal to the working class on xenophobic grounds. Certainly one could point to empirical examples of this, but what I don't think has been established is that those appeals were actually decisive in the Brexit or the Trump victories. I am not sure the working-class vote in either campaign was the decisive factor. Regarding Brexit, many voters were not attracted to the xenophobia so much as they were striking out against the austerity program of the EU. The liberal media was very happy to peg the Trump victory on the working class, but to me there is more of a question mark over that issue.

LP: Let me take up the question of what the legacy of 1917 is, to what extent it embodies Marx and Engels, and whether it does so in a positive way. You say there was good reason to think a revolution would happen in Germany. This was in fact the product of a very understandable tendency in any mortal to want to see socialism in his or her lifetime. That was true of Marx and the way he looked at the 1857–58 crisis, but at other points in his life he precisely made the argument that we need the time to develop capacities. Engels, by 1896, is not pointing to the Paris Commune as the way forward—Lenin comes back to that, but Engels does not—and says, in these societies, what we did in 1848 and even in 1870 is no longer possible. Now, you can say that was not the case with Russia precisely because of the brittle nature of the Tsarist regime, the peasant nature of the society, and so on. But to have expected that the capitalist train had run its course around the world—which was, after all, Lenin's argument in *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*—involved not looking at what Gramsci so quickly said to the Leninists: "This isn't going happen so easily in the West," by which he meant, in those societies where the state is deeply embedded in society. So, it was not just a case of, "It might have happened." It was a product of a teleology in Marxist thought that we have to overcome, which is that capitalism was about to have reached the limits of its productive capacity. We need to overcome that teleological viewpoint, rather than inherit it.

Rosa Luxemburg and Trotsky were pointing to the problems in the Bolshevik Party by 1907, namely, the problems of operating as an underground vanguard and what that meant in terms of party democracy and the development of class capacities. One should try to understand why the Bolsheviks adopted those tactics, but without validating themwe should be wary of validating them. I say that without, in any sense, wanting to suggest that Stalin was present in Lenin or in Trotsky. I do not believe that for a moment. But there were elements in the Bolshevik Party and the Russian situation that did then lead, *very* quickly, to the banishment all opposition parties. As Deutscher pointed out, as soon as they did that, they would inevitably need to banish factions inside the Communist Party, which—right through the Civil War, in fact—were not flourishing. wouldThe factions later needed to be banished, precisely because the same political forces that could no longer find expression in other parties then sought influence in the only place they could, as factions in the Bolshevik Party. How does Lenin respond to that? With the Conditions of Admission to the Communist International.[8] I urge you to go read them and see how fundamentally anti-democratic they are. They are not Stalinist in the totalitarian bureaucratic sense—they are about the party, and the activists in the party. They are not an image for society at large. But, for heaven's sake, there are many elements there that we do not want to emulate.

CC: I will come back to a theme that Bryan raised, the idea of revolution and whether it has been disenchanted. What's remarkable, of course, is that while the idea of revolution may have been disenchanted on the Left, it is *not* disenchanted in general. The Arab Spring was not so long ago, and today you even see capitalist politicians calling what they do "revolution," whether it is Bernie Sanders, Donald Trump, or whoever.

When we talk about the allegedly teleological view of Marxism in Lenin, Luxemburg, and Trotsky's time, and the limits of capitalism, I would say that their understanding of "limits" was not so much predicated on an idea of *economic* limits, but *political* limits. Those political limits had already been clearly exposed in 1848, even if they had not yet been fully reached. In other words, the necessity of the dictatorship of the proletariat—Marx's one original idea—is about the limits that capitalism places *politically* on society and on the democratic revolution. That's why I raise the issue of Bonapartism. If we look at Trotsky and his analysis of Stalinism, fascism, and the New Deal, he places these different configurations on a spectrum of Bonapartism. The U.S. could afford to be Bonapartist in a "soft" way whereas Germany and Russia could not. Whether or not that is a very good analysis of what was going on in the 1930s by Trotsky, it certainly was in keeping with Marx's observation that a certain political crisis in the history of capitalism and of modern democracy, as revealed by 1848. That is, the revolutions of 1848 had a different kind of fallout than those of 1776, 1789, or 1830. In the aftermath of 1848, you could no longer look at the bourgeois revolution as an arc of progress, liberalization, and democratization. Capitalism had created a situation, as Marx put it, in which the bourgeoisie could no longer rule in the old way—that is, in terms of leading civil society—while yet the working class could not yet rule.

Today, even in the most advanced and liberal countries, we still see different varieties of state capitalism that contradict the ideals of classic liberalism and liberal democracy of, the late 18th and early 19th century. When we are talking about the limits of capitalism, the *economic* limits of capitalism may be boundless—they might be infinite, asin the sense that there might be new forms of value extraction always available in a concrete reconfiguration of political economy. However, the *political* limits have been shown long ago. The issue of the party, therefore, is really about meeting the challenge of those political limits.

Various political scientists have remarked on the fact that in the 20th century, capitalist parties started to exhibit Stalinist features. In other words, Stalinism had a kind of echo as a political form—party discipline and a certain kind of authoritarianism became a necessity, politically, even in ostensibly liberal, democratic states. So I would pose that question: Are we talking about limits that are economic, or are we talking about political limits? I would prefer to address the question of socialism as a matter of politics.

Questions

The narrative that has been presented by Bryan, and to some extent by Leo, is that in the 1960s and 1970s there was a new generation that revived the Left. Looking back over the last hundred years, I do not think you could consider the post-war period, even the 1960s and '70s, as such a radical moment. Civil rights, while obviously a progressive movement, did not hold the potential to threaten the global capitalist order in the sense that the New Left thought at the time. So too with decolonization. The New Left profoundly misjudged its own moment and could in many respects be considered a disaster for the Left. It seems to me that the memory of 1968 is, in some way, an obstacle to the memory of 1917.

LP: That's a good point, but 1968 was embedded in trying to revive the memory of 1917—and there were limits to that, as well. In my opening remarks, I was trying to point out the limitations of those within the political New Left, in particular the various Trotskyist groups, who tried to found new Leninist parties. At the same time, those who came out of '68 and moved into social democratic parties were also engaged in a futile and limited project. In both cases, they attempted to sink roots into the class. It was as true of Benn and Corbyn as it was of the Trotskyist industrial organizers. As it turned out, that did not succeed. Our generation of socialists, in that sense, failed. Then, on top of that, there was the "activist-ism" that took off in '68 and led to the kind of protest "movementism" that we have today, the problems of which are very clear. Most protests are not even oriented to winning universal collective benefits—like the universal right to women's reproduction services—but to making tepid demands for meritocracy. That is the *antithesis,* it seems to me, of a socialist ideology. We want to develop everybody's capacities. It's not a matter of plucking a few bright people out of the working class and bringing them into the university or making them CEOs.

BP: I respond more positively towards the New Left. We should remember there were different "New Lefts" in the U.S., Canada, Britain, and Germany. However, in general, I would say that the New Left on the whole was grappling with capitalism and its crises in various forms, on the one hand, and with the failure of the Stalinist Communist International, on the other. The relationship of these New Lefts to Marxism was complicated and shifted over time. But what came out of 1968, and the debates around these questions, did, in fact, further the development of the Left and involved an engagement with the legacies of 1917. It seems to me that the New Left did move, after fragmentations and disillusionment, out of 1968 and into addressing these questions. So, I do not think that there is *a* memory of 1968. I think there is a fragmented set of different memories. Whatever you would say about the Trotskyist or New Communist movements of the 1970s, they were trying to address the point that Leo was focused on: creating a consciousness within the working class. They failed. Their failures are worth grappling with and interrogating, but I do not think their legacy should be seen as simply an *obstacle*. Because it was out of those groups that much of the memory—again, in various reconfigured ways—of 1917 was translated to our times.

CC: I do think the 1970s were significant as a turn from protest to politics, if you will, and as a regroupment and party-building decade. However, the 1970s were conditioned by a number of rather unfortunate influences. Obviously Maoism was a major force, and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution as

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a model complicated things a great deal, because "proletarianization" was understood in terms of the self-criticism of intellectuals in China—in other words, sending intellectuals to the countryside and making them learn from the people. I like to think of the arc of the 1960s and 1970s as a kind of "Neo-Narodnism." The "back to the people" proletarian turn of the 1970s on the Left had a kind of a "pre-Marxist" or even non-Marxist flavor to it. The question of party building is vexed by this history.

Earlier, I cited Leo's comment about the period of the 1870s to the 1920s being the first and only time in history that the subalterns had organized themselves as a political force—never before and never since. But the models for party building inherited by the New Left were and are filtered through the experience of Stalinism in the 1930s and 1940s. I am sympathetic to Trotsky's perspective, which held that the expansion of the Communist parties in the 1920s and '30s was actually their political liquidation. In other words, their growth and *apparent* success actually indicated that they were becoming reformist and abandoning the goal of socialism. In this, they mirrored the trajectory that social democracy took after World War I. This is an obscure point, perhaps, but an important one. It is why Trotsky thought that there was really no difference between what remained of the old Second International and what became of the new Third International in the 1930s. From that perspective one could justify the "French turn" as well as Trotskyists' joining the Socialist Party of America.

In light of this history, it is important for us to reconsider what party building meant *before* World War I. It had a different character than what came later, in the 1970s, which was a weak echo of the 1930s and had more in common with liberalism. In other words, the "vanguard party" idea got completely distorted. The earlier idea was that the party was not simply identical with the self-organization of the working class. Rather, the party served a crucial role in *facilitating* the self-organization of the working class, while also serving a function beyond the membership of the party and even beyond the working class as such. For the party also took up the lead in various democratic struggles in civil society, and thereby led the petite bourgeoisie. It also strove to provide all sorts of social services to people. The party did not just aim at state power, but was the school of revolution—meaning that it was teaching people how they, *themselves,* could exercise state power after the revolution. That was the party in its original conception and practice. I don't think that Lenin was ever guilty of "substitutionalism," of saying that the *party* is going to make revolution, rather than the workers or the masses.

LP: What was Lenin doing, then?

CC: Well, the Civil War and the loss of the SRs as allies in the government are really tragic turns. Nonetheless I think that the model of the SPD, which Lenin and the Bolsheviks followed, was a model of building up the working class so that, as Lenin put it, "Any cook could govern." That was the sincere intention and I do not think there was anything particular to the party organization that prevented it. Rather, there were external circumstances that impinged upon the party. The 21 Conditions that Leo mentioned earlier were meant to distinguish the Communists from the Social Democrats. They had a polemical character and the ban on factions was, precisely, a ban on factions because the party had taken over the state. The assumption was that state bureaucrats would be the ones forming the factions. It was not aimed at the workers who wanted to form factional oppositions politically, but in response to the fact that the party was being taken over by the state bureaucracy. That is what the ban on factions was really about. However, what should have been a temporary measure became a virtue. A necessity was made into a virtue, with disastrous results.

LP: I would not be as hard and fast as Chris in saying that the party ceases to be a positive example or model in the 1920s. As Bryan has shown so well, what the Communists, including the Trotskyists, were doing in the 1930s was very creative and achieved successes in terms of class formation. We can look at the CIO unions, for instance. Of course, they ultimately undermined themselves thanks to their slavish following of Stalinism and, then, because of their alliance with the Democratic Party during and after World War II. Nevertheless, that was a remarkable instance of class formation. The repression of those communist organizers after World War II was a crucial factor in making American trade unionism such a weak and non-radical force today.

Since I have the opportunity, I would like to say, Chris, that it is very dangerous to present the development of liberal democracy after 1848 as a soft form of Bonapartism or fascism. Of course, Marx is correct that we need to overcome liberalism in order to realize full democracy. But there are enormous differences between liberal democracy and authoritarian regimes. Not just in terms of human rights, generally, but also freedom of association, which provides a necessary space in which the working class develops politically.

Leo, in a different panel earlier in the afternoon, you mentioned rereading Luxemburg's Reform or Revolution*. I was wondering if you could elaborate on what you agree and disagree with Luxemburg about?*

LP: As I said in that panel, Luxemburg nailed Bernstein on his statement, "The movement is everything, the end is nothing," in two major respects. First, she argued that the SPD is trying to engage in class formation; *that* is the movement, ultimately. But she also very presciently argued against how his understanding of the reform struggle called for an alliance with state bureaucrats and bourgeois representatives—indeed, even feudal representatives. Thus, you would inevitably end up with reforms conceived and implemented so as to foreclose further, more transformative changes. Now, here's what I think Luxemburg got wrong. Chris may say, "I want to focus on the political limits." However, Luxemburg's critique of Bernstein's teleology—"socialization of capitalism will slip into socialism of its own accord"—was entirely *economic*. For example, the credit system, which Bernstein argues is a form of socialization, is for Luxemburg an instance of capitalism running into its limits. Her critique of Bernstein is based in the idea that the productive forces no longer have room to expand—in 1898! It is absurd.

My question touches on something else often discussed on the Left in relation to 1917: imperialism. Lenin's slogan was, "Turn the imperialist war into a Civil War." Do we still live in imperialism—the highest stage of capitalism? What does that mean today? Can we recover the speculative optimism of the way in which Lenin addressed imperialism—monopoly capitalism—as a transitional phase to a superior social form?

LP: I think how Lenin understood imperialism, as inter-imperial rivalry leading to war amongst the great powers, was unique to that time. It is dangerous to try to make that relevant to the form of empire we have today. In the course of the 20th century, those rival empires were absorbed as subordinate states within the American empire in the post-1945 period. We will have to see whether, with the "Trumpization" of the American state, the U.S. can continue to play that role and how difficult it will be to absorb a capitalist Russia or a capitalist China. But I also think the very term "monopoly capitalism" is full of problems. In Lenin's case he swallowed hook, line, and sinker Hilferding's "Trustification" thesis, which only applied to the United States between 1898 and 1902. The American financial system was, in fact, highly decentralized. You didn't get bank control of companies. Companies went to the market—a much more diffuse capital market—throughout the 20th century. "Monopoly capitalism" is a less apt term today than ever. The dominant corporations are extremely powerful, but there's enormous competition amongst them over rates of profit. Lenin's *Imperialism* seems to imagine that the state has been captured by a few all-knowing capitalists who, in effect, form the executive committee of the bourgeoisie outside the state, and then tell the state what to do. The very notion of the state as an instrument, which has been one of the major premises of the Marxist critique of liberal theory—even though it is not what Marx himself said—is extremely problematic.

BP: But is that to say that imperialism, in a general sense, is over? No. Clearly, imperialism still exists, albeit in forms that differ from 1911. Surely, it would be dangerous to eliminate imperialism as a category of analysis.

LP: Yes, we do need to reclaim it.

BP: And build struggles around it in the era of globalization. Looking at imperialist aggressions around the world will always be an important component of the Left. We must deal with the possibility that a war in some small state becomes a flashpoint for large-scale conflict, with incredibly destructive and destabilizing consequences.

CC: That the imperialist era is the "highest stage of capitalism" is a broader idea of the Second International. It underpins Luxemburg's critique of Bernstein in *Reform or Revolution*, for instance. (Interestingly enough, Hilferding was Bernsteinian.) Lenin's pamphlet *Imperialism* is tricky with respect to how it develops an immanent critique of both Hilferding *and* Hobson. So we need to keep Hobson in the mix. Lenin was saying, "Well, what about the liberal project, articulated by Hobson, that we can dismantle empire, cut down the financial oligarchy and the credit system, achieve a new kind of 'Little England-ism,' and return to pre-monopoly capitalism?" Lenin's issue with that is, even if it is possible, you would only end up reproducing the dynamic that got us here to begin with. One is therefore obligated to turn monopoly capital into a pre-condition for socialism, to treat it as an opportunity, rather than as a mistake or a dead-end from which we must retreat. What comes out of World War I and, later, the Great Depression both falsifies and confirms Hilferding and Hobson, in different ways. This is why it is so difficult to read Lenin's pamphlet in its proper register.

Going back to Luxemburg, when she writes about capitalism reaching its limits, as exhibited by credit, financialization, etc., we must keep in mind that, for *her*, "limit" means "contradictions." Bernstein thinks capitalism will gradually become socialism, but Luxemburg does not simply oppose this by saying, "capitalism is reaching its limits," period. Rather, her real argument with Bernstein is about whether and how this is a *contradictory* phenomenon. Luxemburg accuses Bernstein of treating phenomenon like financialization and the extension of credit to the working class as "un-contradictory," whereas she wants to uphold the dialectical view that these kinds of socialization through capitalism *exacerbate*, rather than ameliorate, contradiction. That is to say, we are tasked as socialists to treat it as an *opportunity*.

Leo, you were talking about the apparent political "success" of social democracy in the 1990s. I was wondering if you considered the ultimate failure of social democracy—which happened alongside the failure of the communist parties—to be a necessary *failure? What was the relationship between the communist project and the social democratic parties, after 1914? Was this supposed "success" of social democracy by the 1990s the necessary outcome of that split?*

LP: No, it was not a necessary outcome. I was using the word "success" by the 1990s as an index of failure in terms of the project for socialism. But they *were* having electoral success. By the time we get to the 1990s, many people around the world were saying, "Okay, communism's gone, but social democracy can ride the wave of neoliberalism, achieving universal healthcare and sustaining the welfare state." Of course, social democracy could not actually do that, and this is especially clear in 2016.

Speaking of 2016, I hope people have not mistaken me to be blaming the white working class for the events of this past year. I blame social democracy for abandoning not only the white working class but also, for instance, the Asian working class—which voted for Brexit, by the way. It is one of the illusions of politically correct identity politics to think there is not racism within and among people of color. For heaven's sake, look at Latin America! Of course a good number of Latino workers are open to xenophobic appeals, which points to a failure on our part, insofar as they had previously been open to politicization by the Left or by labor-oriented institutions, but were not sustainably mobilized or organized by them.

Why do you think we can study 1917 any better than those before us? Is there a greater opportunity for us to understand or recover 1917 because we are further from it? Or is that more of a liability for us?

CC: I could put a finer point on what I was getting at in my opening remarks. The paradox of 1917 is that failure and success are mixed together in its legacy. Therefore, the fact that 1917 is becoming more obscure is an opportunity as well as a liability. We are tasked not only with understanding the opportunity, but also with trying to make the liability into an asset. The various ways in which 1917 is falsely claimed, in a positive sense—we can call that "Stalinism," we can call it all sorts of things—has dissipated. We have to try to make use of that. What has faded is not the revolution, perhaps, but the counter-revolution. In other words, while not entirely gone, the stigmatization of 1917 throughout the 20th century and the horror at the outcome of revolution—these are fading. In *that* way we might be able to disentangle the success and the failure differently than it has been attempted in the past.

LP: Perhaps so, but let's not go back to the attempts by various Trotskyist groups to stand outside of plants with their newspaper, thinking that they are going to attract workers through a debate over the nature of the USSR, about "state capitalism" and "deformed" versus "degenerate" workers' states. I wish we were not discussing 1917. I wish we were discussing 2015, during which a radical Left party, SYRIZA, came into government. Bryan put it very well. SYRIZA did not capitulate so much as it was *subordinated* by powerful interests in Europe, led, above all, by Germany. The question was if Greece, as the weakest link in the European Union, broke away, would others follow their example and leave the EU, thus provoking a general crisis of neoliberalism in Europe? SYRIZA decided that was not going to happen. I wish we were talking about the dilemmas and failures of SYRIZA. There were people in SYRIZA who saw their main task being to bring greater resources to the solidarity networks, providing alternative forms of production and consumption. They were marginalized when SYRIZA came to power, however, as the main concern instead became finding well-trained people to go into this corrupt state and actually run an efficient bureaucracy. That, too, reflected an inability to transform the state. I wish we were talking about that, rather than the much more arcane language of Russia in 1917.

BP: I agree with Chris that there are two sides to our distance from 1917. I would offer this warning, however. In the great separation between 1917 and our period, there is the danger that the revolution's accomplishments become abstractions. We can then very easily forget the great historical accomplishment of 1917 and what that meant to the masses of workers around the world who were inspired by it. We can also forget the repression undertaken by numerous capitalist nations that basically fought World War I on the Russian front. We can forget how that stifled and suffocated the revolution. Without wanting to give excuses, those conditions did play a large part in the undemocratic procedures that came about after 1917.

CC: In 1917 the working class had been organized to take state power and to reconstitute the state, but conditions militated against it. Nonetheless, there was a real achievement in terms of advancing possibilities. However, those possibilities were translated in various paradoxical ways as a function of subsequent history. We could consider the increasing power and rule of the bureaucracy in the USSR, for instance. In some ways it was the resurrection of the old Tsarist bureaucracy, in other ways it was a kind of petty-bourgeois importation into the state—and yet it was the working class, organized for revolution, that *created* the new bureaucracy. That is an achievement of sorts, but an extremely paradoxical achievement. I think what the revolution of 1917 meant to workers around the world was, "We can do this." And that is profound.

BP: Yes. Regarding Leo's point about the "deformed or degenerate workers' state" debates at the factory gates, there *were* many workers in the 1930s who understood that debate and wanted to have it. That seems very strange to us, today, because we have lost something due to our distance from that time period. This distance may give us an opportunity, but we must try to recover what was lost, first, and then deal with the more nuanced analysis.

In 1956, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno had a discussion about rewriting the Communist Manifesto. Horkheimer pointed out that the Soviet Union was under the rule of bureaucracy, whose authoritarian governance shared characteristics with fascism. But they both also said the USSR, even in 1956, nonetheless stood for something more important or even better than the Western world. Today, in reflecting on 1917, does it help us or hurt us that the Soviet Union no longer exists?

BP: Although Stalinism is repugnant to revolutionary socialists, because it has soured socialism in the mouths of millions of people around the world, nevertheless the demise of the Soviet Union is a tremendous setback. It is a tremendous setback in the sense that it has destabilized the world and given undiluted power to the U.S. as a global empire. So I cannot see much in the way of positives to the fact that the Soviet Union no longer exists. But grappling with that question brings forth a whole series of other issues that are far more complicated.

LP: As more time passes since the fall of the Soviet Union, I think our distance from it allows the terms "socialism" and even "communism" to be recovered in the 21st century. We saw that with the Sanders phenomenon. His idea of socialism may have just meant, "Denmark," but people were hearing the word "socialism" and were attracted, or at least not repelled, by it. In that sense there is a positive side to the fall of the USSR. However, Bryan's point on this is well taken. Breakthroughs in particular countries in the 20th century were facilitated because the Soviet Union gave them breathing room in an imperialist world. Of course, what came with that was the very heavy imposition of the Soviet model, both politically and economically. Still, we are not better off now that the USSR no longer offers a kind of buffer geopolitically.

What is positive about the *current* moment is that it is, or could be, the graveyard of the "Third Way," of Blairism and Clintonism. It is also the graveyard of the claim that, liberated from the Soviet Union, Eastern European nation states will all develop into wonderful bourgeois democracies. What we have seen instead is the recrudescence of fascism. We need to hammer that fact home. What you see in Hungary, Poland, and above all in the Ukraine is the revival of the political forces that killed my relatives, who were not shot by German soldiers, but by Ukrainian nationalists.

In the face of all that, it is incumbent on us to *improve* Marxism. I am very suspicious about going back to the classics if we are not trying to discover and move beyond their limitations. It is extremely "un-materialist" to do that, of course. It involves an idealistic reading. So it is really important that we see ourselves as developers of Marxism—as people trying to make it *better*, rather than simply going back to it. What we can and need to take from the classics is how to become organizers. Maybe if there is a massive precariat the younger generation will find they have no alternative but to become organizers. The material base might be developing for that. Young leftists will not find cushy jobs in the university the way that many in the 1960s and 1970s generation did. Perhaps they will have to become revolutionary organizers and develop Marxism.

CC: The USSR collapsed. Whether it is good or bad, it happened—we have to reckon with it. The real question is whether conditions for the Left outside the USSR were better when it existed. I would connect that question to the mixed legacy of the 1990s: the "New World Order," the triumphalism, and the hope that, freed of the exigencies of the Cold War, you could have "capitalism with a human face" (as opposed to the slogan of Prague in 1968, "socialism with a human face"). The illusion of the Third Way was that we would not be blackmailed into the kind of "mean capitalism" necessitated by the Cold War. But, of course, the 1990s ended, and with it that boom, or "bubble," of optimism also ended.

The first time that I read the *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* by Marx, I was struck not so much by what he said about Bonaparte or the working class, but what was said about the lumpenproletariat and the peasants. Being from a working class background, I observed the effects of the 1970s downturn on my immediate milieu—my family, my neighborhood, and so on. What Marx said about the "sack of potatoes," the "walking dead," the "Lazarus layer of the working class," all rang true. The kinds of social pathology that were offered as explanations for Trump—the opioid epidemic, increased death rates among white people, middle-aged men who should be working but are instead dependent on disability benefits—all that stuff was there in the 1970s. What Marx said about the ambient social circumstances of capitalism, as opposed to just the working class per se, has really stuck with me. So, later on, when I heard these terms like "precariat," I just thought, "Where have you *been*?" That had already been my life, for thirty years or more!

Bringing it back around to Bonapartism, I would like to connect that to something Leo brought up, about whether struggles for reforms provide opportunities for the self-organization of the working class, or whether they are just ways of deferring political responsibility to the state. That question is encoded in the loaded term, "Bonapartism," which among other things can help us think about how the working class goes from being aspiring social subjects to being objects of policy—objects of government administration—and therefore objects of politics, but only in a very debased way. Really, the working class becomes objects of pseudo-politics and demagogy. We need to recognize how that is built into this language of Bonapartism; otherwise, its connotation becomes too particular and narrow. What happens when the working class is defeated? What does society start to look like? And why do the petite bourgeoisie and the lumpenproletariat, rather than working class rule, become the "spectre" haunting politics? That is already there in the classics. Going back to the writings of Marx and Engels, one finds this whole penumbra of meaning. |**P**

Transcribed by Matt Cavagrotti and Audrey Crescenti

1 Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times: A Twentieth-Century Life* (New York: Pantheon, 2003), 218.
2 See the foreword to Geoff Eley, *Forging History: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850–2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).
3 Quoted in *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*, by E. P. Thompson and Peter Linebaugh (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2011), 305.
4 See Isaac Deutscher, "The Unfinished Revolution 1917–1967," *New Left Review* I/43 (May–June 1967).
5 See Deutscher, "The Unfinished Revolution 1917–1967."
6 See Mike Davis's editorial, "Spring Confronts Winter," in *New Left Review* 72 (November–December 2011). Available online at <newleftreview.org/II/72/mike-davis-spring-confronts-winter>.
7 An edited transcript of this panel discussion was published by Platypus. See "What is Political Party for the Left?" in *Platypus Review* 74 (March 2015). Available online at <https://platypus1917.org/2015/03/01/political-party-left-2/>.
8 See Lenin, "Terms of Admission into Communist International," first published in 1921. Available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/jul/x01.htm>.

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> revolution. And thirdly, to join any body of men which is honestly striving to give means of expression to that discontent and that hope, and to teach people the details and aims of the constructive revolution.[3]

It was Morris's purpose, whether he addressed audiences large or small—and more often he addressed handfuls of people, rather than rooms like this—to stir them up, to inspire them not to be contented with too little. Insisting that those who were satisfied with what small offerings capitalism claimed it could offer never managed to get even the crumbs, Morris told his audiences that they can either struggle to be free, or remain mired in enslavement. I stress this because in the defeats on the Left in recent decades—which have been marching in seven league boots, to borrow the metaphor from Marx—the idea of revolution is itself drawing fewer and fewer adherents. The notion that it is possible to have a revolutionary transformation, that the very idea could be on the agenda, is something that much of the Left has lost sight of. When you lose your grip on that, you will be contented with too little.

The year 1917 inaugurated a revolution that was, in the end, thwarted by capitalist containment and suffocation, and betrayed by Stalinism to the point that its legacies are now pilloried. It is repudiated by most of today's leftist critics of inequality. And yet, the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 was a world-historic event that made a decisive impact on modern history, directly facilitating many of the events and developments of the 20th century. However one may view it, one has to attend to it. From the class mobilizations and anti-capitalist struggles of the 1920s and 1930s, through World War II and the anti-colonial movements of the 1960s and beyond, to the global upheavals of 1968, the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 has had a determinative influence, the meanings of which demand our attention. If I had two hours, as Morris often did, I would then speak to you about the particulars of this. About, for instance, class struggle initiatives, about the cultural developments in the arts, about the women's question, about race and struggles against inequality, about the anti-colonial struggles—all of which, from the time of the revolution of 1917 through the later 20th century, had been advanced by addressing the revolution and its meanings. But also, all of which were in many ways stifled by the revolution's Stalinist denouement.

All of the above set the stage for the arrival of the New Left, the birth of which, whether in Britain, America, or elsewhere, was inseparable from the structures of the Cold War and the rigid oppositional blocs that defined the post-WWII period: Soviet Stalinized communism versus corporate capitalism. These blocs were further riven by the antagonism of almost every revolutionary movement, and particularly by the colonial revolutionary movements, of the post-WWII period. The Vietnam imbroglio, with its pressures on both the ethical, moral standing of the state and on the Keynesian balance on guns or butter, propelled the domestic American political economy towards crisis. The United States was impaled on the horns of youthful protests, inner-city black insurgencies, and a war across the world that it could not win.

For the first time since the mass industrial union struggles that reached from the late 1930s into the 1940s, young workers exploded in rebellious antagonism in this period, upping the decibel level of class struggle in articulations of alienation that echoed even in the pages of *Life*, *Fortune*, and the *New York Review of Books*. Journalistic commentary noted a troublesome blue-collar blues that convulsed pivotal industries. The Fordist dream of the post-war settlement was turning into a nightmare of class antagonism. Capital and the state awoke to a maelstrom of shock and convulsions, growing over the 1960s and peaking from 1969 to 1972. All of this looked too much like the demonized campus uprisings and the anti-war mobilizations of 1968. Isaac Deutscher, for one—an Old Left figure attractive to the New Left—recognized revolution's ongoing significance, stressing that in spite of Stalinization and ostensible de-Stalinization, "Whatever may be the malaise," he wrote, "the heart searchings and gropings of the post-Stalinist era testify in their own way to the continuity of the revolutionary epoch."[4] For Deutscher, decades of totalitarian rule inside the Soviet Union had robbed the people of their capacity for self-expression, spontaneous action, and self-organization. That said, Deutscher acknowledged that even Trotsky, in the last year of his exile, just before his assassination by a Stalinist agent, insisted that the revolution had not come to an end. His deportation from the Soviet Union notwithstanding, he concluded, "the great divide of 1917 still looms as large as ever in the consciousness of mankind."[5]

Now, how do we assess the revolution's currency in our own particular moment? It's difficult, of course, not to accent the contradictory nature of recent developments. To be sure, there are abundant signs that the revolutionary left and its attachment to the legacies of 1917 are on the decline. This has been evident not only with respect to the fortunes of socialist feminism, but in terms of the general waning influence of revolutionaries and leftists of all stripes in the labor movement. Aside from pockets of entrenched influence, Marxism in the academy has become something of a marginalized voice, whereas it once had more of a purchase with students in the aftermath of the 1960s. The implosion and decline of revolutionary organizations of the New Communist and Trotskyist kind, first evident in the 1970s, has continued over the next decades. Moreover, we have witnessed the collapse of actually existing socialism in the Soviet Union and its satellites, throughout once-Soviet Central and Eastern Europe, now largely incorporated into the European Union. In the outposts of the planned economy that remain, such as China and Cuba, the drift to capitalist restoration is discernible. The experiment of African socialism, in which so much hope was invested in the 1960s, has slowly spiraled downward, the arc of its politics tending toward authoritarianism.

More recently, the long march of the Brazilian left to power and the subsequent reckoning by right-wing terror and military dictatorship, stalled in the morass of populism, concessions to austerity, and corruption, was a development hardly unique throughout Latin America. The promise of the Arab Spring, so electrifying in 2011, is in an undeniable blackout. Mike Davis, writing amidst the hopes and dreams unleashed in Tahrir Square, asked, "Will an Islamic majority government ensure the right of the new left and independent unions to organize and campaign openly? This will be the litmus test of Egyptian democracy."[6] The answer, now apparent, is anything but comforting for the Left. In the context of an unstable European Union, Greece's SYRIZA suffered subordination at the hands of large national capitalist power brokers headed by Germany. Even at the point of resistance, the mercurial politics of anarchist-inflected anti-globalization struggles that erupted in the eventful years reaching from the Battle of Seattle in 1998 to the Occupy Wall Street mobilizations of 2011, fit uneasily with the legacies of 1917 in theory and practice. Moreover, their concrete achievements have been ambiguous at best.

This, however, is not the sum total of what needs to be addressed, analyzed, and acted upon. For all the downside of this sober accounting, there are other considerations. Even as events suggest a troubling reality, there are indications of openings through which the politics of revolution can find new and invigorated life, for capitalism will inevitably push people toward resistance. Crisis after crisis appear to be accelerating the time frame. The 20th century was generally hailed as capitalism's ultimate triumph. However, if you look at the crises over this period, which have been and are being managed in large part because there is *not* a revolutionary opposition, they are increasingly squeezed into shorter and shorter -periods. The pressures, then, on the working class are consequently greater. This will, I would argue, inevitably create resistance, and that resistance will be driven to look back to 1917 and its meanings.

Bringing revolution back into the theory and practice of the Left in a more frontal way, reconnecting current thinking and struggles with the legacies of 1917 in the *longue durée*, is just one component of the contemporary challenge of our times. With the ideologues of the marketplace and acquisitive individualism so ascendant, a foundational continuity with the present of the Left and its pasts has not only been broken, but has been in some measure even been forgotten. Recovery and resuscitation become small but important acts in the renewal and rebirth of the Left. This does not mean, of course, repeating the mistakes and shortcomings of the past, or arguing that we live in the same conditions and must follow the same trajectories of past revolutions,. But we must nonetheless maintain that commitment to the revolutionary alternative in all of its meanings. Revolution's present, like its past, is necessarily subject to the same expansive understandings that have always animated the concrete struggles of those who, like William Morris—and, yes, like Lenin, Luxemburg, and Trotsky—imagine their purpose as revolutionaries to be to stir the people up, and not to be contented with too little. Amidst the determined structure of limitation of our current situation we need a new spectre of agency—one that will haunt the globe amidst the ravages of late, decaying capitalism, one that can and turn the tides of change in entirely new and socialist directions.

Leo Panitch: There's a certain irony that at meetings like this, a quarter of a century after the demise of Communism, we should be talking about 1917 and the Russian Revolution. But to get beyond irony, indeed to validate why it is important to redeem something from 1917, I think we have to begin at least a quarter-century before 1917. We have to begin with the remarkable development that, almost forty years after the Communist Manifesto, mass socialist parties emerged across a range of countries as permanent organizations of the subordinate class. In this period it looked like it might happen in the United States, too. In the 1880s, the American working class was by far the most militant.

There have always been bread riots, there have always been slave revolts, but these permanent organizations of the subordinate class formed in the late 1800s and early 1900s were a new phenomenon. Of course, that had to do with the nature of capitalism. There was a material base for it. Freedom of association gave scope to these new parties, although that freedom was not simply provided, and was not strictly required. People tend to forget that the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), which was treated, including by Lenin, as the model party, remarkably managed to build itself through the 1880s in spite of legal proscription. Some 1,300 newspapers and magazines were shut down in those years, while 1,500 activists were jailed and over 300 trade unions associated with the Social Democrats were dissolved by the state. So, even though the repeal of anti-socialist laws in 1890 was a boon, the emergence of these organizations was not entirely dependent upon the freedom of assembly.

As I mentioned, the Russian revolutionaries modeled the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party on the German SPD. Lenin's discussion in 1895 of party program is explicitly related to the Germans' Erfurt Program of 1891. What Lenin articulated is that the task of the party is class consciousness, which means pushing beyond trade-union consciousness, and I think this is how most social democrats understood their work at this time. Lenin clarified that class consciousness is not just something you add on to trade-union consciousness; it requires the active intervention by socialists in order to drive a politics of class formation.

Today, more than two decades after the demise of communism, things appear very different from how they seemed in the immediate aftermath of 1991. Remember, in 1992 Bill Clinton was elected promising universal health insurance, saying during the campaign, "It's the economy, stupid!" Here it is important to point out that there is no real difference between the Democratic Party in the U.S., European social democratic parties, or the Canadian New Democratic Party (NDP). Have no illusions. There are the same linkages with the union bureaucracies, the same orientation to policy, the same understanding of the state as simply a policy machine neutral to whoever happens to get elected, and none of the branches of these parties are engaged in developing the capacities of the working class. Around this time, In 1990, the NDP—our social democratic party—is elected for the first time in the largest province in Canada, under the leadership of Bob Rae. By 1995, most countries in the developed world are run by some variety of party claiming to be of social democratsparties. Around this time, what you constantly hear from political science departments, especially in America, is, "Well look at the European variety of capitalism. Look at the social democratic variety of capitalism. We may be mired in Anglo-American neoliberalism, but that's viable."

Where are we a quarter-century after *that*? It is apparent that there were two failures: a historic and general failure of social democracy alongside the historical failure of the Communist parties. That failure is so deep, so great, that in 2016, working-class constituencies and communities that traditionally voted Communist or social democratic, areare now voting for scoundrels who appealed directly to the working class, in class terms, but on the basis of xenophobic attacks on immigrant communities. Where have we ended up, from the creation of those remarkable parties, to their very class constituency being open to this? This isn't just a matter of the U.S. and Trump. Brexit in the United Kingdom reflects this, with the most deeply embedded Labour voters, constituencies that have voted Labour continually since 1924, supporting Brexit. I am not a proponent of the neoliberal institutions of the European Union, but voting for Brexit on xenophobic grounds, mobilized by racist appeals, is a reflection of the failure of social democracy, not only the failure of communism. We are seeing something similar in France, with Le Pen rallying an enormous working-class base whileas the Socialist Party trails in the polls.

In my view, neoliberalism as an ideology was never that popular amongst the working classes. When Perry Anderson said in 2000 that neoliberalism is the most successful ideology in world history, I think he was wrong. People forget the fierce opposition to NAFTA, and free trade more generally, from 1992 to 1994. People forget the mobilization of Indian peasants in 1995 against free trade. People forget Seattle, for heaven's sake, when "Teamsters and Turtles" came together. So it was never all that popular ideologically. The problem is that there was not a vehicle for those discontents, apart from the very negative and to some extent racist way that, say, the AFL-CIO wanted China out of the World Trade Organization. Rather than putting resources into building independent trade unions in China, as they did in Poland, they were largely engaged in a kind of Yellow Peril appeal.

What we have seen in the present juncture is not a delegitimization of neoliberal ideology, but a delegitimization of neoliberalism's *institutions*. That includes not only the party institutions of social democracy—for which, clearly, many long-embedded contradictions of neoliberal "social democracy" are coming home to roost—but also institutions like the European Union. In that context, we have seen a remarkable development, with a shift from protest to politics. The emphasis appears to have moved away from anti-neoliberal protest and returned to the question of political parties and the importance of entering the state. With Occupy, we had protests that were class-focused, as seen in the slogan of the "99 percent" against the "1 percent," but not class-*rooted*. The shift since then from protest to politics has taken different forms, from the Indignados and Podemos to the occupations in Syntagma Square in Athens and the solidarity networks of SYRIZA. However, even with this new emphasis on class-focused politics, these formations are still are not class-rooted, in the sense that the social democratic and communist parties once were, with deep roots, organizationally and culturally, in the working class. Those roots are absent, including in recent developments in the old parties, like the Corbyn and Momentum insurrection inside the Labour Party, or the Bernie Sanders phenomenon.

As we consider the revolutionary legacy in light of where we are now, it is important that we not look back from the point of view of nostalgia. Simone Signoret, the great French communist actress, wrote a great memoir in the 1970s, *Nostalgia Isn't What It Used To Be*, in which, among other things, she recounts her affiliation with the Communist Party. We also should not look back the way Enzo Traverso describes in his book, *Left-Wing Melancholia*, about Benjamin, Adorno, and Daniel Bensaïd, all of whom, he argues, were haunted by the defeated revolutions of the past. My generation, the generation of the 1960s, did not become socialists because of the example of the Soviet Union. We became socialists against that example. However, a good portion of us looked to 1917 and the Bolsheviks as the common point of departure of our politics. What we needed to reclaim was the audacity and the strategic brilliance of the Bolsheviks.

In my view, which has been further confirmed as the years have passed, the attempt to build a new and better Leninist party in the post-1968 period was a failure because the language of Bolshevism was arcane by 1970. Would you go around today trying to express your revolutionary ambitions in terms of a "workers' state" and the debate with the Mensheviks? It is not that the politics were sectarian because the people were innately sectarian. Rather, their sectarianism was a product of their isolation, which resulted in turn from taking the Bolshevik Revolution as the departure point *and* the endpoint of their politics.

Others have attempted to revive the educational, pedagogical, and developmental aspect of social democratic parties, including in the U.S. The Shachtmanites and other socialists were heavily involved in the New Politics movement inside the Democratic Party from 1968 to 1972. They ran up against the trade-union bureaucracy that accused them of being middle-class kids who were attacking the class basis of the Democratic Party. Ultimately you ended up with Clinton and Gore putting the last nail in the coffin of achieving the attempt to achieve democratic reforms through the Democrats. The same thing happened in the United Kingdom with the Bennite movement, the Greater London Council, and the campaign for Labour Party democracy, out of which Corbyn comes. Part of the problem there, as with those trying to create a better Leninism, was self-delusion. The Bennites said, "We are returning the Labour Party to its original social democratic roots. We are returning the Labour Party to socialism." Bullshit! The Labour Party was *never* socialist in the sense of class struggle, and those who controlled the Labor Party had as much right to claim that *their* vision of the party was closer to its legacy than was Tony Benn's.

As we see socialist parties evolve through the course of the 21st century, a few things need to be observed. The first is that capitalism is not doomed to collapse. Two, socialism is a marathon, not a sprint. We are not going to get there through insurrection in a country like this, given how the military is controlled and organized. Three, because of the time we need to develop socialist parties and build our capacities, liberal democracy is crucial. Without freedom of association, we will not have the political space to do this. Four, capitalist contradictions today, including the tendency toward crisis, but not only that, are likely to be closing the space for liberal democracy, which will poseaposes a difficult dilemma. Do we combine in alliances and popular fronts with anybody to the left of the authoritarians, in order to preserve liberal democracy? If we do that, however, we nolimit our ability to articulate socialist politics independently. That is a major dilemma at the current conjuncture. I do not think we should in any way be dissuaded from trying to build socialist parties anew, but it will be a major problem if the authoritarian tendencies of capitalism come to the fore in the coming years.

Chris Cutrone: The Frankfurt School approached the problem of the political failure of socialism in terms of the revolutionary subject, namely, the masses in the democratic revolution and the political party for socialism. However, in the failure of socialism, the masses had led to fascism and the party had led to Stalinism. What was liquidated between them was Marxism, or proletarian socialism; what was liquidated was the working class politically constituted as such, or, the class struggle of the working class—which for Marxists required the goal of socialism. The revolutionary political goal of socialism was required for the class struggle or even the working class per se to exist at all. For Marxism, the proletariat was a Hegelian concept: It aimed at fulfillment through self-abolition. Without the struggle for socialism, capitalism led the masses to fascism and led the political party to Stalinism. The failure of socialism thus conditioned the 20th century.

The legacy of the Russian Revolution of 1917 is a decidedly mixed one. This variable character of 1917's legacy can be divided between its actors—the masses and the party—and between the dates, February and October 1917.

The February 1917 revolution is usually regarded as the democratic revolution and the spontaneous action of the masses. By contrast, the October Revolution is usually regarded as the socialist revolution and the action of the party. But this distorts the history—the events as well as the actors involved. What drops out is the specific role of the working class, as distinct from the masses or the party. The soviets or workers' and soldiers' councils were the agencies of the masses in revolution. The party was the agency of the working class struggling for socialism. The party was meant to be the political agency facilitating the broader working class's and the masses' social revolution—the transformation of society—overcoming capitalism. This eliding of the distinction of the masses, the working class and the political party goes so far as to call the October Revolution the "Bolshevik Revolution"—an anti-Communist slander that Stalinism was complicit in perpetuating. The Bolsheviks participated in but were not responsible for the revolution.

As Trotsky observed on the 20th anniversary of the 1917 Revolution in his 1937 article on "Stalinism and Bolshevism"—where he asserted that Stalinism was the "antithesis" of Bolshevism—the Bolsheviks did not identify themselves directly with either the masses, the working class, the revolution, or the ostensibly "revolutionary" state issuing from the revolution. As Trotsky wrote in his 1930 book, *History of the Russian Revolution*, the entrance of the masses onto the stage of history was something Marxism had to reckon with, for good or for ill. How had Marxists done so?

Marx had observed in the failure of the revolutions of 1848 that the result was "Bonapartism," namely, the rule of the state claiming to act on behalf of society as a whole and especially for the masses. Louis Bonaparte, who we must remember was himself a Saint-Simonian Utopian Socialist, claimed to be acting on behalf of the oppressed masses, the workers and peasants, against the capitalists and their corrupt—including avowedly "liberal"—politicians. Louis Bonaparte benefited from the resentment of the masses towards the liberals who had put down so bloodily the rising of the workers of Paris in June 1848. He exploited the masses' discontent.

One key reason why, for Trotsky, Stalinism was the antithesis of Bolshevism—that is to say, the antithesis of Marxism—was that Stalinism, unlike Bolshevism, identified itself with the state, with the working class, and indeed with the masses. But this was for Trotsky the liquidation of Marxism. It was the concession of Stalinism to Bonapartism. Trotsky considered Stalin to be a Bonapartist, not out of personal failing, but out of historical conditions of necessity, due to the failure of world socialist revolution. Stalinism, as a ruling ideology of the USSR as a "revolutionary state," exhibited the contradictions issuing out of the failure of the revolution.

In Marxist terms, socialism would no longer require either a socialist party or a socialist state. By identifying the results of the revolution—the one-party state dictatorship—as "socialism," Stalinism liquidated the actual task of socialism and thus betrayed it. Claiming to govern "democratic republics" or "people's republics," Stalinism confessed its failure to struggle for socialism. Stalinism was an attempted holding action, but as such undermined itself as any kind of socialist politics. Indeed, the degree to which Stalinism did not identify itself with the society it sought to rule,

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