

October 1917: Coup d'état or social revolution?

*The legitimacy of the Russian
Revolution*

Ernest Mandel



Gerd Arntz (1932)

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Presentation



The study which we publish in this *Notebook* is an interpretative, polemical and critical essay.

An interpretative essay because — although it is no longer very "fashionable" to refer to it — the Russian Revolution remains a major historical experience that must be analysed by those who want to understand the contemporary world, by those who want to shed some light on the problems posed by the fight for socialism.

It is a polemical essay because this revolution is today the subject of a real ideological campaign of denigration. It is increasingly identified with Stalinism and a bureaucratic dictatorship. To such an extent that one of the formative events of this century has become quite incomprehensible. To such an extent that Ernest Mandel, in doing the work of a historian and a political activist, must come back to the most basic (and thus essential) question: was October 1917 a totalitarian coup d'état or a socially liberating uprising?

A critical essay because there is nothing less enriching than an apologetic reading of history, even revolutionary history. While vigorously asserting the profound legitimacy of the Russian Revolution and defending the general orientation of the Bolshevik party, Ernest Mandel particularly underlines the main mistakes which were made, especially during the period 1917-21.

This essay is thus an important contribution to the discussion on the lessons of the history of Bolshevism.

We have slightly edited the original text, introducing a number of sub-headings and a greater number of explanatory footnotes. The author has also made a certain number of additions to the English edition.

As Ernest Mandel's work was organized according to themes and not chronology, we

asked François Vercammen to write a short historical introduction. Interesting in itself, it should be particularly useful to the readers who are not so familiar with the events of the period.

A complementary pedagogical apparatus has been added, particularly a guide to people, organizations and events mentioned to make this *Notebook* useful and accessible to all its readers.

P.D. & P.R.

The translation from the original French is by Penny Duggan and Steve Bloom. The illustrations used in this Notebook are taken from the work of Gerd Arntz, an artist of German origin who worked in Moscow for several years before coming to live in the Netherlands in 1934.

Abbreviations used

- CC: Central Committee
 CI: Communist International
 CP: Communist Party
 CPSU: Communist Party of the Soviet Union
 Kadets: Constitutional Democrats
 RSDLP: Russian Social Democrat and Labour Party
 RSFSR: Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic
 SPD: [German] Social-Democratic Party
 SR: Social-Revolutionaries
 SS: Nazi police
 USSR: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
 USPD: [German] Independent Social Democrat Party

The stages of the 1917 revolution

by François Vercammen

N° 17/18

During February 1917, in the midst of war, the autocratic Tsarist regime in Russia was overthrown by mass demonstrations. Eight months later, in October, the working class — supported by a popular uprising in the whole country — conquered political power and began to construct a new, socialist society. The 20th century was transformed.

As predicted by some, and feared by others, the World War of 1914 gave birth to revolution.

The crisis of the regime

The 1917 revolution was the final climax to an endemic crisis that shook Russian society during the second half of the 19th century. A great military power in Europe (but also an imposing force in Asia), it was a society trapped in economic backwardness whereas further West the capitalist mode of production triumphed. The Tsarist state had tried to use its power to bring about certain changes: agrarian reform, democratization of the administrative apparatus, modernization of the educational system, social legislation, recognition of the right to form workers' industrial organizations "from the top", cultural autonomy for the nationalities of the empire, etc. But each tentative reform was only partial and timid, and it was always followed by a counter-reform — all the more brutal since it was necessary to regain control of temporarily "liberated" social and political forces.

"Too little and too late": The crisis exploded in its totality for the first time in 1905. That revolution failed, but the reversal was only partial. In 1914 the declaration of war put a stop to a new wave of revolutionary strikes. Three years later history took its revenge: the world conflict became a powerful catalyst for all the suffering, the frustrations, and the hopes accumulated over the years.

Economic crisis: the regime was no longer able to feed its population. Political-institutional crisis: the autocratic state lost all legitimacy. Agrarian crisis: the hunger for land on the part of the peasantry was reinforced by the general difficulty of daily life. Crisis for the nationalities: they were increasingly suffocated by forced Russification.

The revolution of February 1917

Intolerable poverty during the winter of 1916-17 sparked off the revolution in February. Women — workers and housewives — lit the spark with their International Women's Day. Starting with textile workers, the strike extended rapidly and spontaneously to the entire proletariat of Petrograd — the capital of Russia at the time. In a few days the mass strike had been transformed into an insurrection, with the military garrison coming over to the revolution. The demand for "bread" was quickly joined by demands for "immediate peace" and "down with the Tsar". In the maelstrom of the insurrection,

workers found a way to organize themselves: through the formation of soviets (councils) — in the factories, in their neighbourhoods, and on a city-wide level — as well as through a red guard (revolutionary militia). Even at the front, the soldiers elected their own committees and ... their officers! Later, during the summer of 1917, the peasantry, in its turn, joined in. Thus the entire social base of the regime was eliminated.

Dual power

Between the end of February and the end of October 1917, Russia lived through a very specific kind of revolutionary situation: dual power. Sufficiently resolute to turn out the Tsarist regime in February, the working class was not immediately ready to take "full" power. But it covered the factories and cities with a dense network of councils which quickly expanded to include the army and, finally, the countryside. In essence a counter-power, these soviets — more and more numerous, better and better coordinated — threatened at any moment to overthrow the bourgeoisie.

Two of these soviet structures played a decisive role: those which, elected on a territorial basis exercised a political power "in society" from the outset, and the factory councils, which embodied the dynamic power of the working class.

These councils, resulting from the urgent needs of the masses, also reflected their level of consciousness and their political prejudices. In order for the task of taking power to become clearly posed it was necessary for a revolutionary party to put it forward, to make it a priority. The organization capable of doing this was the Bolshevik Party. But that group remained a minority among the workers and in the soviets until September 1917. Thus, the history of dual power is also the history of a struggle between different political parties — representing the workers and popular movements — over this decisive question of the revolution: for or against the taking of power by the soviets.

The changing relationship of forces: February-June

At the outset, different reformist currents (Mensheviks, Social-Revolutionaries, workerists) dominated these structures of self-organization. They led the soviets and, very quickly (by May 1917) were also taking part in the provisional (bourgeois) government. They attempted to contain the pressure of the masses through the politics of class collaboration.

The evolution of the situation within the workers councils during this period of dual power is, from that time forward, tightly linked to an intensifying class struggle.

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At the beginning of April, 1917, the first congress of the Soviets — declared to be "pan-Russian" but in reality limited largely to St. Petersburg — had 480 delegates from the capital, 138 from local councils, and 46 from the army. It agreed to support the bourgeois-liberal government of Prince Lvov (demanding, however, to exercise control over that government!). It supported continuing the military effort; at the same time calling for an extension of the movement for workers' councils into all countries.

At the end of April, the government again tried to promote a pro-war policy, provoking large demonstrations and a strong strike movement for immediate economic demands. The pendulum was swinging to the left. At the (first) congress of factory committees in Petrograd, the Bolsheviks already had a majority because of their support for the call for "an unconditional 8-hour work day", and "workers' control" (by a vote of 421 to 335). Paradoxically, at the top echelons of the state and on the level of the national soviet structures, this leftward shift first translated itself — to the detriment of the liberals — by reinforcing the position of the reformists (Mensheviks, Social-Revolutionaries). Initially, they entered into a coalition government "between the classes," which they led from that point on.

At the beginning of June, the real first congress of workers and soldiers deputies met. With its 1090 elected delegates (of which 822 were properly mandated and had the right to vote) it represented some 20 million people. Elected on the basis of universal suffrage, the congress constituted the most representative and democratic body that Russia had ever known. Based on a deepgoing political pluralism, it debated, over three weeks (June 3-30), all of the vital questions facing the population. The delegates included 283 SRs (Social-Revolutionaries), 248 Mensheviks, 105 Bolsheviks, and 73 unaffiliated individuals, with the rest divided between different small socialist groups. Its executive committee, which had the character of a virtual "counter-government", was composed of 104 Mensheviks, 100 SRs, 35 Bolsheviks, and 18 socialists from other currents. After a short time it combined forces with the Executive Committee of the All-Russian Peasant Congress, which was held separately, and where the SRs held an absolute monopoly.

The coalition government, very popular at the outset, rapidly discredited itself. Similar causes bring similar results, but flavoured with an awakening class consciousness: the popular masses intervened directly one more time in the political arena, with their own methods of struggle. Aware of the pressures developing at the base, the Executive Committee of the workers' councils, under reformist leadership, tried to take over the movement by allowing a demonstration. On June 18, in Petrograd, it was nevertheless the slogans of the Bolsheviks — especially "All Power to the Soviets" (still under the leadership of the reformists) — which was by far the most popular.

Revolution and counterrevolution: July-August

The new relationship of forces was tested during the "July days".

The initiative had been taken with the demonstration of June 18. The proletariat in the capital interpreted this first victory as a beginning of the final offensive. Going further than the Bolshevik party intended, the masses wanted to overthrow the government. However, this vanguard of the mass movement had failed to grasp the real situation. It was too far out in front. As a result, at the beginning of July, the pendulum swung sharply back again, quite far to the right. The bourgeoisie wanted to find a way to begin snuffing out the fire of the revolution. The man of the moment was named Kerensky.¹

Having become prime minister, Kerensky struck hard at the Bolshevik Party and the other revolutionary organizations. He tried to re-establish the cohesion of the army. He restored the death penalty, dissolved the insurgent regimes, and named General Kornilov to head the general staff. All of this was based on the "legality" of the workers councils and on their higher bodies; Kerensky was attempting to transform their subversive reality! The (reformist) Executive Committee of the Workers Councils actively collaborated with this political approach, helping to empty the soviets of their revolutionary content. They became discredited in the eyes of the vanguard workers.

Kerensky thus organized a general offensive against the conquests which the masses had imposed after February. In addition, he postponed indefinitely the realization of popular demands — always acknowledging them but... always postponing them for future consideration. The dual power was eroded, without totally disappearing as such. The Bolshevik Party experienced grave difficulties, but maintained its majority position among the working class (as demonstrated by the municipal elections which the party won at the end of August).

Some in "high places" believed that the hour for a radical counter-revolution had arrived: the military coup d'Etat. Kornilov turned his back on Kerensky and took his chances at the end of August, 1917 (similar events spring to mind: Allende and Pinochet, September 1973 in Chile; or Ebert-Noske and Kapp, Germany, 1920). In three days, the "army" with which Kerensky attacked the capital was routed. The soviets of Petrograd had taken the lead in the resistance. In this way they recaptured their place at the center of the workers' counter-power.

The revolution of October 1917

At the start of September the pendulum swung to the left just as sharply as it had swung right at the beginning of July.

Within the workers' councils, the Bolshevik Party became a majority — first in Petrograd and Moscow. Within the party, Lenin, still in exile in Finland, put

1. Kerensky's name has entered into the Marxist vocabulary. "Kerenskyism" designates, from that time forward, the ultimate bourgeois solution to crises which have the effrontery to open a door to the proletarian revolution. But once it proves incapable of defeating the power of the workers through such Bonapartist methods, Kerenskyism validates, in the eyes of the broad masses, the "extreme" revolutionary Marxist solution: the overthrow of the established order.

the seizure of power and the organization of the insurrection on the order of the day. He posed the question: When? How?

Between April and September the party learned to struggle for a majority within the soviets using the methods of workers' democracy. From that point on it was through revolutionary initiative that these organs of workers' democracy would become the new state apparatus.

Faced with this turning point, the Bolshevik Party suffered a grave internal crisis before a clear line could emerge. A "right" current, led by Zinoviev and Kamenev — constituting the majority at first in the central committee — hesitated, put off the moment for action, and wanted to reject the idea of insurrection. Between Lenin and Trotsky, both partisans of immediate preparation for the uprising, there developed, at times, a debate over the precise tactic that should be followed in pursuit of it. The left wing of the party finally gained the upper hand in the central committee on October 10.

The national congress of workers', soldiers', and peasants' councils was called for the end of the month. At the same time, the Military Revolutionary Committee, an organ of the Petrograd Soviet, with Trotsky at its head, responded to a provocation by the district military commandant, Polkovnikov (who wanted to dissolve the city garrison which was completely behind the revolution). Thus the insurrection began as a measure of self-defence. In a few hours the bourgeois apparatus of repression was dismantled in Petrograd. Political power was within reach. It was up to the national congress of workers' councils to make a final decision. Its political composition was now transformed from what it had been in June of 1917. Out of 650 delegates, the reformist bloc (the right wing Mensheviks and SRs) controlled less than 100. The Bolsheviks, for their part, had an absolute majority of around 390 delegates. They were joined by the left wing Mensheviks and left SRs. The reformists, a minority, walked out of the congress, shifting to the side of the counter-revolution.

A new executive committee of the workers' councils — a real legislative body for the new soviet power — was elected on a pluralist basis: 67 Bolsheviks, 29 left SRs, with 20 seats given to different revolutionary groups. The executive committee, in turn, elected the first government of the new workers' state. "We begin the construction of a new socialist order," declared Lenin.

A joyous and painless revolution at the outset! But it would have to pass through terrible trials during the civil war years, 1918-1920, before consolidating itself.

The parties of the revolution

The democratic self-organization of the popular masses is a fundamental and model aspect of the Russian Revolution. But this did not determine, by itself, the question of what politics would actually be pursued by the "counter-power".

This self-organization encompassed a plurality of parties, with their specific programs, tactics, activities, etc. During the Russian revolution it was the interaction between these parties and the territorial councils which determined the outcome (the trade

union movement was, for its part, extremely weak, and the activities of the factory committees remained subordinate, although important).

The political parties organized themselves very late and in a particular fashion (one which reflects the social reality of that epoch in Russia: a despotic state, paternalistic and totalitarian at the same time, overwhelming, suffocating or absorbing "civil society").

The Kadets: In 1917, aside from various monarchist groups which had become marginalized, the Kadets ("Constitutional Democrats"), constituted the main party of the dominant classes. This party formed the first provisional government, in the wake of the February 1917 revolution. Muliukov — professor, historian, and ideologue — was, along with Gutchkov, its principal leader.

The Workerists: Kerensky led, in 1917, the Popular Socialists, or Trudoviks (workerists). By then quite weak numerically, the party had known its hour of glory in the pseudo-parliaments of 1906-1914. There it represented the peasant masses who had been awakened to political life after 1905. This party grouped together political personalities, relying on the aspirations and dissatisfactions of the conservative petty-bourgeoisie in the provinces and in the countryside. Kerensky himself became a figure on whom the big bourgeoisie could rely.

The parties of the Second International: Three parties, all of which were members of the Second International, contested for the allegiance of the worker and peasant masses: The Mensheviks, the Bolsheviks, and the Social-Revolutionaries (SRs). All claimed to be socialist, that is to say Marxist, and revolutionary. Except for small minorities, each had, in 1914, adopted a hostile attitude toward the imperialist war. Therefore, the process of political clarification was complicated. It was necessary for these parties to be tested in the fire of battle during the eight months of dual power. The events of the summer of 1917 were conclusive: splits between left and the right wings of SRs and Mensheviks; revolutionary unity within the Bolshevik party. This did not eliminate a certain continuing degree of political confusion among the rank and file and in the periphery of each of these parties, and also between them.

The SRs: Officially reconstituted in 1902, this party rested on a long revolutionary tradition which originated in the middle of the 19th century. It had been a strong political adversary to the RSDLP (Russian Social Democratic Labour Party). Completely hegemonic in the peasant movement, the SRs also had a strong influence in big urban enterprises. Poorly organized and confused politically, the SRs helped — between February and August, 1917 — to guarantee an indispensable social base for the class collaborationist government, of which the Mensheviks constituted a political head.

During the summer of 1917, the SRs split between a left, revolutionary wing (Spiridonova, Kamkov), very close to the positions of the Bolsheviks, and a reformist right-wing (Chernov, Gotz), collaborating closely with the Mensheviks. By the end of 1917, the left SRs largely surpassed the right in influence.

The Mensheviks: They formed after 1903 as the "revolutionary right" wing of the RSDLP. The showdown of 1917 was not the only time that their

majority (Dan, Lieber, Tseretelli) engaged in incurably class-collaborationist politics. They would pay the price in a left split, led by Martov and Martynov. These two, genuine "centrists", opposed the war, had a base in the workers councils, and favoured a socialist revolution in 1917. But they hesitated and vacillated when confronted with the key problem of the revolution: the seizure and exercise of power.

The Bolsheviks: A faction within the RSDLP until 1912, the Bolsheviks became the key revolutionary party in 1913-1914, gaining the allegiance of worker cadres in the cities and the leadership of a general strike in Petrograd. The consolidation, implantation, and growth of the party came at the cost of internal struggles and debates: In 1914 there was a departure of the right-wing national chauvinists; in March and April 1917 the growth of a new opportunist wing (Stalin-Kamenev-Zinoviev), a majority — ready to support the liberal government, to accept the continuation of the war — which was opposed by the radical theses of Lenin. In July there was a struggle against an ultraleft current in favor of immediately seizing power and a fight against sectarianism on the part of an older layer of cadre who were reluctant to fuse with other currents (including Trotsky's). In August there was a debate about revolutionary initiatives and shifting the foundation for workers democracy from the territorial councils to the factory committees. Finally, in October, there was the debate with the right wing of the party over insurrection, a discussion which was replayed again and again, in many different keys, during subsequent years.

But in October, the Bolsheviks were a party of the masses which engaged in the struggle for power — a party recognized and supported by the popular movement.

The Mezhrayontsi: Trotsky, on the basis of his own revolutionary positions, had been a member of — or had been dragged along by — the Menshevik faction. He broke with them in August 1914. In July 1917, he rejoined the Bolsheviks, along with the Mezhrayontsi (the "interdistrict" or "intercraft" committees).

Active and influential in Petrograd, this revolutionary Marxist group was a small minority: 60 to 80 members in 1915, 150 on the eve of February 1917, 300 in April (the Bolsheviks were 16,000 at that time in Petrograd), 4,000 in July — when the Bolshevik Party could count 180,000 members throughout the country.

The minority currents: The phenomenon of the "intercraft" committees underlines the existence of many revolutionary currents and groups, marginal on the scale of the entire country but important at times in one city, one workplace, one sector. Among them were the anarchists, the revolutionary syndicalists, the "maximalists" (an ultraleft split from the SRs), the Menshevik Internationalists (Martov, Martynov), the United Social-Democratic Internationalists (small but influential because of the journal *Novy Zhizn* — New Life — of Maxim Gorky).

The international counter-revolution

The victory of October 1917 had powerful international repercussions. The call for an immediate end to the slaughter of the war and for the punishment

of those responsible — the ruling classes of Europe — raised hopes in the trenches and combativity in the workplace.

The governments signed an armistice in November 1918. But many countries were already undergoing revolutionary crises — imperial Germany first of all. Along with Tsarist Russia, Prussian militarism was the principal barrier against subversion on the European continent after 1789 (the French revolution). The country was destabilized by a rapid succession of struggles. Between 1918 and 1923, the German proletariat tried to "speak Russian". But it lacked a revolutionary party at its head, with the same combativity and organizational tradition. The revolutionary wave was crushed for the first time in January 1919. It reappeared no less powerfully in 1920, then in 1921 and 1923.

A union was conceivable between the USSR — a vast country with rich agricultural lands, but backward and living under precarious circumstances — and a socialist Germany — powerful, industrial, situated in the heart of Europe with a large proletariat constituting a mortal enemy to European reaction. Confronted with this potential "socialist bloc", a large imperialist coalition came together. It consisted of the German army (defeated but still imposing), a Russian army (out of power, but with which the White generals, that is the counter-revolutionaries, launched a civil war), and the military forces of France, England, and the United States — the "victors" in the war. This coalition invaded the USSR.

In the political arena, the activity of social democracy, having passed to the side of the capitalist system, was decisive. Dominant within the world working class, it cut off solidarity, discredited the USSR, and blocked the development of a revolutionary movement in Western Europe. It had a single goal: to crush the socialist revolution and restabilize the bourgeois order. The USSR was devastated by the civil war. In Finland, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Italy, the proletariat was defeated — at times with the aide of private armies of a new type: the "Freikorps" in Germany, the "fascists" in Italy.

In the USSR, six years of uninterrupted war from 1914 to 1920, provoked an economic, social, and human disaster. The workers' state, completely isolated, stood fast. But the construction of socialism suffered badly under these frighteningly difficult conditions.

The end of a cycle

1917-1923: The first cycle of the international revolution came to an end. Another cycle began, one of capitalist stabilization on a world scale. In the USSR the situation was favorable for the emergence of a privileged bureaucracy with Stalin at its head. Lenin, dying, undertook a "last struggle" against the bureaucracy between 1921 and 1923. In Western Europe social-democracy (the "stinking corpse" as Rosa Luxemburg called it) renewed itself. It (re)gained the leadership of the workers' movement in most countries. Mass trade unions were consolidated during the 1920s, as a result of reforms imposed on the bourgeoisie — which feared revolution and mass struggle.

October 1917: coup d'état or social revolution

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There is currently a real campaign of denigration of the October 1917 Revolution underway, in both the West and in Eastern Europe. It is often very bitter. It is based on historical falsifications and myths that are just as great as Stalinist myths and falsifications. Fighting against it is not only indispensable from a scientific and political point of view. It is also a question of intellectual cleanliness. The fight for truth is also a fight for a minimum of decency in public life.

In the first chapter we will deal with three of the myths that are the most frequently encountered in current polemical writing.

The myth of a minority coup d'état

The first mystification deals with the nature of the October Revolution. It was only a diabolical coup d'état organized by that master of manoeuvres Lenin, and carried out by a small sect of professional revolutionaries. The comments which followed the attempted coup d'état in Moscow on 26, August 1991 are very revealing from this point of view. Some went so far as to say that a second (failed) putsch made it possible to eliminate what a first (successful) putsch had created in 1917.

The truth is quite different. The October Revolution was the culminating point of one of the most deep-rooted mass movements ever known. In Europe of the period only the rising of the German workers in 1920 in reaction to the Kapp-von Luttwitz putsch, and the Catalan insurrection, in reaction to the military-fascist taking of power by the Francoists, were of comparable scope, but nevertheless more limited and less long-lasting.

Historical sources do not leave any doubt about the representativity of the Bolsheviks in October 1917. There is no need, to be convinced of this, to use the writing of those who were close to Lenin.¹ The scope of the mass movement before, during and after the October Revolution, is today well-established.² Here

1. See in particular David Mandel, *The Petrograd Workers and the Soviet Seizure of Power*, London, 1984. R. Lorenz, *Die russische Revolution 1917: Der Aufstand der Arbeiter, Bauern und Soldaten*, Nymphenburger Verlagsanstalt, 1981. J. Reed, *Ten Days which Shook the World* London, 1966. S.A. Smith, *Red Petrograd*, Cambridge, 1985. And obviously L. Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, Sphere Books, London 1967.

2. See, as well as the books mentioned in the previous note: E.H. Carr, *The Russian Revolution from Lenin to Stalin 1917-1929*, Macmillan,

we will simply cite some of the many testimonies from the Bolsheviks' opponents.

... the Bolsheviks were working stubbornly and without let-up. They were among the masses, at factory-benches, every day without a pause. Tens of speakers, big and little, were speaking in Petrograd, at the factories and in the barracks, every blessed day. For the masses, they had become their own people, because they were always there, taking the lead in details as well as in the most important affairs of the factory or barracks. They had become the sole hope, if only because since they were one with the masses, they were lavish with promises and sweet though simple fairy tales. The mass lived and breathed together with the Bolsheviks. It was in the hands of the party of Lenin and Trotsky.

To talk about military conspiracy instead of national insurrection, when the party was followed by the overwhelming majority of the people, when the party had already de facto conquered all real power, and authority, was clearly an absurdity.³

The German historian Oskar Anweiler, who was a severe critic of the Bolsheviks noted that:

The Bolsheviks were in the majority in the councils of deputies in almost all the big industrial centres and also in most of the councils of soldiers' deputies in the garrison towns.⁴

Marc Ferro, another ferocious critic of the Bolsheviks, could not stop himself noting that:

In the first place, Bolshevikization was the effect of the radicalization of the masses and was thus the expression of the democratic will...

The radicalization of the masses is sufficiently explained by the ineffectiveness of governmental policy (with the participation of the socialists since May) which, under cover of necessity, instituted conciliation procedures between the ruling and popular classes. Negotiation, far from changing the established order, perpetuated it...

From that time on, in the towns and in the army, there was discontent. Also, those who from the beginning, had contested the very principle of class collaboration were gratified, and among them the most intransigent, that is to say the Bolsheviks of the Lenin tendency. The workers demanded less inhuman working conditions. It was the brutal or cunning rejection of this by the possessing classes which led to the factory occupations, the sequestration of the owners and then, after October, vengeance on the bourgeoisie...

This movement had a popular basis whose forms of organization have been described. The fear of repression and

London 1979. G. Comte, *La révolution russe par les témoins*, Paris 1963. M. Ferro, *October 1917. A Social History of the Russian Revolution*, London 1980. R. Kohn, *Die russische Revolution in Augenzeugenberichten*, München 1977. M. Lieberman, *Leninism under Lenin*, London, 1975. R. Medvedev, *The Revolution of October*, New York, 1979. Among the analyses of the post-Stalinist Soviet Union, particularly in relation to the role of the working class: A.G. Egorova, *Rabocij klas v Oktjabr'skoj revolucii*, Moscow 1967. G.A. Trukan, *Rabocij klas v hobe za pobedu i uprocenie sovetskoi v lasti*, Moscow 1975. For a pre-Stalinist Soviet work, see P.N. Amosov et al: *Oktjabr'skaja Revolucija i Fabzavkomy*, Moscow 1927.

3. N.N. Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution 1917*, Volume II, Oxford 1955, pp. 528 et 579.

4. O. Anweiler, *Les Soviets en Russie 1905-1921*, Paris, 1971, p. 231.

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anger against the treacherous leaders were enough to explain the elementary absolutist attitude [!] of the committees which structured during their participation in the movement which led to October, which was not the absolutism attitude of the Bolsheviks but in solidarity with the movement they led.⁵

For Dan, one of the main Menshevik leaders, on the eve of the Revolution, the masses:

...began more and more frequently to express their discontent and their impatience with impetuous movements and ended...by turning to communism... Strikes followed one after the other. The workers sought to answer the rapid rise in the cost of living with wage rises. But all their efforts failed with the continuous drop in value of the paper money. The communists launched in their own ranks the slogan of "workers' control" and advised them to take the running of the factories into their own hands, in order to stop the "sabotage" of the capitalists. At the same time, the peasants started to take over the big properties, to chase out the land owners and to set fire to their manor houses for fear that the domains would escape from them between that point and the calling of the Constituent Assembly.⁶

The October Revolution took place under the slogan "All power to the Soviets". The historian Beryl Williams summed up the process which led to October in the following fashion:

Soviet power, rather than party programmes or the Constituent Assembly, was seen by the masses as the solution to their problems and only the Bolsheviks were really identified with soviet power...The party was now in a position to ride the popular wave into power.⁷

In the Second Congress of the Soviets, the supporters of the perspective "All power to the soviets" won 69.6% of the mandates. In the All-Russian Congress of Peasant Deputies, which met December 9-23, 1917, there was a slight majority (Left SRs and Bolsheviks) in favour of soviet power. The historian Anweiler concluded, in examining the attitude of the masses in relation to the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly by the Soviet government in January 1918 that:

In the ranks of the people it is rare that there were protests against the coercive measures of the Bolsheviks; and this was certainly not only because of intellectual and physical terrorism, which was still quite "soft" at the time. The fact that the Bolsheviks had very largely anticipated the decisions of the Constituent Assembly on questions as important as peace and land weighed no less heavily in the balance... The working and peasant masses were...more inclined to give their agreement to concrete measures by the new masters. Despite the deficiency of the soviets both in questions of organization and, often, representation, the masses considered them as "theirs".⁸

The myth of the bloody utopia: immediate socialism?

Second mystification and historical falsification: the Bolsheviks carried out their putsch in order to

5. M. Ferro, *Des soviets au communisme bureaucratique*, Paris, 1980, pp. 139-140, 164.

6. Dan, in Martov-Dan, *Geschichte der russischen Sozialdemokratie*, Berlin 1926, pp. 300-301.

7. B. Williams, *The Russian Revolution 1917-1921*, London, 1987, pp. 38,39.

8. O. Anweiler, op. cit, p. 274.

create in Russia, immediately or in the short term, an ideal society, a paradise on earth. They "put utopia in power" in the world of the Soviet historian Alexander Nekritch, from whom we are used to a little more objectivity.⁹

In reality, the taking of power by the soviets had a very precise aim: to obtain a certain number of concrete goals. These were: immediate end to the war; distribute the land to the peasants; ensure the right of self-determination for the oppressed nationalities; avoid the crushing of Red Petrograd which Kerensky wanted to give over the German army; stop the sabotage of the economy by the bourgeoisie; establish workers' control over production; stop the victory of the counter-revolution.

We can summarize their goals in the classic Marxist formula: to carry out the historic tasks of the (national) bourgeois democratic revolution through the establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat; that is to say the destruction of the state, particularly the apparatus of the bourgeois state. The revolution certainly rapidly grew over into the carrying out of socialist tasks. But this was not because the Bolsheviks were utopians. It was because the masses refused any self-limitation on their emancipation, as Trotsky had foreseen as early as 1906. Feeling themselves the masters in the state and in the street, they were not inclined to stay quietly in the factories, allowing themselves to be still and forever exploited.¹⁰

The initiatives to introduce workers' control multiplied spontaneously on the eve of and following the October revolution. They also led almost automatically to the expropriations of factories when industrialists tried to impose mass sackings or factory closures.¹¹

Between November 1917 and March 1918, 836 enterprises were nationalized; three-quarters of the orders of expropriation emanated from local organs such as factory committees, trade unions, local soviets, and local economic councils. Only 5% were nationalized by the centre.¹²

The Bolsheviks did not hope to achieve "utopia", that is immediate socialism in Russia alone. In fact, they unanimously rejected such an idea. Lenin never hid from the Russian masses that, for him, the historical role of winning power in Russia was to encourage the international revolution, particularly the German revolution (taking advantage of the fact that the relationship of forces was more favourable to the

9. A. Nekritch, *L'armée rouge assassinée*, Paris 1965.

10. On this see what remains the most impressive eye-witness account: V. Serge, *Year One of the Russian Revolution*, London 1972. Many striking testimonies are reproduced in S. A. Smith op cit.

11. S. A. Smith, op. cit, p. 223 f.

12. Thomas F. Remington, *Building Socialism in Soviet Russia*, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1984, p. 39.

proletariat in Russia than in any other country in the world).

Julius Braunthal has emphasized the importance of this question for Lenin:

"The whole future of the international workers' revolution, of socialism, is at stake." This argument recurred in practically all the articles and letters in which he pushed the Central Committee, in autumn 1917, to go into action. He repeated, "the growing maturity and the inevitable character of the world socialist revolution can no longer be doubted... We are on the threshold of the world revolution. We would be real traitors to the International if, in such a moment, in such favourable conditions, we did not respond to the appeal of the German revolution (for example [the sailors] of the German navy) by resolutions alone".¹³

Of course, it should not be assumed from what has been said that a socialist perspective was not an essential element in Bolshevik propaganda, that it had not influenced, even in only a marginal way, the concrete measures taken.

For Lenin and the Bolsheviks at that point — contrary to their positions before April 1917 — "soviet power", "workers' power" (or "workers' and peasants' power") and socialist orientation were practically considered as synonyms.

But Lenin incessantly emphasized that this only meant that it was possible — and necessary — to begin following this path, nothing more. Lenin knew that a fully developed socialist society (in the traditional, Marxist, sense of the term: a classless society) could only exist after the victory of the international revolution. He repeated this in January 1918 before the Third Congress of the Soviets:

I have no illusions about our having only just entered the period of transition to socialism, about not yet having reached socialism... We are far from having even completed the transitional phase from capitalism to socialism. We never cherished the hope we would finish it without the aid of the international proletariat.¹⁴

The myth of a party-sect of fanatics

Third mystification and historical falsification. The October 1917 "putsch" was perpetrated by a small sect of power-hungry, fanatical highly-centralized professional revolutionaries manipulated by Lenin.

In reality, from the months of February to October 1917, the Bolshevik Party became a mass party, bringing together the real vanguard of the Russian proletariat: the natural leader of the class, recognized as such. The number of professional revolutionaries (full-time organizers) in its ranks was extremely limited.¹⁵ This party was the least bureaucratized mass

13. J. Braunthal, *Geschichte der Internationale*, Vol. II, Berlin-Bonn 1978, p. 113.

14. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Volume 26, Moscow/London, p. 489.

15. In trying to show that from the beginning there was a tendency to bureaucratization of the mass movement, Ferro in fact proves the contrary. At the second conference of factory committees, the main

party ever known. There were barely 700 full-timers among 250-300,000 members. It functioned in a very democratic manner: there were numerous discussions and differences of opinion which were, in general, publicly expressed.¹⁶

This freedom of oppression did not only concern a few leaders who, when in minority, expressed their opinions publicly (like Bukharin or the "Left Communists"), including in separate daily newspapers. It also concerned entire bodies of the party. Thus, for months during 1917, the party committee in Viborg sent its own agitators into the Baltic fleet, to oppose the arguments of the Petrograd committee, which it considered too tolerant of the Provisional Government.

Two Bolshevik currents publicly disagreed during the conference of factory committees before the October Revolution. The first was represented by Miliutin and Larin, supported by Ryazanov, Lozovsky and Shliapnikov. It wanted to combine workers' control with the demand for central planning. The second, represented by Skrypnik and Chubar, insisted above all on decentralized initiatives at the base.

This tradition remained alive. There was still a trace of it to be found in 1921, at the Tenth Congress of the Communist Party, while the battle on the banning of factions raged (we will come back to this later). During the discussion, Lenin had vigorously attacked Kiselyov, a delegate who had criticized certain extraordinary disciplinary powers that the draft resolution gave the Central Committee. Having obviously been carried away in his polemic, he immediately made a self-criticism:

Comrades, I am very sorry that I used the word "machine-gun" and hereby give a solemn promise never to use such words again even figuratively, for they only scare people and afterwards you can't make out what they want. Nobody intends to shoot at anybody and we are sure that neither Comrade Kiselyov nor anybody else will have cause to do so.¹⁷

The Bolshevik Party was at that time a party fully integrated into Russian society and its living forces. This is the point tellingly made by the first platform of the Workers' Opposition, in its opposition to the rise of the Stalinist faction six years after the revolution:

The Party (was) ... that living independent collectivity which sensitively seizes living reality because it is bound to this reality

base of the Bolsheviks, the members elected directly by the workers were 93%, the members designated by the trade unions, the parties and the soviets 7%. At the third conference, that of October 1917, these percentages were respectively 88% and 12% (op. cit. p. 118). It is difficult to consider as "bureaucratized" or "becoming bureaucratized" a body of which 88% of its members are factory workers, directly elected by their workmates.

16. Trotsky points out in his *History of the Russian Revolution* that the Bolshevik party named 14 people as its representatives in the presiding committee of the Second Congress of the Soviets, 6 of whom were opposed to the insurrection.

17. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol 42, p. 289.

with a thousand threads.¹⁸

While the October Revolution was not a putsch, nor was it simply the culmination of a spontaneous mass movement. It was also an insurrection methodically prepared and carried out by the Bolsheviks and their allies, supporters of soviet power: the anarchists and the Left Social-Revolutionaries.

It was not a secret or minority insurrection. It was an insurrection organized in the full light of day, mainly within the institutions emanating from the soviets.

This was the result of a new legitimacy which had been accepted by the great majority of the workers and soldiers and, a little later, a good part of the peasants. The legitimacy of the soviets and the factory councils outstripped that of the Provisional Government, the military high command, the employers and the big landowners.

In the workplaces, the workers thus increasingly recognized the authority of the factory committees rather than that of the employers.¹⁹

In Petrograd, thanks to the agitation and organization masterfully led by Leon Trotsky, all the regiments of the garrison decided in public assemblies to no longer recognize the orders of the military hierarchy but those of the Soviet and the Military Revolutionary Committee.

18. Quotation from the platform known as that of "the 46". See *Documents of the 1923 Opposition*, London 1975, p. 7.

19. See in S.A. Smith (op. cit. pp. 58-60, 63-64, 85-86, 139 f.) the many initiatives of workers' control in the enterprises. The Red Guards themselves came from the militias established by these committees.



It was in these conditions that the "technical" overthrow of the Provisional Government should take place on October 25, with so little bloodshed. There were fewer deaths than are normally caused by road accidents during a normal weekend in the main countries of Europe. For those who counterpose the "glorious February Revolution" to the Bolsheviks' "bloody putsch", let us remind them that the first cost 1315 victims in Petrograd, while the second hardly a dozen.²⁰

In short, what was the revolution of October 1917? The culminating point of a formidable mass movement, guided towards the taking of power by a vanguard workers' party closely rooted in the masses. A party which sought above all to achieve the most burning immediate demands of the population, while aiming for broader national and international socialist goals.²¹

20. E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, Vol I, Penguin 1950, p. 160:

The almost effortless success of the Petrograd coup of 25 October 1917 seemed to show that it indeed had behind it the vast majority of the population. The boast of the Bolsheviks that the revolution itself cost remarkably few lives and that most of these were lost in attempts of their opponents to wrest the victory from them when it had already been won, was justified.

For the figures, W.H. Chamberlin, *The Russian Revolution, Volume 1 1917-18*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1952 (second edition), p.85.

21. S.A. Smith (op. cit. pp. 150-156) correctly opposes the thesis of many Western historians that the Bolsheviks were congenitally opposed to institutionalized workers' control. But it is to be regretted that he himself makes concessions to this thesis on the basis of the "black years" of 1920-1921. On this question he hardly mentions the later position of Lenin and Trotsky at the Third and Fourth Congresses of the Communist International and those of Trotsky, the Left Opposition and the Fourth International in favour of workers' control from 1923.

The international significance

The victory of the October revolution cannot be understood outside the context of the First World War of 1914-1918. Of all the Bolsheviks' slogans that of an immediate end to the war, "peace without annexations or indemnities" was the most popular. It became the main difference between the Bolsheviks and the other parties claiming to be socialist or revolutionary. It was above all the soldiers, of whom the great majority were peasants, who no longer wanted the war.

The falling apart of the army, which was mainly still Tsarist, disarmed the provisional government and then the first attempts at counter-revolution. This is what made possible the victory and then consolidation of the October revolution.

Perhaps the most significant fact about the revolution of 1917 is that between spring and autumn this great [army], the largest ever put into the field by any country, was transformed into an "enormous, exhausted, badly clothed, badly fed embittered mob of people, united by thirst for peace and general disillusionment".²²

The most clear-sighted Mensheviks later admitted this. Their leader Dan stated bluntly that:

The continuation of the war brought the Bolshevik victory in the Russian Revolution.²³

In addition, the attitude of the Bolsheviks and the soviets after the taking of power in October 1917 made it possible to have a real evaluation of the policy of the new revolutionary state.

The right of the peoples to decide their own fate

Lenin's first speech to the Second Congress of Soviets to present the policy of the new regime brought into being in October was his report on the peace. In it we find a vigorous affirmation of the right to self-determination, whose democratic thrust is very relevant today:

If any country whatsoever is forcibly retained within the borders of a given state, if, in spite of its expressed desires — no matter whether expressed in the press, at public meetings, in the decisions of parties, or in protests and uprisings against national oppression — it is not accorded the right to decide the forms of its state existence by a free vote, taken after the complete evacuation of the troops of the incorporating or, generally, of the stronger nation and without the least pressure being brought to bear, such incorporation is annexation, i.e. seizure and violence.

The government considers it the greatest of crimes against humanity to continue this war over the issue of how to divide among the strong and rich nations the weak nationalities they have conquered, and solemnly announces its determination immediately to sign terms of peace to stop this war on the terms

indicated, which are equally just for all nationalities without exception.²⁴

The Soviet government extended this principle of the peoples' right to decide their own fate to all the colonies and semi-colonies outside Europe. This was a revolutionary act which had incalculable historical repercussions. It gave a decisive impulse to the developing national liberation movements in countries like India, China and Indonesia, as well as significant support to already important anti-imperialist movements such as that in Turkey.²⁵

In one of its very first statements during the peace negotiations with Germany at Brest-Litovsk, on December 30, 1917, the Soviet government proclaimed the extension of the right of nations to decide on their own fate, recognized by the American president Woodrow Wilson, to all colonial and semi-colonial countries. At the same time, this government abolished all unequal treaties with China, particularly those concerning the Chinese Eastern railway and the right to extra-territoriality of all Russian citizens in China, Mongolia and Iran. These principles were also incorporated into the first Soviet constitution, that of the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic (RSFSR) of 1918.

The reaction of anti-imperialist forces in Asia was immediate. In China, the Bolsheviks were called the *huang-i-tang*, "the party of the greatest humanism". Sun Yat-sen, the Chinese nationalist leader, sent a message of solidarity to Lenin. In Iran, the national-democratic movement identified with the October Revolution, once Trotsky withdrew all the Russian troops and instructors from the country.

One of the effects of this policy was the famous conference of the Peoples of the East at Baku in 1920.

The Soviet regime for the first time in history, even abolished secret diplomacy, deciding to publish all diplomatic documents and secret treaties. Most importantly, it decided to immediately start peace negotiations with all the belligerent governments who were prepared to do so.

October 1917: a revolution for peace

This appeal was accompanied by an appeal to the workers of the major imperialist countries to take the path of peace and socialism:

While addressing this proposal for peace to the governments

24. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 26, p. 250.

25. David Mitchell, *1919 Red Mirage*, London 1970, p. 160

22. W.H. Chamberlin, op.cit. p. 223

23. Martov-Dan, op.cit. p. 304.

and peoples of all the belligerent countries, the Provisional Workers' and Peasants' Government of Russia appeals in particular also to the class-conscious workers of the three most advanced nations of mankind and the largest states participating in the present war, namely Great Britain, France and Germany. The workers of these countries have made the greatest contribution to the cause of progress and socialism: they have furnished the great examples of the Chartist movement in England, a number of revolution of historic importance effected by the French proletariat, and finally the heroic struggle against the Anti-Socialist Law in Germany and the prolonged, persistent and disciplined work of creating mass proletarian organizations in Germany, a work which serves as a model to the workers of the whole world. All these examples of proletarian heroism and historical creative work are a pledge that the workers of the countries mentioned will understand the duty that now faces them of saving mankind from the horrors of war and its consequences, that these workers, by comprehensive, determined, and supremely vigorous action, will help us to conclude peace successfully, and at the same time emancipate the labouring and exploited masses of our population from all forms of slavery and all forms of exploitation.²⁶

And in conclusion, in a still more striking fashion:

In the Manifesto of March 14 [1917], we [the soviets] called for the overthrow of the bankers, but, [before the October Revolution] far from overthrowing our own bankers, we entered into an alliance with them. Now we have overthrown the government of the bankers.

The governments and the bourgeois will make every effort to unite their forces and drown the workers' and peasants' revolution in blood. But the three years of war have been a good lesson to the masses — [as is proved by] the soviet movement in other countries and the mutiny in the German navy, which was crushed by the officer cadets of Wilhelm the hangman...

The workers' movement will triumph and will pave the way to peace and socialism.²⁷

Trotsky, speaking to the peoples of Europe affected by the war, proclaimed:

The workers and soldiers must wrest from the criminal hands of the bourgeoisie the cause [the right to decide] of the war and take it into their own hands.

In other words, in the eyes of the Bolsheviks, the October revolution was a means to put an end to the war; in so doing it should encourage and speed up the development of the world socialist revolution.

Is this borne out by history? Incontestably.

The world war was a decisive turning point in the history of capitalism. It was the beginning of the epoch in which the destructive, barbaric, regressive features of the system were going to develop significantly in comparison to its capacity to maintain a periodic development of productive forces.

The First World War was ten million human beings massacred, including the flower of Europe's young men, in the pursuit of goals to which no one today lends any legitimacy at all.²⁸ This was the first of

26. Lenin, "Report on Peace, October 26", *Collected Works*, Vol. 26, pp. 251-252.

27. *Ibidem* pp. 253.

28. Obviously this does not mean that there were not deep-going reasons for the war, particularly the rivalry between Britain and Germany in the division of the spoils arising from the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire and the domination of the Middle East, whose oil

a succession of disasters which led humanity 30 years later to the barbarity of Auschwitz and Hiroshima.

The most clear-sighted socialists — not only revolutionaries like Lenin, Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg but also moderates like Jean Jaurès — had foreseen this before 1914.

The Soviet government fought for immediate peace with Germany and Austro-Hungary during the Brest-Litovsk negotiations. A growing number of workers and soldiers from all countries already rejected the war, which explains the wide popularity throughout the world for the Soviet position, particularly when it was expressed in Trotsky's exemplary use of the negotiation table as an agitational method.

The representatives of Germany and Austro-Hungary complained of violation of all diplomatic norms.⁸

What is this? Speaking directly to soldiers over the heads of their officers? Calling on them to disobey orders if not to mutiny? Calling on the colonies to rise? Calling on workers to strike. From a Foreign Affairs minister is this not trampling on the elementary rules of civilization and of "friendship between nations"?

Very soon the French and British governments followed in the footsteps of their implacable enemies, the Central Powers, and denounced the Soviet revolutionaries in their turn.

On the other hand, for the peoples, the "civilization" and "norms of friendship between nations" that the belligerent nations claimed to stand for meant senseless massacre, destruction of entire towns, inhuman oppression and exploitation. It was the civilization of plague and death. Lenin and Trotsky incarnated the hope of a superior civilization, of life, liberty and equal rights for all women and men.

Imperialist propaganda — which right social-democracy also partly circulated — was much more virulent then than the anti-communist propaganda of the Cold War period or today. It had however a lot less effect among the toiling masses. They saw the sincerity of the Soviet regime.

The Soviet regime: internationalism in action

They saw that the first Soviet Constitution, that of 1918, eliminated the distinction between "national citizens" and "foreigners". Anybody living in Soviet Russia and ready to work there would immediately

wealth began to be suspected. There was also the rivalry between Tsarist Russia and the German-Austro-Hungarian coalition for domination over the Balkans.

enjoy all political rights, including the right to vote. John MacLean, the shopstewards leader from the munitions factory in Glasgow, Scotland was imprisoned by the British government for having gone on strike. He was named Consul General for the RSFSR and thus achieved diplomatic immunity; which forced London to release him.

The Bolsheviks thus showed that they remained faithful to the best traditions of the socialist movement. The Second International had tragically failed in this domain on August 4, 1914 when its best leaders had accepted the logic of the war, in violation of their most solemn oaths and the resolutions adopted by their own organization during successive congresses.

After this historic capitulation, the practice of the new Soviet regime which was in conformity with its principles, did more to stimulate a strong regrowth of internationalism within the masses than thousands of speeches, articles, pamphlets or books.

It was this which made possible the creation of the Third International and unleashed a powerful movement of solidarity with the besieged Russian Revolution.

A socialist revolution: the revolution against the war

The new Soviet regime had in fact put into practice the resolutions adopted in 1907 and 1913 by the Second International itself. In fact, the policy of a socialist answer to the threat of war was not simply to denounce the dangers of unprecedented butchery on calling for a halt or an end to the massacre. Thanks to the consistent efforts of the left, then led by Lenin, Martov and Rosa Luxemburg at the 1907 Stuttgart Congress of the Socialist International, the unanimously voted resolution stated:

In case war should break out anyway, it is their [the socialist parties] duty to intervene for its speedy termination and to strive with all their power to utilize the economic and political crisis created by the war to rouse the masses and thereby hasten the downfall of capitalist class rule.²⁹

In 1913 in the Basle extraordinary congress, the Socialist International addressed a solemn warning to all governments:

Let the governments remember that, given the present condition of Europe and the mood of the working class, they cannot unleash a war without danger to themselves. Let them remember that the Franco-German War was followed by the revolutionary outbreak of the Commune; that the Russo-Japanese War set into motion the revolutionary energies of the peoples of the Russian Empire; that the military and naval arms race gave the class conflicts in England and on the continent an unheard-of sharpness and unleashed an enormous wave of

strikes. It would be insanity for the governments not to realize that the very idea of a monstrous world war must inevitably call forth the indignation and the revolt of the working class. Proletarians consider it a crime to fire at each other for the profits of the capitalists, the ambitions of dynasties, or the greater glory of secret diplomatic treaties.

If the governments cut off every possibility of normal progress, and thereby drive the proletariat to desperate steps, they themselves will have to bear the entire responsibility for the consequences of the crisis they bring about. . .

The proletariat is conscious that at this moment it is the bearer of the entire future of humanity. The proletariat will exert all its energy to prevent the annihilation of the flower of all peoples, threatened by all the horrors of mass murder, starvation and pestilence.³⁰

Jean Jaurès, a great figure of French socialism, summed up this message in succinct terms in the final phrase of his speech to the Basle congress:

In sharpening the danger of war, the governments should see that the peoples can easily make the count: their own revolution would cost fewer dead than the war of others.

Going even further, Victor Adler, the leader of Austrian social-democracy stated that:

If the crime [of starting the war] is committed, a historic punishment will follow it: it will be the beginning of the end of the reign of these criminals.

With hindsight, these analyses and perspectives can seem rather unrealistic, in the light of the events of August 1914. Nevertheless, it should be noted that neither Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg and Martov, nor Jaurès and Adler predicted that a revolution would immediately follow the outbreak of war — and revolutions did indeed break out three or four years later.

The period after the First World War

It is true that Adler himself capitulated in August 1914 to the "criminals" that he denounced in 1913 and that he then did everything to prevent the revolution rather than prepare it. It is also true that the masses, including the social-democrats, let themselves be swept up into the wave of chauvinism of the period.

These are unchallengeable facts. But it would be rather jumping the gun to conclude that they were necessarily the product of a reformist daily practice (combining economic strikes and the preparation of "good" electoral results) or that this was the reflection of the growing integration of the proletariat into the bourgeois state and society.

Because in that case how could we explain the turn in the masses' attitude from 1917? That is to say from the moment that "the political and economic crisis created by the war" in fact provoked poverty, famine, disease, massacres, the suppression of democratic freedoms, exactly as the Stuttgart and Basle resolutions had foreseen. How can the growing strike

wave be explained, including of political strikes, against the "paix de rapine" imposed by the German Ludendorff on the Russian Revolution at Brest Litovsk in January 1918?

In May 1917, open mutiny erupted in the French army. Fifty-four divisions refused to obey orders. Over 100,000 *poilus* [rank-and-file soldiers] were court-martialed, 23,000 found guilty, 423 sentenced to death, 55 actually shot according to official figures. Many others were shot without trial or pounded to death through artillery fire.³¹ In August 1917, a mass strike in Barcelona was machine-gunned into submission, leaving 70 dead, hundreds of wounded and 200 prisoners. In February 1918, the Austro-Hungarian fleet mutinied at Catamaro.

From October 1918 this turnaround led to an uninterrupted series of revolution. Rather later than the Bolsheviks had hoped. But nevertheless they were real revolutions: in Finland, in Austria, in Hungary, creation of soviet power in Bavaria, revolutionary crisis in Italy.³² The world revolution was a tangible reality during these two years.

In December 1918, at a Herald rally in the Albert Hall, London, Robert Williams, general secretary of the Transport Workers' Federation, urged "preparedness for revolution". "The sun of international socialism," he said, "is melting capitalism throughout Europe."³³ In January 1919, a general strike broke out in Belfast, and in Seattle USA. In February 1919 a general strike in Barcelona lasted one month.

The world revolution was not only a tangible reality for the Bolsheviks, the revolutionary socialists, and for a good section of the "centrist" socialist left throughout the world. It was also a tangible reality for the bourgeoisie.

The British prime minister Lloyd George wrote in relation to this:

The whole of Europe is filled with the spirit of revolution. There is a deep sense not only of discontent but of anger and revolt amongst the workmen against the pre-war conditions. The whole existing order in its political, social and economic aspects is questioned by the masses of the population from one end of Europe to the other.

Lloyd George sent a confidential memorandum to the delegates to the Versailles Peace Congress on March 23, 1919:

If Germany ever goes over to the Spartakists, it is inevitable that she should throw in her lot with the Russian Bolsheviks. Once that happens, all Eastern Europe will be swept into the orbit of the Bolshevik Revolution and within a year we may witness a

spectacle of nearly 300 million people organized into a vast Red Army under German instructors and German generals.³⁴

Concerning the situation in Italy, during the wave of factory occupations in September 1920, the historian Gaetano Salvemini wrote:

The bankers, the big industrialists and the big landowners waited for the social revolution like sheep waiting to be led to the slaughterhouse.³⁵

In his *History of the International*, the Austro-Marxist Julius Braunthal described the situation during the Socialist International's first post-war meeting, in August 1919 in the following terms:

Europe was in ferment. It seemed as if we were on the verge of decisive struggles between revolution and counter-revolution.³⁶

And he added:

Immediately after the meeting of the founding congress of the IC, there was a revolutionary upsurge in Europe which seemed to confirm Lenin's prognosis.³⁷

In relation to Germany he noted that:

The imperialism of the Western powers imposed limits on the social revolution in Germany. But even within these limits, the conditions existed for a social revolution which would break the power of the big capitalist bourgeoisie; for heavy industry, mines and the chemical industry which was then owned by a few to become public property; to break [the power] of finance capital by imposing state control of the banks; the conditions for breaking the power of Junkers by the division [in a way favourable to the peasants] of big land properties; and above all by the development of an organ of the revolution's power — an armed force recruited among the workers and led by the socialists, as was the case of Volkswehr created by Austrian social-democracy.³⁸

In his report to the Third Congress of the Communist International, Trotsky cited two retrospective judgements of the European bourgeoisie which fully confirmed this analysis of the situation in 1919-20. The reactionary French newspaper *Le Temps* wrote on April 28, 1921:

Last year's May day was set as the beginning of a general strike which was in its turn to usher in the first phase of the revolution. Today absolute confidence prevails in the nation's effort to surmount all the crises consequent upon the war.

And the daily newspaper most representative of the Swiss bourgeoisie *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* wrote at the same time about Germany:

Germany of 1921 bears no resemblance to Germany of 1918. Governmental consciousness has become so strong that communist methods meet with opposition among almost all the layers of the population, although the number of communists, who during the revolutionary days comprised a small and resolute handful, has since grown inordinately.³⁹

It is true that outside Russia the revolutionary wave only had temporary victories: the creation of ephemeral soviet republics in Hungary and Bavaria.

29. Riddell, John (ed), *Lenin's Struggle for a Revolutionary International Documents: 1907-1916. The Preparatory Years*, Monad Press, New York 1984, p. 35.

30. *Idem* pp. 89-90.

31. David Mitchell, *op cit*, p. 18.

32. Bavaria is German border region which meets Austria. This geographical position is important, as we will see later, because there was a simultaneous revolutionary upsurge in Bavaria, to the west of Austria, in Hungary on the east border of Austria and in Austria itself.

33. Mitchell, *op cit*, p. 32.

34. Mitchell, *op cit* p. 171.

35. G. Salvemini, *The Fascist Dictatorship in Italy*, New York, 1927, pp. 30-31.

36. J. Braunthal, *op.cit.* p. 175.

37. *Ibidem* p. 186.

38. *Ibidem* p. 232.

39. L. Trotsky, *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, Vol. 1, p. 177, New York 1945.

The first phase of the German revolution was defeated in January 1919. The Austrian revolution was stopped in a deliberate way by the (centrist) Austrian Socialist Party which negotiated a compromise with the bourgeoisie.⁴⁰

Defeats in Europe: the responsibility of the reformists

But this compromise was not a result of an objectively unfavourable relationship of forces. On this point we should note the terrible historic responsibility of the leaders of the Austrian SP. In fact, the taking of power by the Austrian socialists — which was perfectly possible at the time — would have fundamentally changed the situation in Europe in favour of the revolution. This would have assured a territorial junction with the soviet republics of Bavaria and Hungary which had been recently established and were situated on either side of Austria. By their refusal to take power, the Austrian socialists interrupted the chain of the social revolution; if they had acted otherwise the three proletarian republics would have mutually strengthened each other, provoking a revolutionary momentum which could have spread throughout the whole of Europe.⁴¹

The German revolution started in 1918 and then suffered a heavy blow. But it then went through another upward phase which culminated in the impressive general strike of March 1920 against the Kapp-von Lüttwitz putsch and was followed by a third wave in 1923 with the general strike against the Cuno government.⁴²

And most importantly, if the Bolsheviks had "illusions" in the world revolution, these illusions were shared by millions of wage-workers throughout

40. R. Rosdolsky (*Die revolutionäre Situation in Österreich im Jahre 1918 und die Politik der Sozialdemokraten - Der Österreichische Januarstreik 1918*, Berlin, 1973) has shown on the basis of archive material how the Austrian social-democratic leaders manoeuvred, in close association with the imperial government, to first channel and then suffocate this strong general strike in Vienna. Otto Bauer, leader of the left wing of the Austrian SP, recognizes that the end of the general strike before it became a revolution was massively resisted within the proletariat.

41. For a presentation of this question, see the Introduction by Y. Bourdet to a selection of texts by Max Adler, *Démocratie et conseils ouvriers*, Paris 1967. Yvon Bourdet essentially justifies the refusal of the Austro-Marxists to conquer power, under-estimating both the international revolutionary potential of the period and the seriousness of the short-term consequences of the political choice (while emphasizing that the failure of the Austro-Marxist project of a "slow revolution" allowed the later rise of fascism).

42. During the general strike against the far-right putsch of Kapp/von Lüttwitz, for the first and only time, even the reformist trade unions called for the constitution of a "pure" workers' government composed of the SPD, the USPD and the trade unions.

the world.

There were only a handful of small revolutionary groups representing some tens of thousands of people outside Russia at the first Congress of the Communist International in March 1919. But in the months which followed, the sympathy "for Moscow" would spread to such a point that the majority of organized workers in many countries (Spain, Italy, France, Norway, Bulgaria, Czecho-Slovakia) and a strong minority in others asked to join the Communist International. In Austria, Poland, Switzerland, the leaders of the Socialist Parties could only stop this tidal wave by themselves breaking with reformist social-democracy and forming the so-called "Two-and-a-half International", which made oaths in favour of the dictatorship of the proletariat.⁴³

It should be pointed out that the deep radicalization of the international proletariat after the October Revolution had its roots in the conditions in each country. It was not simply a product exported from Moscow.⁴⁴ It profoundly changed the international relationship of forces between the classes. To try to hold back this revolutionary wave with the aid of the reformists, the bourgeoisie had to grant the proletariat important reforms for which it had been fighting for more than 25 years, particularly the eight-hour day and simple universal suffrage. So deep was the radicalization that there was even a general strike in Switzerland and a call by the social-democrat leader Troelstra for a revolution in the Netherlands, two countries which had remained neutral during the war and which were a lot more stable than the rest of Europe.

43. The revolutionary wave even affected the faraway town of Seattle in the United States where a general strike broke out which took semi-soviet forms of organization.

44. The left Menshevik leader, Martov, tried after the event to give a "sociological" interpretation of the international workers' radicalization which followed 1917. He stated (J. Martov, *Bolshevismo mondiale*, Einaudi, Toronto 1960. The Russian original dates from 1919) that this radicalization was essentially among the soldiers and unorganized workers, who took the standpoint of "consumers" opposed to the standpoint of the "producers", traditional social-democratic skilled and semi-skilled workers.

This cannot be sustained to defend in the light of the facts. Not only in Russia and Italy but also in Germany, the wage-workers opting for the Communist International were above all skilled and semi-skilled workers in the big factories, while the reformists received their main support from more or less unskilled workers from small and medium enterprises and the less developed sectors of the economy. The division in Germany between the USPD and SPD first, and then between left and right in the USPD (up to March 1921), and then in 1923 between the CP and social-democracy, has exactly the same sociological basis. As for Russia, S.A. Smith and D. P. Koenker have shown that the Bolsheviks received all the support from the skilled workers of the big enterprises. See Kaiser (ed.), *The Workers' Revolution in Russia in 1917 - The View from Below*, Cambridge 1987.

This change in the international relationship of forces between the classes saved Soviet Russia from military suffocation in 1920 when the unanimous threat of a general strike by the British workers' movement prevented British imperialism from intervening alongside the counter-revolutionary forces of Weygand and Foch during the Russo-Polish war.⁴⁵ In this very precise sense as well the Bolsheviks' hopes in the world revolution were hardly illusory.

These hopes were undoubtedly excessive if we talk about decisive short term victories. Lenin and Trotsky recognized this quite quickly. In a rather paradoxical fashion, they had sinned by an excess of spontaneism. The revolutionary wave seemed then so deep that they had rather under-estimated the role of the subjective factor — of the revolutionary leadership — in wresting a victory:

What lies ahead of us is not chaotic, spontaneous assault, the first stage of which we observed in Europe in 1918-1919. It seemed to us (and there was some historical justification for it) that in the period when the bourgeoisie was disorganized, this

45. On August 9, 1920, a Council of Action was organized by the Parliamentary Committee of the British trade unions, the Executive Committee of the Labour Party and the parliamentary group of this party with the goal of warning the government:

that a war is being prepared by the Allies against Soviet Russia on the Polish question. It states that such a war would be an intolerable crime against humanity. It thus warns the government that all the industrial strength of the workers will be used to prevent this war... and that a Council of Action will be immediately formed to take all the measures necessary to implement this resolution.

More than 1,000 delegates on August 13 with the aim of forming local Councils of Action and preparing a general strike. Councils were formed in more than 350 towns.

assault could mount in ever-rising waves, that in this process the consciousness of the leading layers of the working class would become clarified, and that in this way the proletariat would attain state power in the course of one or two years. There was this historical possibility. But it did not materialize. History has — with the assistance of the bourgeoisie's bad or good will, its cunning, its experience, its instinct for power — granted the bourgeoisie a fairly prolonged breathing space. No miracles have taken place.⁴⁶

But it is undoubtedly the case that the masses wanted the revolution in a whole series of countries. There is much proof and many personal testimonies which underline this. If, despite this, the revolutionary struggle did not triumph outside Russia this is because there was not an adequate leadership or even that the hegemonic

leaderships of the mass movement intervened actively to prevent this victory.

Despite the hesitations and the contradictions in his diagnostic this is also the conclusion that Braunthal himself reached:

Why is it that nothing like this [a social revolution] happened? In the last instance it is because the German social democracy did not intervene in the revolution as a revolutionary party, because the majority of the leaders as well as the masses (their own base) were far from thinking in revolutionary terms, and thus were not mentally prepared for the test of the revolution.⁴⁷

The German people, the German and international proletariat, humanity as whole, have paid a terrible price for this bankruptcy, based on crimes. We will come back to this.

46. L. Trotsky, *ibidem* p. 219.

47. Braunthal, *op. cit.* p. 232.

The national significance

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The Tsarist regime was overthrown in February 1917, eight months before the October Revolution. It was then that the soviets — the workers', soldiers' and peasants' councils — were created. However, at the beginning of this crucial period, the Bolsheviks were not a majority in the soviets and were not in power. It was other political forces, the bourgeois liberals and Mensheviks, who formed the provisional government, and had the opportunity to prove themselves. But they turned out to be incapable of resolving all the burning problems that existed. It was this incapacity which explains the continuing growth of the Bolsheviks' influence and the creation of a new revolutionary situation in the autumn.

Immediate peace was not the only task which confronted the provisional government. The population felt the urgency of other problems and the soviets were committed to resolving them without delay (without that always meaning that the masses consciously supported the power of the soviets).

This is particularly true for the questions of land, workers' poverty, and political institutions.

In these three key fields of socio-political life, Russia carried a heritage of barbarism, of backwardness, of under-development, to which were added the effects of a rapid and savage industrialization carried out by the autocracy.

The historic merit of the October Revolution is that it made it possible to rapidly clean out these Augean stables produced by Tsarism, for which the great majority of the Russian people — prisoner of these inhuman conditions — paid in human suffering.

It should be enough simply to describe these conditions to see once again the hypocrisy, if not the cynicism, of all those who hold the October Revolution responsible for the misery which existed in Russia until the early 1920s.

The agrarian question

The abolition of serfdom in 1861 was accompanied by heavy charges on the peasants. It is estimated that the capitalized yield of the land that the peasants were to receive at that time was around 648 million gold roubles, but the total price the peasants were obliged to pay was 867 million roubles. The peasants had in addition to pay an agricultural tax of 1.56 roubles per desiatin (a desiatin is equivalent to 2.7 acres). This makes in all 170 million roubles, while the bourgeois and noble private owners only paid 0.23 roubles per desiatin.

According to a 1902 survey, the sums to be paid by

the peasantry varied between 50 and 100% of the net income per farm, according to size.

In addition, during the division of the land, the big landowners took the good land which had previously been available to the peasants, and too often only "gave" them the right to buy less fertile land.

The peasants got practically nothing from the Tsarist state in exchange for this heavy contribution. In the heartlands of central Russia, living and working conditions remained as they had been for the last thousand years. The yield by hectare was a quarter of what it was in Britain, and less than a fifth for the average peasant farm (that is to say without including the land worked by the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie).⁴⁸

In these conditions, the burden of the rent and taxes to be paid year after year made it impossible for the peasants to accumulate any reserves. This led on the one hand to a gradual exhaustion of the fertility of the land by over-cultivation (we see that ecological problems do not only date from the Stalinist period!) and also led to periodic famines at every bad harvest. The worst was that of 1891.

More serious than this financial burden was the lack of land. It has been estimated that the size of a farm sufficient to feed a peasant family was 6.5 to 7 desiatin. The peasants working on formerly noble or public land received only 3.17 or 4.9 desiatin respectively. Given the growth of the population and the very limited rural exodus, the average amount of land available to each adult peasant was 4.83 desiatin in 1861 and 3.1 desiatin in 1905. Around 5 million adult men in the country could not really use their labour power, even at the low average level of productivity cited. The peasants needed 60 to 70 million desiatin of land in addition.

In 1905, in comparison with the 112 million desiatin in the hands of the peasants there were 101.7 million in the hands of the nobility, the clergy and the bourgeoisie, and 145 million desiatin in state and public lands. Agricultural enterprises of more than 50 desiatin each (15 times greater than the average peasant farm) occupied in themselves 80 million desiatin.

The conclusion is obvious, the peasants could only obtain the land they needed by radical elimination of the noble and bourgeois big property owners.

For as long as this agricultural revolution did not take place, the peasants could only continue to rent

48. All these figures can be found in L. Trotsky, *1905*, Paris 1969, pp. 34 et seq.

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land belonging to the big landowners. At the end of the 19th century, in the so-called "black earth" zone (the heart of Russia), the landowners leased 50% of their property to the peasants; in the other parts of the country it was 35 to 40%. The farm rents were extremely high, sometimes as much as half the harvest.

Adding up the cost of buying the land, the taxes and the rents, gives a total cost to the peasantry which implies inevitable pauperization of the majority of families in the countryside. Between 1888 and 1898, the number of horses owned by the peasants fell from 19.6 to 17 million. Their cattle livestock fell from 34.6 to 24.5 million. The number of farms without horses rose by 22% within the same period. (All these figures come from official surveys of the time.)

Teodor Shanin, correcting — no doubt advisedly — the figures that Lenin used in his 1908 text "The Agrarian Programme of Russian Social Democracy during the First Russian Revolution", presents the following table for the stratification of the peasantry in European Russia towards 1905:

- 15.8% of well-off peasant families had 15 desiatin or more;
- 51.4% of peasant families had between 7 and 15 desiatin;
- 32.4% of poor peasant families had less than 7 desiatin.

(In each case this is property per family and not by head of the population.)

He deduces that on average for the period 1897-1905 there were in Russia:

- between 0.8 and 1.2% of capitalist farmers (5.1 to 7.6% of the peasant population);
- between 6 and 8% of landless workers (3 to 4% of the peasant population);
- between 2.6 and 3.9% of rich peasants;
- between 12.4 and 10.7% of well-off peasants;
- 51.8% of middle peasants;
- between 24.2 and 26.4% of poor peasants.⁴⁹

The poor therefore represented a third of the village populations.

The barbaric conditions and poverty in which the peasantry lived under Tsarism was clearly expressed in their level of consumption. By head of the population, the average peasant farm, aside from expenses in food and housing, spent 5.5 roubles per year on clothing, 2.5 roubles for cultural-spiritual needs, 1.4 roubles for other material needs. Two

peasant families each comprising 6 people, that is 12 inhabitants of the Tsarist countryside, consumed the same as one single American worker (without his family) in 1905. That is a difference of 1:12 (and at that time the consumption of an American worker was, obviously, very much less than it is today).

The massive exportation of wheat by Russia, the main source of its foreign currency before the export of oil, was only possible because the charges of rent and taxes forced the peasants to sell wheat even if they did not have enough to eat. If they had been able to really satisfy their needs, Russia would have been a country which imported not exported wheat.

In his once classic work on Russia, the very conservative Sir Donald Mackenzie Wallace, official representative of the British establishment, summed up the deterioration of the situation of the Russian peasants in the following figures: the annual tax arrears (that is the unpaid taxes) rose from 0.9 roubles per male inhabitant in 1882 to 6 roubles in 1893 and to 22 roubles in 1899 in the seven provinces of the black earth zone.⁵⁰

Urban poverty

Urban and working-class poverty was no less dramatic. Anatole Kopp, mainly using the figures of the Soviet author G. Pouzis, stated that in the 131 towns situated in the territories which constituted the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic (RSFSR):

Only 9% of houses were linked to this system [of drains]. Of the 195,000 existing in 213 towns of the RSFSR which, before the Revolution, had a water supply system, only 12.5% were connected to it.⁵¹

In 1912, the number of people per apartment was 8.7 in Moscow, around 8 in Petrograd compared to 3.6 in Berlin, 4.2 in Vienna and 2.7 in Paris.⁵²

The average working day was usually 10 hours, without counting the many hours of overtime. According to the historian Prokopovitch, in 1909 in Petrograd three times the average annual wage was necessary to keep a family decently. Working-class poverty was thus enormous. In 1908, a working-class family spent 48% of its income on food (which was extremely inadequate), 21% on housing (usually miserable) and 15% on clothing. For all other needs, particularly health care and even elementary education, there was only 15% of a very meagre wage.

Pokrovski estimated that between 1892 and 1902,

50. D. Mackenzie Wallace, *Russia on the Eve of War and Revolution*, Cyril E. Black, Random House, 1961, p. 346.

51. A. Kopp, *Changer la vie, changer la ville*, Paris, 1975, p. 261.

52. James H. Baker: "St. Petersburg and Moscow on the eve of the revolution", p. 50 in: Daniel H. Kaiser: *The Workers' Revolution in Russia, 1917 - The View from Below*, Cambridge University Press, 1987.

the real wage of a Russian worker had fallen by 20%.⁵³ And in a later enlarged edition of his work, this communist historian, who was much praised by Lenin, described the miserable living conditions of the Russian workers at the end of the 19th century:

63.7% of workers were illiterate. ... In the factories of Moscow, the textile workers were almost always obliged to sleep on their looms. The whole family in fact slept on these looms two and-a-half metres long and two metres wide. They had to clean the dirty pieces with their clothes. The employers said to the doctor that the workers "liked" to live like this...

The doctor who gave [this] information on textile workers became an inspector, which, let it be said in passing, immediately changed his attitude. Two years later, he described the workers' living conditions in most of the governmental enterprises of the Vladimir government: pollution, bad air, two families in a room with one or two windows...

The Russian workers then ate worse than the [German] after the imperialist war, during the civil war and the blockade. The usual food was salted meat, smoked fish. The only fresh meat was offal...

In these living and housing conditions, the workers were often ill. In the Moscow textile factories, 134 women in 1000 had tuberculosis. In addition there was an epidemic, which the doctors qualified as "traumatic" and entirely "proletarian": the injuries ... In one [big] textile factory, in a three-year period only one in three workers had not been injured.⁵⁴

The rate of infantile mortality in the essentially working-class areas of Petrograd was at least double that of the "mixed" areas. Almost a quarter of the babies born within the capital died before they were a year old.⁵⁵

If we think that the descriptions from this Marxist source are excessive, this is the judgement of a very moderate bourgeois historian:

It is frequently argued that the slums of Britain achieved an obscenity of inhumanity which no other society could conceivably equal. In the sense that the misery of the lower depths in English and Scottish slums equalled the misery of the lowest depths ... this is true. But by no means all British workers belonged to the lowest depths, while almost all Russian workers did so belong ... In Russia there were no gradations: workers were wage-slaves in the strictest sense and their wages were insufficient to support a family.⁵⁶

The academic of Russian origin, Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, whose works are frequently used in Western universities wrote:

... despite the labour legislation and despite the fact that wages undoubtedly rose in the years which preceded the First World War (which, let it be said in passing, Soviet historians continue to deny hotly), the Russian workers in general remained very poor. Badly paid, housed in overcrowded slums, almost illiterate and deprived of any other advantage, the proletariat of imperial Russia offered an excellent example of the indigent and exploited workforce characteristic of the first phases of capitalism and which Marx described so powerfully in *Capital*.⁵⁷

53. M. Pokrovski, *Geschichte Russlands*, Hirschfeld, Leipzig 1929, p.275.

54. M. Pokrovski, *Russische Geschichte*, Büchergilde Gutenberg, Berlin 1930, pp. 249-252.

55. S.A. Smith, op. cit p. 13.

56. E. Crankshaw, *The Shadow of the Winter Palace*, Harmondsworth, 1978, p. 344.

57. N. Riasanovsky, *Histoire de la Russie*, Paris 1987, pp. 463-464.

The English professors Kochan and Abraham cite an almost unbelievable fact:

A circular [was] issued by Delyanov, the Minister of Education in 1887, banning lower class children from secondary schools: "... children of coachmen, cooks, washerwomen, small shopkeepers and persons of similar type, whose children, perhaps with the exception of those gifted with unusual abilities, should certainly not be brought out of the social environment to which they belong".⁵⁸

The super-exploitation of women workers was particularly serious. In 1914, women workers' wages were half those of men. In 1916 they had fallen to less than 40%.⁵⁹

Can the idea that the October revolution did a useful and healthy job in radically eliminating these abominations really be challenged?

The Tsarist state

The oppressive role of the Tsarist state had a precise financial dimension: 80% of its budget was spent on the army and the repressive apparatus. This parasitic drain on the national income was essentially at the cost of the peasantry (but also at the cost of the workers, given the indirect taxes). Industry was financed above all thanks to foreign investment.

Russian industry was not competitive in the world market. Nor could the narrow base of the national market, given the poverty of the great majority of the population, give it sufficient outlets. In addition, imported products were cheaper and of better quality than the products of Russian industry. Thus there was an extreme protectionist policy and a constant tendency to military expansionism towards the East and South East. Countries like Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, China, Korea as well as regions of the Caucasians were forced, by threats or bayonets, to buy Russian goods. The term "Cossack capitalism (imperialism)" has been correctly used to describe this. It ended badly with the Russo-Japanese war at Tsushima when the Western armies were defeated.

But the most oppressive and repressive aspect of Tsarism was expressed in all the institutions (or their absence) formed by the autocracy and what they represented for the peoples of the empire: lack of democratic rights and freedoms; extreme bureaucratic arbitrariness; accentuated national oppression:

With the emergence of national intelligentsia among nearly all the minority peoples, the government had either to concede the need for some local autonomy in the vulnerable borderlands or else to seek to convert these new forces to its own beliefs. The upshot was a vigorous policy of Russification. In the Ukraine, White Russia, Lithuania and Poland, the teaching of the vernacular was restricted or forbidden in schools and the use of Russian enforced. In the Baltic provinces, Livonia, Estonia and Courland, the government exercised similar discrimination against the German element ...

58. Lionel Kochan and Richard Abraham, *The Making of Modern Russia*, Harmondsworth, 1983, p. 223.

59. S.A. Smith, op. cit p. pp. 47-48.

It was probably the Russian Jews who now had to undergo the worst torments. [Dreadful pogroms took place.] "One third of the Jews must die, one third emigrate and one third assimilate," said Pobedonostev [layhead of the Orthodox church and one of the models for Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor].

The apparent victory over Islamic nationalism in Transcaucasia merely encouraged the intelligentsia of Georgia and Armenia to feel secure enough to turn to revolutionary agitation. In Asia, the government's increasing support for a determined proselytizing movement was bound to offend the Islamic traditionalists among local population ... Central Asia and the Far East were the happy hunting grounds of Russian imperialist adventurers, dubious carpet-baggers and pseudo viceroys ...⁶⁰

In his 1,000 page book *The Russian Revolution*, Richard Pipes defends the preposterous thesis that the revolution was the result of the intelligentsia's devotion to utopian ideas and extreme thirst for power since the end of the 19th century.⁶¹ But in order to support this conspiracy theory, he has to obliterate the powerful workers' strikes leading up to a general strike on February 25, ("a startling event in wartime" as Moynahan adds) which occurred before the soldiers' mutiny of February-March 1917.⁶² All this occurred because of the extreme deterioration of workers' living conditions, not because of the intelligentsia's incitement.⁶³

60. Kochan - Abraham, op.cit., pp. 223-224, 196-197.

61. Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, Vintage Books, New York 1990.

62. See in this respect, among other sources, Moynahan's fiercely anti-communist book *Comrades* (pp. 49-56).

63. Ibidem pp. 4, 7.

64. Chamberlin op cit p. 143

In what is probably the most objective history of the Russian Revolution written by a non-socialist, William Henry Chamberlin wrote:

What were the outstanding characteristics of the first period of the deepening of the revolution? Loosening of discipline in the army, increasingly radical demands of the industrial workers, first for higher wages, then for control over production and distribution, arbitrary confiscation of housing in the towns, to a greater degree of land in the country districts, insistence in such non-Russian parts of the country as Finland and Ukraine on the grant of far-reaching autonomy.⁶⁴

Far from acting under the influence of radical utopia or of extreme thirst for power, the intelligentsia in 1917 was characterized by growing moderation, hesitation and absence of any will to exercise power, in the last analysis determined by extreme class polarization in the country.

* * *

Is it surprising that at the time of the February 1917 revolution, the peasants, workers and oppressed nationalities emitted an almost unanimous cry: Enough is enough. Land, the right to self-determination, the 8-hour day and workers' control straightaway.

But the Provisional Government hesitated, dragged its feet, postponed the decision, put off decisions on these questions until after the Constituent Assembly, and the elections to the Constituent in turn were repeatedly postponed.

Is it surprising in these conditions that the masses increasingly took their fate into their own hands, that they sought to resolve their vital problems themselves, that they identified with Bolshevik policies and the power of the soviets, when they resolved these problems from one day to the next?



The political significance

Both East and West, the condemnation of the October Revolution is generally based on the idea that the Bolshevik "putsch" prevented the institutionalization and consolidation of democracy. Because of this it led to the establishment of a "totalitarian regime". Democracy or dictatorship, this was the alternative in October 1917 and in the months that followed.

Once again this is a flagrant mystification or falsification of history.

In reality, the polarization of social and political forces had reached a paroxysm in Russia. This polarization was such that it did not leave any space for an experiment in institutionalized or indeed prolonged bourgeois democracy. From July 1917, days which were marked by a radicalization of popular demands, the bourgeois parties — and the military cliques to which they were linked — had adopted a much more repressive course.

Kornilov's military coup d'état in August 1917 did not fall from the sky. It reflected the sharpening of the socio-political struggle. Its failure simply reinforced the thirst for revenge on the part of the possessing classes and their henchmen. This was seen on the eve and immediately after the October insurrection.

This hate of the Russian property-owning classes took on a rarely-seen force. It can for example be compared to that of the French bourgeoisie at the time of the Paris Commune in 1871 and the Spanish reaction in the summer of 1936.

Jacques Sadoul noted pertinently that they:

...wanted to establish an absolutist regime which would drown the revolution in blood, and massacre and deport the Jews, Bolsheviks, socialists and Kadets.⁶⁵

Russian reaction and German imperialism

This class hatred was so deep that in the space of a few months, the nobility and the "patriotic" monarchists who were indignant about the soldiers' lack of enthusiasm for Kerensky's offensive on the Polish Galician front in June 1917, called for the arrival of German troops in Petrograd in order to crush the revolutionary hotbed and became strongly Germanophile.⁶⁶ Again it is Sadoul who points out:

...since the arrival of the [German ambassador] Mirbach in

65. J. Sadoul, *Notes sur la révolution bolchevique*, Paris, 1920, p. 288.

66. Kerensky, a reformist, was the head of the Provisional Government. The political situation within the armed forces and the

Moscow, the monarchists feel at ease. The first visit of the German ambassador was to the Grand Duchess, sister-in-law of Nicholas II. He then saw other notorious royalists. It is obviously a question of preparing a restoration of the Tsar. The absolutist monarchists are ready to accept everything without shame, and particularly a military alliance with Germany and Ukrainian independence.⁶⁷

A member of the German embassy, the Freiherr Karl von Bothmer, completely confirmed this:

For some time, monarchist circles have been being very active and are talking freely to us... During these discussions, I have met a series of important personalities who are sympathetic to us. They all said the same sort of thing: We can do nothing without you. You have to intervene directly, then we can act.⁶⁸

Counter-revolutionary repression

This class hatred was not directed in the first place against the Bolsheviks and their allies. It was directed above all at the popular masses, starting with the "wild" peasants in their villages, demanding that the "plunderers" should be brought into line.

It was the bourgeoisie and the nobles, with the hesitant support of the reformist parties, particularly the right Social Revolutionaries, who started the Civil War after the Russian Revolution. They showed proof of an unlimited cruelty in the period of 1918-21.

This line of cruelty based upon deep contempt for the masses was expressed most clearly by the Tsarina Alexandra herself. She wrote to her husband: "Be Peter the Great, Ivan the Terrible, be Tsar Paul — crush them all under your feet."⁶⁹

And on the very eve of the revolution she still wrote to the Tsar: "Dearest, show the power of your fist — that is what Russians need... They themselves ask for this — so many have said to me recently: 'We need the knout'.⁷⁰

The American journalists A.R. Williams, who lived in Russia during the revolution, cited the following passage by N. Chiffirin in the anti-Bolshevik daily *Le Jour* of September 7, 1919:

soldiers' desire for peace were such that they did not manage to organize effective military offensives against the German forces, for which he was strongly reproached by the right. We should remember that a large part of Poland had been incorporated into the Russian empire.

67. Sadoul op cit, p. 322

68. K. v. Bothmer, *Mit Graf Mirbach in Moskau*, Tübingen 1922, p. 56.

69. Moynahan op cit p. 34

70. Moynahan op cit p. 51

As you know, the Bolsheviks have changed the names of the old regiments. The Moscow troops have on their backs K.L. — Karl Liebknecht. We (the northern White Army) took one of these regiments prisoner. We took it before the war tribunal. The trials on the White front are very short. Each soldier is interrogated and if he admits to being communist then he is immediately condemned to death by hanging or bullet. The Reds know this perfectly well.

Lieutenant K. stood before the prisoner regiment and declared: "Those among you who are real communists, show their courage and step forward." There was a long and oppressive pause after these words. Then more than half the regiment stepped forward in line. They were condemned to death by firing squad. But before the execution, each soldier had to dig his own grave. ...

The condemned men were ordered to undress ... so that their uniforms would not be stained by their blood nor cut to pieces by the bullets. The communists slowly took off their shirts and tied them up in a bundle. ... Then, naked, they dug their graves... A command, a flash in the night, the shots rang out ... The communists were still upright, very straight. A second salvo. The bullets went straight to their hearts, the blood gushed out...⁷¹

To the smallest detail this description prefigures the methods used by the Nazi special forces, the SS, during the Second World War: massacre of political commissars and Jews forced to dig their own graves. They were, what is more, prisoners of war. This was the action of "defenders of democracy" against the "Bolshevik dictatorship".

The Freiherr von Bothmer reported in his above-mentioned book:

The Czecho-Slovaks [prisoners of war whom imperialism armed against the Soviet power during the summer of 1918] and the Siberians acted with an extreme lack of scruples in relation to the members of soviets who fell into their hands. The large number of executions made a deep impression on all Bolsheviks.⁷²

The German writer Alfons Paquet, the correspondent in Russia of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, also noted that, after the temporary occupation of Jaroslav in July 1918, the Bolshevik members of the soviet were executed by the counter-revolution with, on this occasion, the active participation of the SRs.

Does it need to be recalled that at the same time the terrorists of the left SRs killed some of the most important Bolshevik leaders, including Volodarski and Uritsky. One left SR, Fanny Kaplan, made an attempt on Lenin which was nearly successful.

Bolshevik writers asserted quite correctly:

It was under the salvos of the Czechoslovak rifles, behind the mountain of dead bodies of the finest flower of the proletariat of Siberia and the Urals, ... that the so-called "people's army" (the Whites) was formed.⁷³

The attempts by conciliatory parties to create a regime called the "Constituent Assembly" failed rapidly. A series of coups d'état gave power back into

71. A.R. Williams, *Durch die russische Revolution*, Berlin, 1922, pp. 233-234.

72. Bothmer, op.cit. p. 62.

73. *Illustrierte Geschichte der russischen Revolution*, Berlin, 1928, p. 539.

the hands of military dictators like the admiral Kolchak or the general Wrangel.⁷⁴

White dictatorship or soviet power

The concrete choice was not between bourgeois democracy and Bolshevik dictatorship. It was between counter-revolutionary dictatorship of soviet power.

There is no doubt about the dictatorial character of the counter-revolution. John Rees gave a good description of the terror used by the reactionary forces:

"The greater the terror, the greater our victories," declared Kornilov. We must save Russia he argued "even if we have to set fire to half of it and shed the blood of three fourths of all the Russians!"

Ataman Semyonov was placed under the authority of the White general Kolchak.⁷⁵ The spectacle of the zones under his control left no ambiguity as to the nature of his rule:

Innocent men and women dangled by the scores from telegraph poles in the vicinity of his capital, and his men machine-gunned freight cars full of victims at execution fields along the railway. ...

By the orders of another White leader, Baron Urgan-Sternberg, "men and women suffered death by beating, hanging, beheading, disembowling and countless other tortures which transformed living human beings into what one witness called a 'formless bloody mass'." Even his own staff physician described one of the Baron's written orders as "the product of the diseased brain of a pervert and a megalomaniac affected with a thirst for human blood".⁷⁶

The pogroms

In 1918-1921, the Ukraine was the theatre of the worst pogroms, massacres of the Jewish communities, that Europe was to know before the "final solution" of the Nazis. According to Zvi Gitelman, there were 2000 pogroms, 1200 of which were in the Ukraine. The author estimated the total number of victims at 150,000. These massacres were accompanied by unbelievable cruelty:

Men were buried up to their necks and then killed by the hooves of horses driven over them, or were literally pulled apart by horses driven in opposite directions. Children were smashed against walls in view of their parents; pregnant women were a favorite target, their unborn children killed in their mothers'

74. On November 17, 1918, "Admiral Kolchak ... was declared 'Supreme Ruler of all Russia' ... The British and French representatives approved of the coup ... The Socialist Revolutionaries, in hiding in Ufa, disowned the Corps but were unable to do much more. Some of them made precarious peace with the Communists; the Socialist Revolutionary members of the Directory, Zenzinov and Avksentiev, were forced to emigrate; and Chernov eventually escaped abroad." (Leonard Shapiro, *The Russian Revolution of 1917*, Basic Books, New York 1984, p. 175.

75. The term "White" is used to refer to the counter-revolutionaries, as opposed to the "Reds". A White general is thus a general from the counter-revolutionary army.

76. John Rees: "In Defence of October", *International Socialism*, No 52, Autumn 1991.

sight. Thousands of women were raped and hundreds were left insane by their experiences.⁷⁷

These pogroms were coldly and consciously organized by the counter-revolutionary leaders. As the — very reactionary — British author Bruce Lincoln notes:

No longer spontaneous outpourings of racial and religious hatred, pogroms now became coldly calculated incidents of wholesale rape, extreme brutality and unprecedented destruction. In a single day at the end of August, in the Jewish settlement of Kremenchuk, the Whites raped 350 women, including pregnant women, women who had just given birth and even women who were dying.⁷⁸

According to Salo W. Baron, after the pogroms organized under the "socialist" Petljura, the massacres left in their wake some 100,000 new widows, and 200,000 new orphans. No less than 28% of all Ukrainian Jewish houses were said to have been burned, and in addition 10% abandoned by their owners.⁷⁹

The counter-revolution also drew on the support of the German occupying army. When it conquered the town of Odessa and its surroundings, it published a statement dated November 16, 1918, also reproduced in its newspaper *Neue Nachrichten*, and which in particular asserted that:

We have penetrated into Russian territory with the intention of re-establishing order and freeing the country from the Bolshevik usurpers... All the elements harmful to Russia, that is the Bolsheviks and those who support them, are now declared outlaws. Whoever shelters them will be taken before a military tribunal.⁸⁰

The list of atrocities committed by the Whites can be prolonged indefinitely:

The assassinations by Yudenich (650 people shot or hung in the town of Iamburg alone in August 1919) ...; by the Baltic gangs and the Germans of von der Galtz (approximately 4000 victims) ... by Kolchak (a thousand Red soldiers burnt alive at Perm during his withdrawal)...⁸¹

The social counter-revolution

The "political alternative" to the power of the soviets had, obviously, a precise socio-economic content as is the case during any social revolution. Where the Whites established their dictatorship, the gains of October were rapidly if not immediately eliminated. The landowners took back their estates. The rights of the national minorities were suppressed.

77. Z. Gitelman, *A Century of Ambivalence - The Jews of Russia and the Soviet Union*, New York, 1988, pp. 99-106.

78. B. Lincoln, *Red Victory*, New York 1989, p. 322-223.

79. Salo W. Baron, *The Russian Jew under Tsars and Soviets*, Schocken Books, New York, 1987, pp. 184-85.

80. Quoted in the book by P. Price, correspondent in Russia for the liberal British daily Manchester Guardian, *Die russische Revolution*, Hamburg, 1921, p.456.

81. A. Morizet, *Chez Lénine et Trotsky*, La Renaissance du Livre, Paris 1922, p. 129.

The soviets were ferociously persecuted. The democratic rights of the workers were totally denied.

This is what caused the the defeat of the Whites.

A major factor in Kolchak's defeat was the low morale of his forces; there were frequent desertions to the communist side in the course of the battle. Another was his failure to win over the population, which, although far from pro-communist, preferred Soviet rule in the last resort.

There were many reasons for the victory of the Red Army in the civil war, but most of them add up to one simple fact: the people as a whole, in spite of the unpopularity of the communists, preferred the Soviet regime to the available alternatives. The peasants disliked both sides, and wished above all to be left alone; but when it came to the choice, they preferred the Communists, who gave them land, to the Whites, who took, or threatened to take, it away.⁸²

Chamberlin states likewise:

On July 16 [1918], the Siberian government ordered the suppression of all existing Soviets and forbade the election of new ones. Throughout July and August the policy of the Siberian government was directed to the restoration of private property in every form...

When the Whites began to bring back the landlords, the peasants organized guerrilla bands and fell upon them.⁸³

This is why the Whites lost. They could not win or reconstitute a popular base. Their armies were, in general, officer armies, without the ability or even the desire to recruit conscripts. We see to what extent these officers feared the peasants.

A third way?

Confronted with this diagnosis, which it is difficult to contest, opponents of October often react in two diametrically opposed directions. Some consider that there was no basis for a (bourgeois) democratic regime in Russia whether this was for social reasons (extreme instability; absence of middle classes, the traditional support of democracy) or for ethno-cultural reasons (lack of democratic traditions in the Russian empire, tendency of the masses to vacillate wildly between resigned passivity and chaotic and uncontrollable explosions).

In these conditions, for these people the "totalitarian deviation" of the Bolsheviks was inevitable but was nevertheless worse than an authoritarian right-wing regime.

For others, there was nevertheless the possibility of a third way. In their opinion, if the Kerensky regime had not been overthrown by the "Bolshevik putsch" it could have gradually stabilized, carrying out moderate repression against both the far right and the far left.⁸⁴

82. L. Shapiro, op.cit. pp.176, 184.

83. Chamberlin op cit, pp. 14 and 19.

84. Contrary to what is generally thought, the Kerensky regime was very repressive, although in a less bloody fashion than the Ebert-Noske regime. Just before the October revolution, there were more than 10,000 Bolshevik prisoners in Kerensky's prisons, most of them soldiers.

Once the Constituent Assembly was convoked and the distribution of the land to the peasants carried out in an orderly and legal fashion, a bourgeois democracy comparable to that in Poland, although certainly with limitations that Western Europe did not experience, could have stabilized.

This is not a realistic view. It underestimates the explosive character of social contradictions. To think that the capitalists would have accepted social legislation which undermined the competitiveness of their factories, to think that the landowners would have accepted a division of their property, because these reforms had been carried out by a Constituent Assembly elected by universal suffrage, is to misunderstand the lessons of European history of the 1920s and 1930s.

During this period, bourgeois democracy was not only severely restricted or indeed suppressed — except to a very limited extent — in Poland and the Baltic countries, and strongly restricted in Finland. It was also eliminated in Italy, in Germany and in Spain, three countries that were a lot more developed than Russia in 1917.

The Menshevik leaders themselves recognized this. Dan wrote:

Having assessed the effective relationship of forces, it [the Menshevik CC] reached the conclusion that — independently of their subjective intentions — the victory of the elements marching on Petrograd would have necessarily meant the victory of the worst of counter-revolutions.⁸⁵

The price of October 1917

The choice was thus truly either victory of the socialist revolution or victory of a counter-revolution that would have been among the most bloody ever known, which would have brought to power a Russian Hitler still worse than the German Hitler we know.

It is in the light of this diagnosis and of everything that it implies that we can reply to the question whether, in the final analysis, the price paid by the October Revolution was too high or not. Our answer is a definite no. A defeat of the revolution in 1917 would have cost the Russian people and Europe much too dear.

In order to distort the calculation, the opponents of the October revolution use the sort of magical disappearing trick that they use for the French Revolution. They add up pell-mell the victims of the revolution and of the counter-revolution, the economic effects of the first and of the second and then say that all that is the cost of the October Revolution.

How can the French Revolution be held responsible for the victims of the Napoleonic Wars?

85. Dan, op. cit. pp. 305-306.

How can the October Revolution be held responsible for the victims of the White terror and pogroms?

Sophists argue that the Civil War and the White Terror are only products of the revolution. The answer is in the question: was not the Revolution itself the product of the Ancien Regime? Here we come up against a conception of history as a continuous flow without being attached anywhere in time or in space. This conception does not make it possible to ever draw out any conclusions. While saying that it is an attempt to understand the movement of history as a whole, this method in fact hides the precise responsibility of given social and political forces, in relation to specific actions.

Revolutions are at present not very popular, to say the least. Unfortunately, even R.V. Daniels, author of two rather left books *The Honor of the Revolution* and *Red Petrograd*, is caught up by the "spirit of the time" and writes in the New York Times Review of Books of April 26, 1992:

Mr Moynahan shows what a revolution really means. The normal bonds of society give way to mindless murder and mayhem.

This is nothing but anti-working-class and anti-peasant prejudice. Why is the revolutionary masses upsurge "mindless" and "mayhem" while the ruling state's and private violence is supposed to be "normal"? The Tsarist-capitalist participation in the First World War cost between 5 and 6 million deaths. Was that not "mindless" murder? Why was the pre-war rule based on the knout, countless executions and deportations, barbaric oppression (pogroms!) and mass starvation "normal" and the masses' revolt against these evils a dissolution of the "normal bonds of society"? Was slavery also "normal" and revolts against slavery "mindless murder and mayhem"?

Moral judgement and class prejudice

There is, moreover, an aspect of this question which we should not try to hide. In time of revolution, the toiling population is first of all carried towards generous reactions. But, faced with civil war, when it sees itself repeatedly provoked and subject to aggression from its class enemies, it also tends to use direct indeed sometimes "savage" violence. Babœuf already pointed out in his letter to his wife, commenting on the execution of the Princesse de Lamballe after the taking of Bastille, that these excesses were the largely inevitable product of years of confrontation by the people with the violence and cruelty of their oppressors.⁸⁶ To hope, in these

86. Babœuf, a political figure in the French Revolution of 1789. On the left of democratic radicalism he formulated a communist point of view. He was guillotined in 1797.

conditions, that the masses in all circumstances would show themselves to be scrupulously respectful of all the rights of women and men is really to demand a miracle.

In the final analysis, what is hidden by all these abstract, pseudo-moral condemnations of revolutionary violence — without any consideration of the precise historic context — is open class prejudice. The traditional violence of those in power is "normal". It represents a "lesser evil" whatever its extent. The rebellious response of the risen people is by definition "worse", even if its scope is much less than that of the property-owners. The hypocrisy hits us in the face.

This class prejudice often hides a fear of the masses whose social support is once again quite obvious. As a rather moderate French historian says:

After 1861, the intelligentsia and the state had the constant preoccupation of controlling the people through fear of their anarchic and destructive potential. The common fear (due to ignorance) prevents them from having an objective idea of the people, based on a concrete knowledge of the reality of the country. Thus both have succumbed to the popular stikhiinost (elementary force) of the beginning of the 20th century.⁸⁷

It is just as mistaken to want to add together the cost of the October 1917 revolution and that of the later Stalinist regime. Stalinism is in fact the product of a real bureaucratic counter-revolution. To confuse the two is an under-estimation, or indeed a negation of the scope of this later, or the radical break that the "Soviet Thermidor" — the bureaucratic counter-revolution — constituted in relation to October and the period which immediately followed.⁸⁸

The cost of Stalinism was dramatic for the Soviet and international proletariat.

The scope of this Stalinist counter-revolution expresses the historic tragedy which occurred a lot better than any subtle analyses of the so-called responsibility of Lenin's ideas (or indeed those of Marx) for Stalin's crimes. During the 1920s and 1930s, Stalin assassinated a million communists. Can we seriously say that this is "a detail of history"? Is it not odious to throw butcher and victims into the same bag?⁸⁹

87. M. Raëff, *Comprendre l'Ancien régime russe*, Paris, 1982, p. 176.

88. I have dealt with these problems, including that of the specific nature of the Soviet Thermidor, in my latest book *Power and Money - A Marxist Theory of Bureaucracy*, London, Verso Press, 1992. The term "Thermidor" originally indicated a political counter-revolution, during the French Revolution of 1789-1815. Starting in 1794 ("thermidor" was the name of a month in the revolutionary calendar) this counter-revolution dismantled the democratic and popular forms of organization created in the rising against the *Ancien régime*, without challenging its bourgeois character. By analogy, the "Soviet Thermidor" refers to the Stalinist counter-revolution which eliminated socialist democracy and introduced a bureaucratic dictatorship without re-establishing capitalism in the USSR.

89. The historian Marc Ferro gives the following figures which illustrate the transformation of the CPSU: between the first half of 1924 and the second half of 1925, the number of workers among the candidates members of the party fell from 64.5 to 43.8%. Is this not eloquent? (M. Ferro, op. cit., p. 246). This was only an indication of



The Bolshevik orientation: a critical analysis

In general the October Revolution was the product of objective social contradictions, which acquire an irrepressible explosive dynamic, as well as the evolution of the relationship of forces between the classes and the social layers operating in this framework. It also resulted from the activity of the Bolshevik Party in untangling these knots of contradictions in the interests of the toiling masses and the international proletariat.

This said, in the light of the later evolution of the Russia of soviets and of the USSR, we should ask whether some of the policies put into operation by the Bolshevik party, after the taking of power, did not encourage the process of bureaucratic degeneration of the first workers' state.

This bureaucratic degeneration, in the 1920s and 1930s, was certainly not initiated nor fundamentally caused by the orientation of this party. It also had its roots in the objective contradictions of Soviet society and the international situation which then prevailed. However, decisions like the concrete attitude to the Bolshevik party — or different components of its leadership — at precise moments also had an effect on the process of bureaucratization of the regime. We should try to understand some of the mistakes which were made.

The banning of the soviet parties

The most serious of these mistakes was the banning of the soviet parties at the very moment that the revolutionary government had definitively won the civil war of 1918-20. Trotsky, although not very inclined to self-criticism of the decisions of the leadership and government of which he was the most influential member after Lenin, made two explicit judgements on this.

In 1936 he wrote:

The prohibition of factions ended in a prohibition to think otherwise than the infallible leaders. The police-manufactured monolithism of the party resulted in a bureaucratic impunity which has become the source of all kinds of wantonness and corruption.⁹⁰

Two years later, in the Transitional Programme that he wrote in 1938 for the founding conference of the Fourth International, he came out explicitly in favour of multi-partyism:

Democratization of the soviets is impossible without legalization of soviet parties. The workers and peasants

themselves by their own free vote will indicate what parties they recognize as soviet parties.⁹¹

It is undeniable that the workers considered the Mensheviks in 1920 as a soviet party, because they had quite a number of elected representatives, particularly in Charkov and Moscow.

The same remark also applies to the anarchists.

The banning of the soviet parties, as well as the banning of factions within the government party which was its logical follow-on (each faction is in fact another party in formation), were undoubtedly seen as temporary measures, related to particular circumstances, which would therefore be repealed when the objective situation improved. Obviously we should ask what were the precise consequences of these specific decisions, put into effect at a particular moment.

But we should also ask another question: what were the consequences of the theories which were put forward to justify such bannings, even if they were conjunctural? I think that the theoretical justifications caused a lot more harm in the more long term, than the measures themselves — and continue to do so today.

The danger of substitutionism

The banning of soviet parties was based on a substitutionist conception of building socialism — and of socialist/communist policies in general. That is a conception which Trotsky had always vigorously denounced (except in the "black years" of 1920-21) and that Lenin also fought against during a good part of his life.

In this conception, the proletariat in its majority not conscious enough to rule a country (the social-democrats are of the same opinion and even add: to lead a trade union). Another argument was introduced later: that of losing its class character and its corruption (including through colonial superprofits).

This starting point very quickly leads to the conclusion that the party must rule instead of the actually existing working class. The party apparatus; or even its leadership, or even its "infallible leader", are then the decisive instruments for changing society. Stalin expressed the real content of substitutionism in a formula which leaves no room for misunderstanding:

91. Leon Trotsky, "The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International" in *The Transitional Programme for Socialist Revolution*, Pathfinder Press, New York 1973, pp. 145-6.

90. L. Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, Pioneer Publishers, New York 1945, p. 105

"the cadres decide everything".

The substitutionist doctrine of the party feeds a verticalist, statist, paternalist and authoritarian conception of the regime, even when the worst excesses and crimes of Stalinism are avoided. It can certainly be hedged around with all sorts of restrictive clauses: the party (the party leadership) rules in place of the working class but is based on it, mobilizes it, notes its reactions, corrects its own mistakes in the light of experience, etc.

But this does not in the least change the fundamental attitude. It is not the working class which rules, which democratically takes decisions. A small minority rules in its stead.

In these conditions the soviets are emptied of at least one vital component of their content. They can at the limit be an effective fighting instrument against the class enemy. But they no longer assure the direct exercise of power by the proletariat and (or) the toiling masses as a whole.

Without real multi-partyism, in practice, the soviets cannot experience real democracy. They cannot really choose between different alternatives in economic, social, cultural policies.

To the extent that the suppression of soviet democracy takes on a repressive aspect, this repression no longer targets simply the big, medium and petty bourgeoisie. It also hits the working class. We can even say that the more numerous the proletariat is, the more hegemonic it is from a social point of view, the more it is the target.

Self-emancipation

Such a conception and such political orientation are contrary to Marx's main contribution to socialist theory (including the theory of revolutionary organization): the idea of the self-liberation and the increasing self-organization of the proletariat. The emancipation of the workers will be the doing of the workers themselves, not that of the trade unions, the parties, the governments or the state. These are indispensable instruments in the historical process. But they can never replace the activity of the wage-workers themselves and other layers of the exploited and oppressed. The fundamental emancipating role of their self-activity cannot be ignored.

It would be to misunderstand the driving role of material and social interests in history to think that the substitutionist ideology created the hydra of bureaucratization. It was rather the existence of the

workers' bureaucracy which produced the ideology of substitutionism. But once it existed, this ideology in its turn encouraged the objective process of bureaucratization.

The position of Rosa Luxemburg

This is what Rosa Luxemburg understood when she warned the Bolshevik leaders of the danger in her first comments on the Russian Revolution:

But with the repression of political life in the land as a whole, life in the soviets must also become more crippled. Without general elections, without unrestricted freedom of press and assembly, without a free struggle of opinion, life dies out in every public institution, becomes a mere semblance of life, in which only the bureaucracy remains as the active element.⁹²

This quotation from Luxemburg does not correctly describe the state of public life in Russia in 1918. There was then a strong diversity and discussion of political ideas, and legal or quasi-legal activity of many organizations. Rosa wrote her pamphlet in prison and did not have sufficient information available.

But she offered a remarkable and prophetic critical diagnosis of the more long-term trends, particularly from 1920-21. To have formulated them already in the summer of 1918 — "only the bureaucracy will remain an active element" — shows an exceptional lucidity and capacity for theoretical analysis.

We consider that Rosa was also right when she wrote that:

The basic error of the Lenin-Trotsky theory is that they too, just like Kautsky, oppose dictatorship to democracy... The latter naturally decides in favour of "democracy", that is, of bourgeois democracy... Lenin and Trotsky, on the other hand, decide in favour of dictatorship [of the proletariat]...

... to spur the working class... to create a socialist democracy to replace bourgeois democracy — not to eliminate democracy altogether.

But socialist democracy is not something which begins only in the promised land after the foundations of socialist democracy are created; it does not come as some sort of Christmas present for the worthy people who, in the interim, have loyally supported a handful of socialist dictators. Socialist democracy begins simultaneously with the beginnings of destruction of class rule and of the construction of socialism. It begins at the very moment of the seizure of power by the socialist party. It is the same thing as the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Yes, dictatorship! But this dictatorship consists in the manner of applying democracy, not in its elimination, in energetic, resolute attacks upon the well-entrenched rights and economic

92. Rosa Luxemburg, *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, Pathfinder Press, New York 1970, p. 391. Rosa Luxemburg was a Polish revolutionary leader and Marxist theorist. She was very active in the German workers' movement. She was assassinated by reactionary forces in 1919.

relationships of bourgeois society, without which a socialist transformation cannot be accomplished. But this dictatorship must be the work of the class and not of a little leading minority in the name of the class — that is it must proceed step by step out of the direct participation of the masses; it must be under their direct influence, subjected to the control of complete public activity; it must arise out of the growing political training of the mass of the people.⁹³

Rosa Luxemburg is much less lucid when, in the same pamphlet, she criticized the orientations of the Bolshevik Party and the Soviet regime on the nationality question and the peasant question. On these questions she adopted dogmatic notions which did not take into account the immediate or historic political and economic necessities (concerning the period of transition). She criticized the central slogans of the right to self-determination and the distribution of the land to those who worked it in the agrarian reform as "petty-bourgeois" and opportunist.

However, if the Bolsheviks had opposed the desire for self-determination of the peoples integrated by force into the Tsarist empire; if they had opposed the great desire for land from the majority of the peasants, they would have lost power. What happened in the USSR after 1928, and what is happening today are a tragic confirmation of this.

In fact, if the leadership were wrong in this question — Lenin and Trotsky much less than the others — it was through leftist sectarianism and not by an excess of opportunism. We can moreover use the argument of "parallelism" with Kautsky's reasoning against Rosa. Kautsky also used the argument of opportunism to the peasants against Rosa.

The workers' and peasants' alliance and war communism.

It is difficult to judge at what point the policy of requisition of wheat by the Soviet regime under siege, called "war communism" was inevitable, to a certain extent at least, in 1918-1920. But it is certain that it threatened more and more to break the workers-peasants' alliance, that is the very basis of the Soviet regime.⁹⁴

It is no less certain that it led to a greater and greater decline of productive forces, particularly the production of foodstuffs, which threatened to bring about the collapse of the whole Russian economy.

Agricultural, essentially cereal production, fell by

93. Ibidem, pp. 393-94. Kautsky was the best-known theorist and leader of German social-democracy and the Second International. He became a reformist.

94. "War communism" is the name given to the politico-economic policy applied during the Civil War (1918-1920). It was characterized by radical "statization" and exceptional measures such as forced requisition of food from the peasants.

almost 30%, horse livestock by 25, cattle livestock by 20%, swine livestock by 28%, and industrial production by almost 60%. In exchange for the same quantity of wheat, the peasants only received 5% of the same industrial products that they had received in 1917-18. Thus they refused to sell wheat for money that had practically no value. And thus it was necessary to requisition the wheat.

But this also led to an absolute fall in wheat production and not simply a retreat by the peasants to a subsistence economy. And as wheat production fell, there was in time less and less to requisition.

Then followed a general trend to speculation and the black market, which was particularly hard on the poorest layers of the population.

Trotsky, head of the Red Army during the Civil War, found himself at the head of an army that was essentially composed of millions of peasants. He travelled constantly throughout this enormous country. Because of this he saw better than Lenin and the other leaders of the party the immediate concerns of the peasantry. He thus proposed, one year before Lenin, abandoning "war communism" in favour of the early adoption of a more flexible policy, the "NEP" (New Economic Policy). At this point he ran into the resistance of Lenin and the majority of the leadership.⁹⁵

On this question we agree with the assessment of the Soviet historian Roy Medvedev who considers that the attempt to continue the policy of requisitioning wheat after the end of the Civil War provoked the social crisis of 1921, including the Kronstadt rising. This was a serious error which cost them dearly.⁹⁶

95. Trotsky, after the failure of his premature proposal of the NEP for a while defended an alternative proposal of the "militarization of labour". This was unanimously approved by the Ninth Party Congress. The NEP — or New Economic Policy — was introduced in 1921. It represented a profound break with the command economy of War Communism, introducing a liberalization of the market and peasant production, encouraging a certain development of small private industry and proposing to accept foreign investment.

96. Roy Medvedev, *La Révolution d'octobre*, Paris, 1978, p. 210. In March 1917, the garrison in Kronstadt, a port on the Baltic rebelled. The negotiations started with the regime having failed, the rebellion was crushed by the Red Army. I do not intend in this essay to analyze more deeply the problem posed by the Kronstadt revolt and its repression by the Soviet regime. It is my opinion, given that the Civil War had not yet ended, that we are dealing here with a question of political judgement, of tactics, and not of principle. The difficulty in the discussion lies in the fact that most of those who criticise the decision of the Bolsheviks base their judgement on specifically political assessments: the nature of the demands, the nature of the political forces present, etc. But, in our opinion, in a situation of civil war it is the nature of the social forces (and their "logic") which is decisive.

But on this question, the information available does not make it possible to reach definite conclusions. According to some people,

Moreover, during "war communism" the proletariat was weakened, not only numerically but also physically and morally. In 1921, an industrial producer during production only consumed 30% of the energy that used in 1913-14, and less than half of that used in 1916-17. This led to a severe fall in work productivity which Chamberlin estimated as having declined in 1920 to 20% of the 1913 level.⁹⁷

Some people have idealized the policy of "war communism", emphasizing the passage to "directly communist" forms of production and distribution. Kritsmann, whose statistics we have used in what has just been said, talks about the "heroic years of the great Russian Revolution".⁹⁸ Many Bolshevik leaders have followed suit.

Making a law out of necessity, these latter theorized the constraints of lack and rationing. They idealized the return to a "natural" economy (more exactly to an economy of three sectors: a subsistence economy, an exchange economy and a monetary economy).

All Marxist tradition and the good sense of the proletariat argue against this "communism of poverty", however sympathetic and stimulating — for the future! — were the very egalitarian "models" developed and applied at this time.⁹⁹ This "model" did not unleash any dynamic able to bring the country out of growing famine. And it caused a confusion that Stalin was cynically able to call on in 1928-34.

The question of peace negotiations

The Civil War and the intervention by the imperialist powers particularly German imperialism, against Soviet Russia, partly explains the the origins

particularly anarchists, the Kronstadt sailors were basically workers, like those of 1917-18. Their revolt was an extension of the workers' protests in Petrograd and elsewhere. So what was at posed was the question of soviet, proletarian democracy.

According to others, particularly Trotsky, the proletarian sailors of 1917-18 had largely disappeared. They had died at the front or had been absorbed by the Red Army or state apparatus. The 1921 sailors were the sons of middle or well-off peasants. Their revolt reflected the peasants' rejection of "war communism" and the requisitions of wheat. It was necessary to negotiate with them but not to give in to a social dynamic which could strengthen the counter-revolutionary threat that hung over Petrograd, a national and international threat, because the thawing of the ice floes could open the port of Kronstadt to the White fleet in the Baltic.

97. Chamberlin op cit Vol 2, p. 108

98. L. Kritsmann, *Die heroische Periode der grossen russischen Revolution*. Wien-Berlin, 1929.

99. Marx and Engels warned against this primitive "communism of misery" which would only generalize poverty and lead inevitably to the renaissance of all the "old shit".

and deviations of "war communism".

But here we touch on another important mistake that was made during the Brest-Litovsk negotiations by most of the Bolshevik leaders and cadres with the notable exception of Lenin, who at that point reached the summit of his political lucidity. This is the delay in reaching separate peace with each of the Central Powers

There was an important difference between the peace conditions proposed by these empires during the first phase of the negotiations of Brest-Litovsk, opened in December 1917, and the conditions obtained from them after the interruption of the negotiations by the Soviets and the continuation of the advance by the German army.

The first were still acceptable to a large section of public opinion in the working class and the urban petty-bourgeoisie. The second were widely felt as a national humiliation and a betrayal of the interests of the proletariat of the Soviet Union and of the international proletariat. In addition, they meant the control of the Ukraine by imperial Germany and the repression of the Ukrainian peasant movement. They provoked the break in the coalition between the Bolsheviks and the left SRs. They gave a strong stimulus to the Civil War.

The majority of the Central Committee and the Bolsheviks refused to sign the peace conditions resulting from the first phase of the Brest-Litovsk negotiations. They used as an argument for their position — as did Trotsky for his intermediary position "neither war nor peace" — the fact that this position corresponded to the sentiments of the majority of the urban population. But it did not correspond to the sentiments of the majority of the peasant population, without mentioning those of the soldiers in the army which was in full flight of decomposition.

And above all it did not lead to any concrete alternative: immediate overthrow of the rule of the Hohenzollern and Habsburgs. What could guarantee this? Immediate organization of the "revolutionary war"? With an non-existent army?¹⁰⁰

The only result of the refusal to sign the peace conditions immediately was to allow the German army to occupy new and very important territories, and in particular to take the immensely rich Ukraine away from the Soviet Republic. Lenin predicted this from day to day. We seen once against that the price that the Revolution had to pay for this mistake was very high.

100. The Hohenzollern and the Habsburg: ruling families of Germany and Austro-Hungary.

The Red Terror

The question of the Terror — and the creation of the Cheka (the secret political police) — are directly linked to the consequences of the Brest-Litovsk peace. Both can only be explained in the light of these events.

The question of the terror — independent of the question of its unacceptable excesses — is less clear than some claim. The experience of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 is a clear illustration of this fact. At that time not only the Stalinist but also the anarchists and the social-democrats of the right, centre and left without distinction, as well as many autonomous and unorganized groups of workers, applied wide-ranging measures of "red terror". They had no choice.

Confronted with an implacable, murderous and torturing enemy, who takes the women and children of militants as hostages, who shoots prisoners of war and political opponents en masse, something has to be done to limit the losses. This is a question of common sense. To force the murderers to stop if they do not want to pay too high a price for their crimes.

We should note moreover that Lenin tried to avoid being forced to use terror after the October revolution. In particular he said:

We are accused of making arrests. Indeed, we have made arrests; today we arrested the director of the State Bank. We are accused of resorting to terrorism, but we have not resorted, and I hope will not resort, to the terrorism of the French revolutionaries who guillotined unarmed men. I hope we shall not resort to it, because we have strength on our side. When we arrested anyone we told him we would let him go if he gave us a written promise not to engage in sabotage. Such written promises have been given.¹⁰¹

But the counter-revolutionaries acted with total cynicism and lack of scruples, despite the initial generosity of the Bolsheviks. The general Krasnov, Kaledin and others, the pupil-officers arrested during the October insurrection, were released on the promise that they would refrain from any anti-governmental action. They immediately broke their word, took arms and caused the death of thousands of workers.

The people make these mistakes once, twice, and then reply harshly. Is this surprising?

Among the particularly cynical action of the future "victims of the Terror", A.R. Williams points out the Whites' use of Red Cross lorries to cross the front lines and bring munitions to the White armies.¹⁰²

Williams even reports on a moving expression of the generous spirit of the revolution during the taking of the Winter Palace. The pupil-officers gave themselves up. The crowd was mad with rage, having discovered among other things the torture chambers in

the depths of the palace. Antonov-Ovseenk, who led the Red Army detachment, cried: "I'll shoot the first one to touch a prisoner". He ended by convincing the crowd:

Do you know where this madness leads? When you kill a White Guard prisoner it is the revolution you kill and not the counter-revolution. I have given twenty years of my life in exile and in prison for this revolution... [It] means something better, it means life and liberty for all. You give your blood and your life for the revolution, but you should also give it something else...: your intelligence. You should put commitment to the revolution above satisfying your passions. You have the courage to bring victory to the revolution. Now, in the name of your honour, you should give proof of magnanimity. You love the revolution. The only thing I ask you is not to kill the thing you love.¹⁰³

But having suffered from the savage violence of the counter-revolutionaries the climate changed. Again, should we be surprised?

Moreover, we should be clear on the limits of the Terror. Up to March 1920, the total number of victims of the Red Terror was officially estimated at 8,620 people. Morizet estimates the number at a little more than 10,000. After the defeat of the White Armies of Denikine and Kolchak, the death penalty was abolished for several months by the Soviet government (it was only reintroduced from the time of the Polish offensive against the Ukraine in May 1920).

The atmosphere in Soviet Russia was far from the universal fear described by so many historians. We can see this from reading what Morizet, any eye-witness, said about the trial of a high-ranking White officer, Galkin, by the Revolutionary Tribunal at Moscow on July 14, 1921:

I do not think I have ever seen a public or magistrates more sympathetic to the accused than on that day. The four hundred workers or soldiers who crowded into the chamber, the three judges and the prosecutor, all four of them young, all looked with a sort of friendship on this little man of thirty-five, in his worn clothes, that a debonair under-officer guarded, revolver in hand to obey the rules. There was no barrier between them and him. Four armed soldiers, interested in the discussions above all vaguely covered the free space around the garden bench reserved for the accused, the table of defence and ours.

Rather than a terrible audience of the Revolutionary Tribunal, one would have thought oneself watching an impassioned discussion between men who disagreed on the answer to a question of conscience.¹⁰⁴

Galkin was given a light sentence, then rapidly pardoned, although he had taken arms against the soviet regime. But he stated that he detested still more the counter-revolutionary White dictators after the experience he had of them. The Tribunal believed him.

The Cheka

The question of the Cheka is very different from what we have just been talking about: temporary measures during a cruel civil war. The Cheka was the

101. Lenin, "Speech at a joint meeting of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies and delegates from the fronts November 4 (17), 1917", *Collected Works*, Vol 26, p. 295.

102. A.R. Williams, op.cit. pp. 112 ff.

103. Ibidem, p. 126.

104. Morizet, op. cit. p. 429.

creation of an institution, an apparatus, with the inevitable tendency of any institution and any apparatus to become permanent, and to escape any control.

A fascist torturer can be shot after a public trial, even a summary one. But a secret political police cannot be submitted to public control.

The archives of the Cheka, which have begun to be published thanks to *glasnost* (the policy of "transparency" under Gorbachev), showed that the worm was in the fruit from the very beginning, despite the personal honesty of Felix Dzerzhinsky, the first leader of the Cheka, who nobody suspects of improper intentions. The mention of just one fact is enough: the members and informers of the Cheka gave themselves a bonus (a part of the "spoils") for any goods seized from "speculators" or those who committed "economic crimes". There is no doubt of the dynamic to corruption this represents. Chamberlin fully confirms this judgement.¹⁰⁵

The same goes for the tendency of the Cheka to escape from all control. This dangerous dynamic was affirmed very early. One anecdote illustrates this. Lenin had the greatest admiration and friendship for the left Menshevik leader Martov. One day Lenin called him into the Kremlin, gave him a false passport and said: "Leave the country immediately. If not the Cheka will arrest you in a few days and I would not be able to stop them."

G. Leggett, a reactionary who was extremely

hostile to the Bolshevik regime admits however that this independence was only conjunctural at first:

In the inevitable clash between the arbitrary violence of the Cheka and the system of Soviet law evolved by the People's Commissariat for Justice, the Cheka gained the upper hand whenever the regime came under threat; when the crises receded the [People's Commissariat] won the advantage.¹⁰⁶

Lenin himself was resolutely favourable to the constitution of a state based on law and the need to make decisive steps in this direction. In a conflict which set Dzerzhinsky against Kamenev in 1921, concerning the reforms of the political police after the end of the Civil War, Lenin supported Kamenev who had proposed to limit the competence of the Cheka to questions of espionage, political crimes, the protection of the railways and food stores. All other repressive activity should be the responsibility of the People's Commissariat of Justice.

It should also be noted that the Cheka was hardly a creature of the Bolshevik Party or of Lenin. It was above all the left SRs who played a key role in its creation. But all that being said, it is none the less true that the tendency to become independent, less and less controllable, was present from the beginning of the Cheka. Victor Serge used the term "professional degeneration". This is why we think that the creation of the Cheka was undoubtedly a mistake.

105. Chamberlin op cit p. Vol 2 p. 71.

106. G. Leggett, *The Cheka: Lenin's political police*, Oxford 1981, p. 171.



Lenin's organizational conceptions

Did the organizational conceptions of Lenin open the road to the excesses of the October Revolution and the Stalinist dictatorship?

One of the theses frequently put forward by the critics of Bolshevism is that the excesses which occurred after 1918 — the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, the Terror, the prolongation of war communism — were in the last analysis the result of Lenin's organizational conceptions. We can sum up the conceptions attributed to Lenin, the ultimate source of all evil, by these authors in the following way: revolutions are "made" by the revolutionary party and not by the masses; this party should be a highly-centralized, limited troop of professional revolutionaries; it — because of this — largely escapes the control of the working class; this class is unable to raise itself to the level of revolutionary political action, let alone reach a revolutionary political consciousness.¹⁰⁷

Other authors, such as Louis Fischer, go a step further and say that Lenin's organizational conceptions, as they were classically expressed in the pamphlet *What is to be done?*, were inspired by not very pleasant psychological traits of the person in question: blind hatred of Tsarism and the property-owning classes; a thirst for vengeance for the execution of his brother by the autocracy; the conviction that violence, terror, "the extermination of the enemy" play an essential role in all revolutions.

All these affirmations, in whatever variant, are in the best of cases a unilateral view of historical reality, of the writings of Lenin and the actions which he inspired or led.

Lenin and power

Above all, the portrait of Lenin as a monomaniac for absolute personal power does not tally with the image of him that emerges from the many accounts of those who knew him. Nikolai Valentinov, who was very critical of the Bolshevik leader, said:

It is a huge mistake, and many, almost all, make it to consider

107. Stephen F. Cohen, "Bolshevism and Stalinism" (in Robert C. Tucker: *Stalinism - Essays in Historical Interpretation*, Norton 1977) cites a large number of authors who have this judgement. The sources are too numerous to be reproduced here. We can simply note as examples: Merle Fainsod, Hannah Arendt, Robert V. Daniels, Michael Karpovitch, Ulam, Barrington Moore, Arthur P. Mendel, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Robert H. McNeal, Alexander Solzhenitzyn. One quotation is enough to sum up their thinking. It comes from Merle Fainsod: "Out of the totalitarian embryo would come totalitarianism full-blown."

Lenin a heartless man of iron, a producer only of political resolutions, completely indifferent and insensitive to the beauties of nature. He loved the fields, the meadows, the rivers, the mountains, the sea, the ocean.¹⁰⁸

The rather limited importance that Lenin gave to his personal role is revealed by his reaction when the Central Committee proposed to start publishing his Collected Works:

Why? It's quite useless. Thirty years ago we wrote anything. It's not worth reproducing all that.¹⁰⁹

Lenin's simplicity and honesty in rejecting all kinds of material privileges appears clearly from the following facts:

Lenin gave away the gifts of food and fuel which peasant admirers brought to the Kremlin... Commissars' salaries were fixed at two-thirds of the rate for the highest category for industrial technicians...

War communism had not killed the theatres of Moscow or stifled the exuberance of the avant-garde. The demand for theatre seats was so enormous that both Lenin and Balabanova [then secretary of the Communist International - EM] — united at least in determination not to accept preferential treatment — were turned away one evening from the Arts Theatre where a Stanislavsky production of Chekov's *Three Sisters* was playing.¹¹⁰

The myth of Lenin as cynical and unscrupulous in the "struggle for power" is based above all on a rather disgusting calumny, that he accepted "German gold" in 1917 to finance Bolshevik propaganda. This calumny was the basis of persecutions of the Bolsheviks after the revolutionary days of July 1917.

In what is one of the best biographies of Lenin, Ronald W. Clark demonstrates a certain agnosticism on this question, going almost so far as to say there is no smoke without fire. He then recounts, without totally dismissing it, the assertion by an employee of the German Foreign Affairs Ministry, that 50 million gold marks were "invested" in the Bolshevik movement.¹¹¹

But the same Ronald Clark cites in passing the most striking proof of the unfounded nature of this calumny: *Pravda*, the main journal of the Bolsheviks, was always short of money.

Urgent and constant appeals were launched for a few tens of thousands of roubles.¹¹² How could a movement which had received millions of gold marks be so short of money?

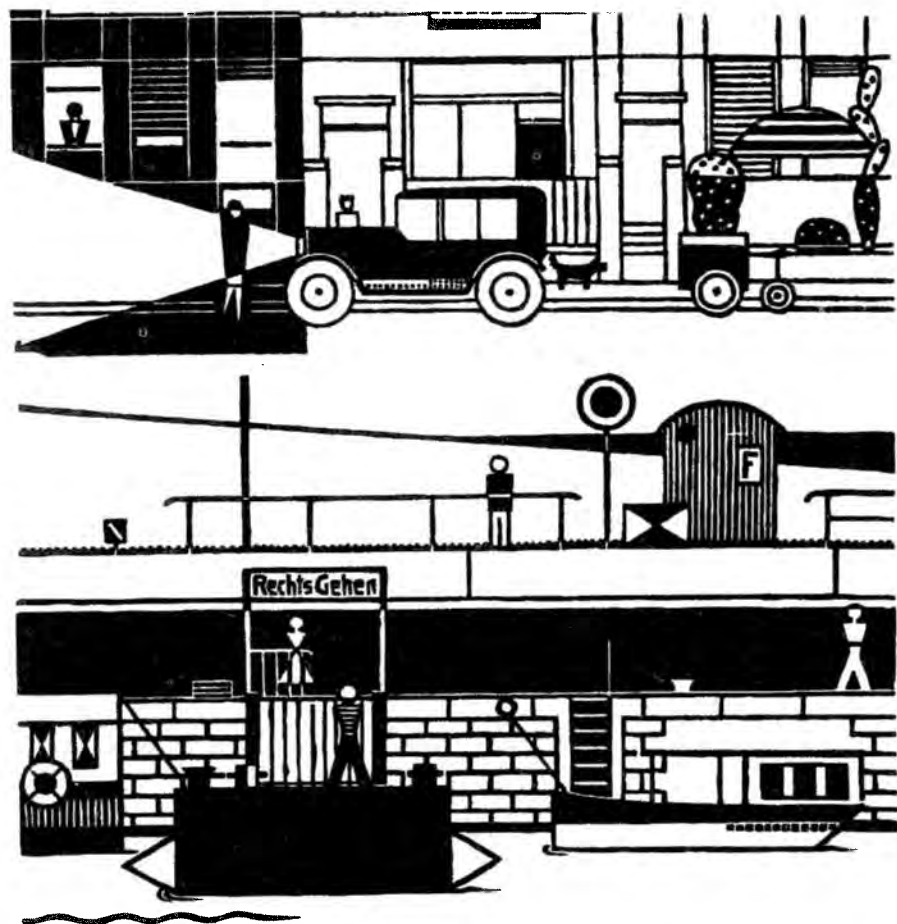
108. N. Valentinov, *Encounters with Lenin*, Oxford University Press 1968.

109. L.B. Kamenev, *Lenin's literarisches Erbe*, Hamburg, 1924.

110. Mitchell, op cit pp 152 and 156.

111. R. W. Clark, *Lenin, the Man Behind the Mask*, London, 1988, pp. 207, 239-240.

112. Idem, p. 227.



Brian Moynahan takes up this slander in a completely uncritical way, without mentioning the unreliable nature of the so-called "witnesses".¹¹³ Moynahan's treatment of Lenin in the period February-September 1917 is characterized by extreme bad faith, if not clear falsifications. He alleges for example that in the famous "sealed train" organized by the Swiss social-democrats Grimm and Platten, Lenin failed to involve other socialists than Bolsheviks in the trip.¹¹⁴

Wrong. Among the 32 Russian emigrants in the separate train wagon which, on the basis of an agreement with the German government, went through German territory to return to Russia, because the British and French authorities blocked their return by sea, there were 19 Bolsheviks, 6 members of the Bund, 3 members of the group *Nashe Slovo* close to Trotsky, and 4 members of other organizations. Furthermore, the agreement made with the German government stated clearly that there would be no discrimination between "defeatist" and "defensist" emigrants, all Russian emigrants had the right to board said wagon. In fact, at least some of the Bundists were defensists.¹¹⁵

113. Moynahan op cit pp. 19-201 and Chamberlin op cit Vol 1.

114. Moynahan op cit p. 143.

115. Fritz Platten [general secretary of the Swiss Socialist Party], *Lénine, de l'émigration en Russie*, Moscow, 1925.

In fact, this trip, and all the conditions with which it took place, was approved by a declaration of a series of international socialist militants, among them Stroem, the general secretary of the Swedish Socialist Party, and Lindhagen, the socialist mayor of Stockholm, as well as Fritz Platten.

Moynahan presents the trip as having been identified by public opinion both internationally and in Russia as a pro-German manoeuvre.¹¹⁶ But how can one reconcile this version with the fact that upon arrival in Petrograd, Lenin was welcomed officially by the Menshevik leader of the soviet, Nikola Chkheidze? And what about Radek's agitation against German militarism. What about the fiercely defeatist Trotsky's behaviour on his way back to Russia, reported by Moynahan himself:

The British released him [from the prison camp in Amherst Canada], to the relief of the camp commandant. Trotsky had been converting the [interned German] submariners with enough success for German officers to plead with the commandant to muzzle him. "Camp life had become a perpetual meeting." The British colonel agreed to ban him from speaking.¹¹⁷

Who acted there in the interests of German militarism?

116. Moynahan op cit p. 143.

117. Moynahan, op cit p. 161.

What is to be done? and the years 1905-07

Finally, it is impossible to use only the pamphlet *What is to be done?* — written in 1902 — to judge Lenin's organizational conceptions. The theses put forward in this work, undoubtedly with a certain exaggeration that Lenin himself was to admit later, cannot be detached from the precise historical context: a small party working in the strictest clandestinity.

Lenin never raised these theses to the level of a general theory of organization valid for all countries (including Russia) in all periods, independently of the period and the concrete conditions in which the class struggle was developing.

The alternative conceptions then proposed by the Mensheviks underestimated the constraints of illegality, the threat that they represented for the continuity of class activity, the — necessary but difficult — role of political centralization of fragmented struggles and above all the key nature of the struggle for political independence and later for the hegemony of the working class in the revolution. The split during the Second Congress of the party, in 1903, already contained in a latent fashion the germs of the central political differentiation between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks concerning the role of the Russian bourgeoisie in the revolution (the division between these two currents of the RSDLP was formalized in 1912).¹¹⁸

Even in the 1902 pamphlet *What is to be done?*, we find passages that sound very much "Luxemburgist-Trotskyist":

The organization of professional revolutionaries has no meaning apart from its connection with the "genuine revolutionary class that is spontaneously rising to struggle".¹¹⁹

Everyone will probably agree that "the broad democratic principle" presupposes the two following conditions: first, full publicity, and secondly, election to all offices... We call the German Socialist Party a democratic organization because all its functions are carried out publicly; even its party congresses are held in public.¹²⁰

These quotes are already sufficient to reject the thesis defended by Ingerflom.¹²¹ That author believes that Lenin's organizational concepts were derived from a broad understanding — which he is supposed to have shared with Axelrod of all people — of the historical consequences of the absence of "civil society" in traditional Russia. Hence even the proletariat, contrary to what Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg thought, was unable to conquer class con-

118. In fact, it is almost forgotten that it was the Mensheviks and not Lenin who formulated the concept of democratic centralism.

119. Lenin, "Preface to the Collection 'Twelve Years'", *Collected Works*, Vol 13, p. 104.

120. Lenin, "What Is To Be Done?", *Collected Works*, Vol 5, p. 477.

121. Claudio Sergio Ingerflom, *Le citoyen impossible — Les racines russes de Léninisme*, Payot, Paris 1988)

consciousness. Lenin is supposed to have thought that the party is prior to the class and the class struggle; it has to constitute the class, so to speak. All these affirmations do not hold in the light of the sum total of Lenin's writings even prior to the 1905 revolution.

After the very important experience of the 1905 revolution, Lenin broadened this clarification still further, in a partially self-critical fashion, by using the image of having "bent the stick too far in one direction" (his opponents having "bent the stick" — that is the argument — "in one direction" he had to bend it in the other to re-establish the balance):

From 1903 to 1907 ... the Social-Democratic party, despite the split in its ranks, gave the public the fullest information on the inner-party situation (minutes of the Second General Congress, the Third Bolshevik and the Fourth General, or Stockholm, congress). Despite the split, the Social-Democratic Party earlier than any of the other parties was able to take advantage of the temporary spell of freedom to build a legal organization with an ideal democratic structure, an electoral system, and representation at congresses according to the number of organized members...

Basically, of course, their success was due to the fact that the working class, whose best representatives built the Social-Democratic party, for objective economic reasons possesses a greater capacity for organization than any other class in capitalist society. Without this condition an organization of professional revolutionaries would be nothing more than a plaything, an adventure, a mere signboard.¹²²

Lenin expressed himself in a still clearer way when he asserted that:

It seems to me that comrade Radin is wrong in raising the question ... the Soviet of Workers' Deputies or the Party? I think that ... the decision must certainly be: both the Soviet of Workers' Deputies and the Party (...). it seems to me that the Soviet of Workers' Deputies, as an organization representing all occupations, should strive to include deputies from all industrial and professional and office workers, domestic servants, farm laborers, etc, from all who want and are able to fight in common for a better life for the whole working people, from all who would have at least an elementary degree of political honesty, from all but the Black Hundreds.¹²³

[At the 1906 Unity Congress] we were all agreed on the principle of democratic centralism, on guarantees for the rights of all minorities and for all loyal opposition, on the autonomy of every Party organization, on recognition that all Party functionaries must be elected, accountable to the Party and subject to recall.¹²⁴

122. Lenin, "Preface to the Collection 'Twelve Years'", *Collected Works*, Vol 13, pp. 103-104. In 1905-1907, Russia experienced an important wave of revolutionary struggles. This was a major experience for all the organizations, a test for the validity of their programmes and the quality of their structures. The later evolution of these organizations — like that of the Tsarist regime — was deeply marked by these key years. See in particular T. Shanin, *The Roots of Otherness: Russia's Turn of Century*, Volume 2, Russia, 1905-07, Revolution as a Moment of Truth, London, 1985.

123. Lenin, "Our tasks and the Soviet of Workers' Deputies", *Collected Works*, vol 10, pp. 20. "Black Hundreds" is the name usually given to the Association of Russian People, one of the main far-right organizations founded during the 1905-07 revolution to attack the revolutionary forces. These organizations also wanted to reverse the constitutional reforms made under the pressure of the events in October 1905.

124. Lenin, "Appeal to the Party by Delegates to the Unity Congress who belonged to the former 'Bolshevik' group", *Collected Works*, Vol 10, pp. 314.

The principle of democratic centralism and autonomy (sic) for local Party organizations implies universal and full freedom to criticize, so long as this does not disturb the unity of a definite action ...¹²⁵

The Central Committee has absolutely no right to call upon the party organizations to accept its resolution in favour of supporting the demand for a Cadet Ministry. It is the duty of every party member to take an absolutely independent and critical stand on this question and to declare for the resolution that in his opinion more correctly solves the problem within the framework of the decisions of the Unity Congress. The St Petersburg worker Social Democrats know that the whole Party organization is now built on a democratic basis. This means that all the Party members take part in the election of officials, committee members and so forth, ... that all the party members determine the line of tactics of the party organizations.¹²⁶

An author like Louis Fischer knew his sources perfectly. However, he deliberately does not comment on the passages in Lenin's writing which go in this direction.¹²⁷ This is manifest intellectual dishonesty, something that he is well-acquainted with.

Fischer lived in the USSR between 1923 and 1936 as a foreign correspondent, particularly for the American periodical *The Nation*. As such he made an apology for the Moscow that was extremely useful to Stalin and international Stalinism.¹²⁸ However, in the biography of Lenin which he wrote thirty years later, he said:

Stalin's vendetta against Trotsky plunged Soviet Russia into a bloodbath. In reality directed against Trotsky, the Moscow Trials of the 1930s cost the country its top leaders... In 1937 it was the turn of the military leaders of Russia and, in their thousands, its best industrial managers, writers, planners, administrators... It will always be impossible to measure what disasters this mad policy brought for Russia.¹²⁹

The person who in 1936-38 was an advocate of this "mad policy" did not find it necessary to formulate a single word of regret, of excuse or of self-criticism. He preferred to cross to the other side of the barricade.

Yesterday the wonderful Stalin was the successor of the wonderful Lenin. Today the despot Stalin is a by-product of the Leninist inclination for personal power and violence. We see what these two symmetrical positions have in common: in the last analysis Stalin derives from Lenin, yesterday for good and today for evil.

A non-monolithic party

We touch here on a much more general historical falsehood that is found in many authors who deal with

125. Lenin, "Freedom to Criticize and Unity of Action", *Collected Works*, Vol 10, p. 443.

126. Lenin, "Let the Workers Decide", *Collected Works*, Vol 10, p. 502-03.

127. Louis Fischer, *Lénine*, Paris: Bourgois 1966.

128. It was at the time of the "Moscow Trials" during the 1930s, that Stalin had the majority of the Communist Party cadres condemned and liquidated, in order to consolidate the rule of the bureaucracy.

129. Fischer op cit p. 462.

the history of Soviet Russia in 1918-20.¹³⁰ Where was this so-called monolithic Bolshevik Party that was a result of the claimed Leninist obsession for hyper-centralization?

In reality, we have never seen a workers' party with so many differences of opinion and so much freedom of expression, including in public, as the Bolshevik Party of this period — and certainly not the German or Austrian social-democratic parties even in their best moments. We could cite many different illustrations of this. But we will simply mention the following:

- During the discussion on the opportuneness of the October insurrection, Zinoviev and Kamenev, the main members of the Central Committee, publicly disagreed with the position of the majority in an article published in the journal of Maxim Gorky.

- During the discussion on the formation of a coalition government of all the workers' parties, after the Second Congress of the Soviets, six members of the Central Committee and a number of members of the Council of Peoples' Commissars, publicly took a position against the decision of the majority. They also resigned from their posts to give more weight to their opposition.¹³¹

- Ryazanov and Lozovsky, two Bolshevik leaders,

130. Haimson goes into the claimed relationship between the positions of Lenin and those of the populist/terrorist Thachev. But he does not say a word about the positions of Victor Adler and Karl Kautsky on the need to introduce of socialist consciousness from the outside, that is to say from the intellectuals, into the working class. It can however be demonstrated that this is the real origin of the so much criticized passage in "What is to be done" (see L. Haimson, *The Russian Marxists and the Origins of Bolshevism*, Boston, 1966, p. 16).

131. This episode, which is not very well-known, deserves to be explained in detail:

When the Second Congress of the Soviets ratified the Bolshevik seizure of power on October 25, it was broadly assumed even among the Bolsheviks that the new government would include representatives of all the soviet parties. Martov's proposal that the congress should immediately consider the establishment of such a regime was seconded by Lunacharsky and passed by the delegates unanimously. ...

The secondary Bolshevik leadership was strongly in favour of coalition. Nein was rebuffed in Petrograd, and the Moscow city organization, led by Rykov and Nogin, openly backed Zinoviev and Kamenev. Even the Moscow Regional Bureau, distinguished by its left-wing coloration, resolved to accept coalition if the Bolsheviks had a majority of cabinet posts. On November 2 the coalition issue began to come to a head when a resolution was passed by the Central Executive Committee insisting that Lenin and Trotsky be included in any cabinet and that at least half the portfolios go to the Bolsheviks. In opposition to this minimal condition, the whole Bolshevik Right voted against the party — Kamenev..., Zinoviev, almost half the Council of People's Commissars (Rykov, Lunacharsky, Nogin, Miliutin, Teodorovich) and others including Lozovsky and the ex-Mensheviks Ryazanov and Yurenev...

...on November 4 the crisis erupted. The Central Executive Committee was discussing the moves made by the government to muzzle the non-socialist press, and the representatives of the

voted against the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly in January 1918, at a meeting of the Central Executive Committee of the Soviets.

- During the negotiations on the Brest-Litovsk agreement, the "left communists" around Bukharin published a daily newspaper to defend in public their minority position.

- The current know as the "democratic centralist" tendency led by the "left communists" like Ossinsky, put forward in the review *Kommunist* from 1918 a plan for workers' management of industry which was very different from that of the majority of the Central Committee. It started, very timidly, to put it into practice.¹³²

- The Workers' Opposition led by Chliapnikov, Miasnikov and Kollontai, established in 1920, defended its minority positions publicly.

- Again in 1921, I. Vardin (Megaldze), the director of the Cheka, against Lenin's opposition, proposed to legalize all the opposition parties and groupings which accepted the Soviet system of government. They were to be authorized to present separate lists of candidates in the elections to the soviets and a free press in line with their size.¹³³

An episode recounted by Ilyin-Zhenevsky, deputy People's Commissar for Defence, is a good illustration of this liberal atmosphere. At the end of March 1918 there was the first conference of soldiers and sailors of the Red Army. At the opening of the conference, there was a proposal to elect an honorary presiding committee of Lenin, Trotsky and Zinoviev. The anarchists were opposed. The proposal was adopted but only with a small majority, a lot of the Bolsheviks voting with the anarchists.

Against the opposition of the leaders of the Bolshevik delegation and of Ilyin-Zhanovsky representing the government, a bloc of anarchists and "left" Bolsheviks forced through that the conference

Bolshevik Opposition, apprehensive over the possibility of dictatorial rule, joined in condemning restraints on newspapers which were not actually calling for rebellion. Larin... offered a resolution to this effect. It failed, twenty-two to thirty-one, with a number of abstentions...

All five of Lenin's critics within the Central Committee left — Zinoviev, Kamenev, Rykov, Miliutin, and Nogin. Collectively they declared "... Long live the government of the soviet parties!"...

Shliapnikov, the Commissar of Labour, joined this group in a declaration to the Central Executive Committee: "We take the stand that it is necessary to form a socialist government of all parties in the soviet..."

From R. Daniels, *The Conscience of the Revolution*, Boulder, 1988 pp 64-66.

132. See Thomas F. Remington, op. cit. on the running conflict and debate on the question of industrial administration inside the Bolshevik Party.

133. Cited in S. Farber, op.cit., p. 206.

should have legislative and decision-making powers. The same bloc also imposed a substantial increase in soldiers' and sailors' pay that the government said it could not fulfil.¹³⁴

It could be objected that Lenin violently — a violence that remained essentially verbal and did not lead to any disciplinary measures — opposed these ruptures of discipline.

This is true but this is not the essential point.

Because what these episodes show is that the party formed by the organizational conceptions of Lenin was non-monolithic; that very many leaders and cadres, as much workers as intellectuals, maintained a great independence of thought, an ultra-sharp critical spirit and that the daily practice of this party reflected much more this critical independence than any sort of monolithic or hyper-centralist education.

In addition it should be noted that Lenin's inspiration was not really different. At the Tenth Party Congress, in March 1921, when factions were banned, he opposed the proposal to ban tendencies as well. He stated clearly that when the party is divided on important questions it is impossible to prevent the election of the leadership on the basis of different tendency platforms.

He himself, on more than one occasion when he was in a minority in the leadership, decided to look elsewhere and sought to organize a minority tendency or defend minority positions in public.

These facts cannot be hidden without distorting the history of the Soviet Russia of Lenin's time.

An internal tension in Leninism

It is true that in the writings and practice of Lenin there are also different features of paternalism, authoritarianism and substitutionism. In fact, the total organizational theory and practice of Lenin seems to be dominated by a balancing act, as explained in the works of Marcel Liebman, Paul Le Blanc and above all the excellent essay by Stephen Cohen already mentioned.¹³⁵

In a first approximation this balancing act can be summed up as follows: in the phases of a revolutionary upsurge, the tumultuous rise of the mass movements, the democratic and even libertarian emphases predominate in Lenin's practice. In the periods of revolutionary slump, the decline of activity of the mass movement, the themes of centralism and replacement of the class by the party take predominance.

134. A.F. Ilyin-Zhenevsky, *The Bolsheviks in power - Reminiscences of the year 1918*, London, 1984, pp. 48-51.

135. M. Liebman, op. cit., P. LeBlanc, *Lenin and the Revolutionary Party*, Humanities Press, 1990, S. Cohen op. cit.

To explain this duality by Machiavellism is misplaced and unjust. The starting point for such an attitude is a psychological interpretation which can hardly be proved.¹³⁶

At the limit this psychological interpretation could be replaced by a sociological one. The democratic and libertarian Lenin acted under the pressure of the workers' vanguard and masses. The hyper-centralist and substitutionist Lenin sought a pragmatic solution in a situation where, in practice the masses were not active.

But this sociological explanation is not fair to Lenin either. It does not take into account the whole of Russian history from 1918 to 1923. In particular it does not make it possible to understand the almost desperate violence with which Lenin reacted from 1922, if not the end of 1921, faced with the growing bureaucratization of the state and of the party (a bureaucratization of which he then became aware). It does not explain "Lenin's last fight" against the tentacular bureaucracy, nor the violence of his final confrontation with Stalin, nor the truly pathetic tone he used on this occasion:

I suppose I have been very remiss with respect to the workers of Russia for not having intervened energetically and decisively enough.¹³⁷

Any "sociological" explanation can only ignore a historical fact, that is nevertheless difficult, and that Paul Le Blanc correctly counterposed to the too mechanical view of the "balancing act" as it was formulated by Liebmann. It was in the years of reaction, in 1908-11, in the struggle against the "liquidating" tendency that Lenin to a large extent grouped together and trained the Bolshevik cadres which made it possible for his party to become hegemonic in the Russian workers' movement from 1912.

136. According to L. Haimson, Lenin more than Marx and the "orthodox Marxists" was convinced that "passions" played a central role in individual and social choices. But he deeply distrusted these passions, including his own. This led to his ideological intransigence. He had been traumatized by some personal disappointments, particularly in his relations with Plekhanov. (op. cit., pp. 139, 186-187.

But Haimson himself recognized that at the end of the Second Congress of the RSDLP, Lenin had adopted a very conciliating attitude to the Mensheviks, particularly Martov. He was ready to withdraw his proposals to change the editorial board of *Iskra*. It was Martov's intransigence and not Lenin's which provoked the split. (ibidem pp. 182-183).

137. It was the first sentence of his "Note" of December 30, 1922, on the question of "The question of nationalities or 'autonomization'" where he violently criticizes Stalin's policy on this question (*Collected Works*, Vol 36, p. 605). On this period see M. Lewin, *Lenin's Last Struggle*, London, 1970.

An independent mind

The Russian example illustrates a more general historical rule: it is in non-revolutionary periods that the programmatic, political and organizational bases are created for the "breakthrough" of the revolutionary party during the later years of struggle.

The thesis whereby the party conceived by Lenin was a party essentially composed if not dominated by bourgeois intellectuals and not workers has no factual basis.¹³⁸ This opinion is put forward by Alfred Meyer, which even asserts that democratic centralism was a system that:

... functioned pretty well, while the party was commanded by a strong leader who ruled it with an iron grip.¹³⁹

This second assertion fits the facts no more than does the first.

To demonstrate the contrary we can cite Beryl Williams, who is nevertheless very hostile to the Bolsheviks and to Lenin:

As the Bolsheviks popularity rose, so did party membership. In the process the party was to change out of all recognition. By October, it was a mass party, not the elite intellectual grouping of 1903 or of popular imagination. Figures for membership are difficult to establish, but it would seem that the party grew tenfold in the course of the year to rather more than a quarter of a million. The vast majority of members by October were workers ... Again in contrast to popular belief, they were not highly organized or united, although they probably had more cohesion and certainly stronger leadership than their rivals. But there were great differences in approach between the Central Committee, local "sub-elites" in district committees and soviets, and "sub-sub-elites" in the factories. Local activists, like their supporters, tended to act with remarkable independence.¹⁴⁰

This honest description gives a much more faithful picture of the real functioning of the party than the different legends about "democratic centralism" under Lenin. It makes it possible to understand why Lenin had serious clashes with these "committee men" at least four times; in 1905-16; at the beginning of the revolution in February 1917; on the eve of October; from 1921-22. The first three times the clash ended to his advantage, thanks to the support he won from the broad workers' vanguard, including outside the party. The fourth time he lacked this support, with the tragic consequences that we know.

Towards a coherent conception

Lenin never really presented a total, completely coherent conception of the party and its organizational principles. But it does seem, that in the light of

138. On the overwhelmingly working-class composition of the Bolshevik Party see *The Workers' Revolution in Russia - The View from Below*, op.cit.

139. Cited by P. Le Blanc, op. cit., pp. 60 et 126.

140. B. Williams, op.cit., pp. 28-29.

historical events he moved in this direction. An element of this process of clarification was the gradual assertion of the dialectical unity between the self-activity of the class and the role of the vanguard party, except in the "black years" of 1920-21 (some would say 1919-21).

Authors like Leopold Haimson assert that the Russian intellectuals and Marxists have never been able to resolve the problem of the contradiction between spontaneity and consciousness, between the action of the masses and the action inspired and organized by the vanguard. However, the October Revolution gave this answer, illustrated by the striking and classic formula given by Trotsky in his *History of the Russian Revolution*:

Without a guiding organization the energy of the masses would dissipate like steam not enclosed in a piston box. But nevertheless what moves things is not the piston or the box, but the steam.¹⁴¹

It remains the case that the organizational model of *What is to be done?* even applied in a limited period has produced problems: a certain type of leaders, "committee men" un able to adapt to tumultuous mass movements. Lenin's companion Krupskaya wrote on this subject:

The "committeeman" was usually a rather self-assured person. He saw what a tremendous influence the work of the committee had on the masses, and as a rule he recognized no inner-party democracy. "Inner-party democracy only leads to trouble with the police. We are connected with the movement as it is," the committeeman would say. Inwardly, they rather despised the Party workers abroad, who, in their opinion, had nothing better to do than squabble among themselves — "they ought to be made to work under Russian conditions". The committeeman objected to the over-ruling influence of the Centre abroad [that is of Lenin! EM]. At the same time, they did not want innovations. They were neither desirous nor capable of adjusting themselves to quickly changing conditions.¹⁴²

In any case, the real history of Soviet Russia between 1918 and 1923 can only be understood in function of all these contradictory elements and not as some original sin of Lenin.

Those who want to find the origins of Stalinism should first of all look at the social forces and their mutual relations, which is more in line with the principles of historical materialism than to simply look at ideas. But, as for the intellectual sources, Stalinist organizational conceptions do not continue those of Lenin: they represent their brutal and terrorist negation.

Re-establish soviet democracy immediately?

How was it possible to effectively oppose the

141. L. Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, New York 1980, p. xix.

142. N.K. Krupskaya, *Reminiscences of Lenin*, New York 1970, pp.124-125.

bureaucratization process in the Russia of 1920? That is, in a country which was drained bloodless, hit by famine, whose transport system was totally disorganized, with a working class reduced to less than half if not a third of what it was in 1917. A working class on a rapid road to demobilization, not because of the end of the Civil War but because of the absolute necessity of finding an individual supply of food. In such social and material conditions, the immediate re-establishment of soviet democracy, indeed decisive steps to workers' management were a total utopia.

The leadership of the party and of the state were supposed to give the priority to an upturn in production, particularly agricultural production, a rise in work productivity and the re-establishment of employment.

Lenin and Trotsky's mistake was to generalize the exceptional conditions of the time. From the beginning of the NEP in 1921-22, the numerical weakening and the tendency to decomposition and social degeneration of the working class were halted.

It was at this point that a gradual broadening of soviet democracy could have speeded up the socio-political re-establishment of the working class, making easier its slow re-politicization. But by limiting what remained of democracy in a draconian fashion at this very moment, the Soviet leaders on the contrary made worse the depoliticization of the proletariat and of the party.¹⁴³

It is impossible to judge to what point a "new course" would have met with success. But the tragic results of the policy followed in 1921 are too obvious not to conclude: what was utopian in 1920 was no longer so from 1922.



143. In March 1921 the Tenth Congress of the CP banned factions and reduced the internal democracy of the party. Moreover, the famous "Lenin promotion" of 1924, a wave of recruitment which brought into the party hundreds of thousands of politically uneducated workers who were not forged in struggle, paradoxically contributed to the depoliticization of the party and proletariat.

The strategic dimension

The October revolution raises the key strategic question which confronts the whole of the socialist workers' movement: how should a party which identifies with the working class and socialism (or communism) behave in a revolutionary situation. This question refers back to another, broader, question, that of long-term socialist (or communist) strategy; a question that we will not go into here.¹⁴⁴

Revolutions do not fall from the sky. They cannot be mechanically detached from the periods which precede them, the periods in which the conditions which lead to their explosion slowly mature. In the same way, what the parties identifying with the working class do and are depends to a large extent on their composition and their activity in pre-revolutionary or non-revolutionary phases (although we cannot deny that the revolution itself can noticeably modify some of these factors).

It is schematic but useful to sum up the two fundamentally counterposed strategic philosophies during a revolution by the formula: fatalism or voluntarism.

Fatalism or reasonable voluntarism

The fatalist approach is based on the idea that the "objective conditions" and the "balance of power" determine practically everything, that the course of events is largely independent of decisions of parties and their leaders, that the task of these latter is essentially to draw the boundaries between what is "objectively possible" and the rest (which would be adventurism and illusions).

We should therefore have the courage to say to the masses that a series of their aspirations are impossible.

The Mensheviks embodied this orientation during 1917. Their main contacts abroad were the Austro-Marxists whose leader and theorist Otto Bauer has gone down in history as the very prototype of the fatalist Marxist.

The voluntarist approach to strategy in a revolutionary period is on the other hand based on the idea that, whatever the weight of objective factors (economic, social, historical and cultural tradition), which partially determine the course of events, this is not totally predetermined. The concrete actions of social classes (and the main sections of them), the activity and precise orientation of parties and their

leaders can also have a decisive effect on the course of events.

"Parametric" determinism

It is not a question of counterposing a determinist approach (identified with "fatalism") to an agnostic or teleological philosophy of history (which would then be identified with "voluntarism").¹⁴⁵ We are discussing here voluntarism which respects the major historical-materialist constraints.

We must avoid mechanistic and linear determinism, which has done a lot of harm, replacing it with a richer determinism, based on the dialectic of objective and subjective factors.¹⁴⁶ We express this understanding of what is "possible" by the concept "parametric determinism", an understanding of history which makes it possible to take into account what is "latent" and "virtual". Such a concept was already used by Marx in Volume I of *Capital*.

The course of events is neither totally predetermined nor totally undetermined. The possible outcome of the revolution oscillates within predetermined limits.

In Russia in 1917, neither a return to a semi-feudal regime nor the rise of capitalism based on parliamentary democracy, nor the totally finished building of a classless socialist society were possible.

145. Agnosticism considers that it is impossible to know what is reality beyond what is apparent (ie a doctrine which declares the unknowable inaccessible to human beings) or which considers any metaphysics as useless. Telenology is a set of speculations applied to the question of the purpose of the world, men or, here, of history. It thus tends to interpret the course of history starting from a supposed purpose.

146. The term "mechanistic" designates a current of materialist thinking which excessively simplifies the interaction between different factors, by defining rigid chains of cause and effects and which neglects in particular the historical dimension. Mechanism originates in the natural sciences of the 18th century which used extensively comparisons with machines and particularly with a watch mechanism. In a mechanistic conception of historical materialism, of Marxist theory, economic contradictions determine a rigid, unique and inevitable succession of societies (primitive communist, antique slave, feudal, capitalist, socialist).

The (more authentic) dialectical conception of historical materialism obviously integrates socio-economic factors and constraints. But it also takes into account the weight of other factors (for example: states, cultures, ideologies, traditions of struggle). In particular it emphasizes the active role of socio-political struggles, the class struggle. This is what makes it possible to understand that the course of history is determined by the interaction between these different factors and not simply by the "iron logic" of economic contradictions.

144. I hope to prepare a future *Notebook* on this question.

But in the predetermined framework, the action of the masses, of the parties and their leaders could lead to several possible variants: victory of an ultra-reactionary bourgeois counter-revolution (which could only be bloody, repressive, and destructive of the workers' movement and all independent activity of the working and peasants masses); victory of the revolution through the soviets taking power, making it possible to start building a new society (in fusion with or at least with the support of the international revolution).

The fatalist approach was, in great measure, the product of the "Marxism" of the Second International, inspired by Kautsky. It was a conception strongly marked by a mechanistic determinism of semi-Darwinian inspiration.¹⁴⁷ It implied that, even when confronted with a revolutionary explosion, the socialists could not in the final analysis do otherwise than submit to the inexorable march of events; The voluntarist approach implied on the contrary that socialists were conscious of the possibility of influencing in a decisive fashion the historic outcome through their own action. This is the principal merit of the Bolsheviks, who tried to do just that. And this is the main lesson that Rosa Luxemburg learnt from the October events; a lesson which led her to moderate her criticisms of Lenin and Trotsky and to support the Russian Revolution in an enthusiastic fashion:

Whatever a party could offer of courage, revolutionary farsightedness and consistency in a historic hour, Lenin, Trotsky and the other comrades have given in good measure. All the revolutionary honour and capacity which Western social-democracy lacked were represented by the Bolsheviks. Their October uprising was not only the actual salvation of the Russian Revolution; it was also the salvation of the honour of international socialism.

and again:

What is in order is to distinguish the essential from the non-essential, the kernel from the additional excrescences in the policies of the Bolsheviks. In the present period, when we face decisive final struggles in all the world, the most important problem of socialism was and is the burning question of our time. It is not a matter of this or that secondary question of tactics, but of the capacity for action of the proletariat, the strength to act, the will to power of socialism as such. In this, Lenin and Trotsky and their friends were the first, those who went ahead as an example to the proletariat of the world; they are still the only ones up to now who can cry with Hutten: "I have dared!"

This is the essential and the enduring in Bolshevik policy. In this sense their's is the immortal historical service of having marched at the head of the international proletariat with the conquest of political power and the practical placing of the problem of the realization of socialism, and of having advanced mightily the settlement of the score between capital and labour in the entire world. In Russia the problem could only be posed. It could not be solved in Russia. And in this sense, the future

147. Charles Darwin was an English naturalist and biologist of the 19th century, known for his work on the evolution of living species through the process of natural selection. His theories, "Darwinism", are very rich but have sometimes been interpreted in a very simplistic way (with neo-Darwinism) and incorrectly transposed into the field of sociology.

everywhere belongs to "Bolshevism".¹⁴⁸

Was it right to take power?

Of course the counterposition between these two options, fatalism and opportunism, should not be exaggerated, even though they do remain two fundamentally different options. Too great a simplification of the problem can confuse things and make the choice more difficult.

There is, in this sense, the possibility of adventurist, putschist, "Blanquist" excesses in the "voluntarist" course: attempts to seize power by minorities who do not enjoy the support of the majority of wage-workers.¹⁴⁹

But the existence and the danger of such deviations can only be an excuse to avoid the real strategic choice which existed in Russia just before the October Revolution.

The Bolsheviks obviously enjoyed the support of the majority of the proletariat. The people obviously wanted a radical, revolutionary change. Was it right, in these precise circumstances, to take power?

The revolutionary Marxists of today, like those of 1917 and the following years, remain convinced that the answer is an unreserved "yes".

Determinism, political choices, experience

Recently, the critical study of Bolshevik tactics in the years which followed the October Revolution, has given rise to a confrontation on the nature of historical determinism between John Rees and Samuel Farber. The first accuses the second of having abandoned all materialist determinism, because he presents a range of alternatives, analyses, other choices which could have been possible for revolutionary socialist policy in Russia in 1918-23

Marxism does not suggest that in every circumstance, political will or ideology can play a key role. The degree to which workers can "make their own history" depends on the weight of objective factors bearing down on them. ... In Russia (after October 1927) the limits of action were reduced to withstanding, under ever narrowing constrictions, a siege. Every ounce of willpower and political consciousness was necessary

148. Rosa Luxemburg, "The Russian Revolution" in op.cit., p. 375 and pp. 395.

149. The January 1919 Spartakist uprising in Germany, the attempt led by Bettelheim to take power in Vienna, Austria a little later, and above all the "March 1921 Action" in Germany as well as the Bulgarian CP's coup against Stambulinsky, fall into this category. Auguste Blanqui, a very important French revolutionary in the 19th century, gave his name to "Blanquism", considered as the desire to conquer power basing oneself on an active minority and using conspiratorial methods.

to keep the workers' state from being overcome. The "subjective factor" was reduced to withstanding, under ever narrowing constrictions, to a choice between capitulation to the Whites or defending the revolution with whatever means were at hand.¹⁵⁰

But this way of posing the problem has two fundamental weaknesses.

First of all it does not respond to the essential objection, that is that soviet democracy was definitively suffocated at the moment when the soviet parties were banned, after the Civil War, and not when the alternative was either to capitulate to the Whites or to defend the revolution with all the means available. It was thus suffocated after the victory, when there was no White army still present on Soviet territory.

The measures then taken were inspired by the idea that, precisely because of the victory in the Civil War, the revolutionary mobilization of the Civil War was going to decline. This demobilization, in the eyes of the Bolsheviks, could threaten soviet power still more than the White armies. John Rees does not mention this explanation. Thus he does not unmask its illogical and mistaken character.

Rees then dissolves these concrete problems in an abstract and general formula. The question was not to know whether if, in general, "all means necessary", should be used to defend soviet power and prevent a White victory. The question is to know whether this or that concrete measure made easier or more difficult the victorious pursuit of the Civil War.

Was this the case in the creation of the Cheka? Was this the case in the continuation and stepping up of wheat requisitions in 1919-20 and in general the excesses of "war communism"? Was this the case with the banning of the soviet parties?

The Soviet power, the leaders of the Bolshevik Party, had a real choice: to take or not take these measures. Were they right? Were they wrong?

John Rees argues as if the question was not even posed. And, curiously, he does not mention the central argument which could, if not totally justify, at least largely explain the behaviour of the Bolsheviks in this regard. It was formulated by Rosa Luxemburg in her pamphlet on the Russian Revolution.

The socialist revolution, as well as the beginning of building a classless society, constituted a totally new experience. There was absolutely no handbook of pre-established rules that could be referred to. The Russian Revolution was an immense historical laboratory, both exalting and dramatic. Advances could only be made by experimentation, in feeling the way.

Only practice can show if this or that concrete measure — we are not talking here about general orientation — is correct or false. Any dogmatic

150. J. Rees, "In Defence of October" in *International Socialism*, No 52.

approach, starting from pre-established schemas, is counter-productive (as is any purely pragmatic orientation). Both avoid the big strategic choices.

Many things are clear after the event, but were not at the time. They could not be so. As Napoleon Bonaparte said: "We'll start fighting then we'll see." Lenin liked to repeat these words of a master tactician.

Mistakes and socialist democracy

It is just because this is the case that the revolution has a vital need of pluralist soviet democracy, of an active political life, of the masses' right in practice to criticize and to intervene. Because if the revolution as the beginning of building a classless society is an immense laboratory, then mistakes are inevitable: it is thus vital to have mechanisms which make it possible not so much to avoid mistakes — which is impossible — but to correct them as quickly as possible, and then to avoid them being repeated in the future. Lenin himself noted that the fashion in which a party behaved in relation to its own mistakes determined its future.

And it is in this context that soviet democracy acquires all its value.

Democracy and social equality

Samuel Farber is thus, in my opinion, correct as opposed to John Rees for the general method of approach. But, once again, he is only right in a general and abstract fashion and not in a large number of the concrete judgements he makes. In fact he uses purely formal criteria of democracy excessively; criteria which turn out to be in practice much less democratic than they seem at first sight.

Farber insists strongly on the importance of a "state based on law", the need for written laws, the principle according to which the accused is presumed innocent until proven guilty, etc.¹⁵¹ Our movement incorporated most of these principles into the theses which it adopted during its 1979 and 1985 congresses, entitled "Socialist Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat". We did not wait for the upheavals in Eastern Europe nor the publication of Farber's book to assert and defend these rights.¹⁵²

But Farber does not deal with a series of other problems which although not "formal" are

151. S. Farber, *Before Stalinism*, Polity Press, 1990, pp. 159-162.

152. The resolution "Socialist Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat" was first presented at the 11th World Congress of the Fourth International in 1979. Adopted first by an indicative vote, it was rediscussed, amended and finally adopted at the 12th World Congress in January 1985. For this version see *International Viewpoint*, special issue, 1985.

nevertheless very real; problems which could be an obstacle to the guarantee of human rights for women and men, as long as market and monetary phenomena exist (that is to say during the whole transitional period): the corruptibility of judges; the need to limit the number of lawyers that an individual can use because if not those who have with more money have greater possibilities of defending themselves or — under civil law — of accusing others; free legal defence; the need for strict public control and thus elimination of the principle that a "closed case" cannot be reopened; substantial modifications of the procedural codes to make them more transparent to the mass of citizens; generalization of the principle of the revocability of judges (thus elimination of the principle that they appointed for life); and the maximum extension of the principle of jury trials.

There is no reason why these juridical changes would undermine or limit the rights of individuals or the "state based on law". They are in fact necessary conditions if we want all women and men, and not only privileged minorities (including bureaucrats and intellectuals) to enjoy their formal rights to the full! However, the severe criticism of "revolutionary justice" rejects them dogmatically, as if on principle.

Social inequality in the legal system is a well-known scandal in our "states based on law". Three recent events provide a rather spectacular confirmation of this, if one is needed. Prince Victor-Emmanuel, claimant to the throne of Italy, has been acquitted of the murder of a young German after the legal process dragged on for eleven years. Would a citizen of average means be able to drag things out for so long?

In Japan, after 24 years, the Hitachi corporation has won a case against one of its employees, sacked for having refused to work overtime. A lawyer who has established a workers' advice centre, Mr Kawahito, said about this case:

Like many of Japan's laws, this one is deliberately unclear. Today's decision was wrong because Japanese workers will now be unable to refuse overtime and the incidence of *karoshi* (death from overwork) will rise further... One in four white collar workers now fear death from overwork, according to a recent Tokyo survey by Nippon Kayaku, a medicine manufacturer...

Clearly, the Supreme Court has favoured big business and believes economic power comes from overtime. It has given priority to economy over human life.¹⁵³

The Kennedy family spent one million dollars in less than six months to defend a member of the family accused of rape.¹⁵⁴ Could an ordinary person do that?

The United States, Italy and Japan are of course capitalist countries and not post-capitalist societies. But this does not change anything in the fact that these three cases illustrate the ambiguity of the concept of

153. *The Times*, November 29, 1991. A white-collar worker in an office worker, a blue-collar worker is a manual worker.

154. *Sunday Times Magazine*, December 1, 1991.

the "state based on law". They show that the independence of the judicial power can enter into open conflict with equal opportunities, when there is an inequality of wealth, of income, of social status: phenomena which will survive during the period of transition to which Farber refers.

A coalition government?

The problem of the choice of possible actions obviously has a much broader dimension than that of the undoubtedly very limited possible variants of Bolshevik tactics. This choice is posed for all those from 1917 until today, from Plekhanov to Eric Hobsbawm, who say decidedly: they should not have taken power, the October Revolution was "premature".

What should have been done? Wait passively for events to occur? Deliver the country to the rabble army of Wilhelm II? Russian and international reformists do not put forward anything coherent, except absurd illusions in an impossible bourgeois democracy.

Centrists like Martov and Otto Bauer/Hilferding defended an alternative solution in a hesitant and timid way. Martov called it "a unified revolutionary democratic government": a coalition of all the parties identifying with socialism.

A whole wing of the Bolsheviks also looked to such project (as we saw in the previous chapter). It was however fundamentally impossible, not because of the supposed "sectarianism" of the Bolsheviks but for much deeper reasons.

In fact, the right SRs and the right Mensheviks did not want to give up at any price the policy of "national defence", that is to say the continuation of the war which had unavoidable implications. The centre-left Menshevik Dan, who was himself a (more and more hesitant) supporter of "revolutionary national defence" wrote on this:

The continuing defence of the country, while waiting to sign a democratic peace, required that an army of several million people be maintained, and that everything should be done to prevent it becoming disorganized. As a consequence the application of the agrarian reform had to be put off until after the meeting of the Constituent Assembly. In fact, a revolutionary expropriation of the big landowners and the distribution of land would have inevitably provoked the desertion of millions of peasant soldiers who would not have stayed at the front at such a time.¹⁵⁵

In other words, neither the majority of the Mensheviks nor the right SRs were ready to accept immediate peace, the immediate division of the big properties and workers' control over production. The Menshevik minister of labour, Skobelev, agreed to re-establish the authority of the manufacturers and managers in the enterprises, a demand of the

155. Dan op.cit., p. 298.

employers' association. On what programme could a governmental coalition then be established?

The "conciliators" made the exclusion of Lenin and Trotsky a condition for the constitution of such a "workers' united front" government. It was obviously an unacceptable condition for the Bolsheviks who nevertheless held the absolute majority of mandates in the congress of soviets!

A coalition government of the Bolsheviks, left SRs, left Mensheviks (the "internationalists" around Martov) would at the limit have been possible. It was moreover partially constituted because a coalition government of the Bolsheviks-left SRs was formed. But it was Martov's group which from the outset refused to follow this path.

Do nothing? The German example

It could be argued that, after all, it was better not to follow a revolutionary path which could only lead to failure. This is only in appearance a Pontius Pilate position.

In reality, by refusing to act, one influences events as much as one does in acting — because one opts for the status quo and leaves the field open to the class opponent who can take the initiative freely.

Scholastics say, not incorrectly, that there are sins of omission as well as of commission.

This fundamental question of strategic choice can be most clearly illustrated by comparing the behaviour of the German social-democrats who had the majority during 1918 with the behaviour of the Bolsheviks in 1917 (the right wing of the USPD occupying a middle position quite similar to that of Martov in Russia).

Let us leave aside the question of the social composition of the leadership of the German social-democratic party and the material interests represented. Let us even leave aside the question of the real motivation of this majority current. The disastrous historical balance sheet of reformism is clear.¹⁵⁶

The SPD refused to take power. It refused to envisage the possibility of an advance, however moderate, to socialism. It refused to purge seriously the state apparatus inherited from the Empire — particularly its military, legal and diplomatic branches.

156. Pierre Broué *Révolution en Allemagne (1917-1923)*, Paris, 1971 publishes a very extensive bibliography of the German Revolution 1918-1919. Here we will only mention the memoirs of Richard Müller, leader of the *Obleue* revolutionaries of Berlin; the memoirs of Noske, of Philip Scheidemann, of Severing, of General Groener, the books of Benoist Méchin, Pater von Oertzen, Paul Frölich, Paul Lévi, Franz Borkenau (see bibliography for titles).

It went over to the side of the established order one hundred per cent, and was at most prepared to undertake some timid reforms.

This policy was concretized in a number of ways: finalization of the agreement on institutionalized negotiations (class collaboration) between the trade-union bureaucracy and the employers; formation of a coalition government with the bourgeoisie; liquidation of the workers' councils not only as bodies of political power but even as bodies of workers' control and dual power within the enterprises; above all, a secret agreement with the command of the imperial armed forces, on the joint proposal of Ebert, social-democratic leader, and General Groener:

There can no longer be any discussion today on the question of the alliance made in November between Chancellor Ebert and the army chiefs, even in the version of a telephone agreement between Groener and Ebert in the night of November 9 to 10 cannot be formally substantiated. From November 10, Marshal Hindenburg telegraphed to the military commanders that the central command had decided to collaborate with the Chancellery in order to "prevent the spread of terrorist Bolshevism in Germany".

General Groener [wrote] some years later: "We made an alliance against Bolshevism".¹⁵⁷

But what Ebert, Noske and Groener called "Bolshevism" was, in Germany, a very broad popular movement challenging bourgeois society, independently of the existence of adventurist and minority ultra-left groups. For example, the general strike for the defence of the workers' councils in February-March 1919, or the formidable mass mobilization against the Kapp-von Lüttwitz putsch in March-April 1920.

Reformism and counter-revolution

In a revolutionary period, the refusal to get involved in the revolution and the taking of power almost inevitably means being part of the counter-revolution. The choice is then no longer between action and inaction. It is between revolutionary action and counter-revolutionary action. The reformists are in fact led to repress the spontaneous, semi-spontaneous or organized movement of the toiling masses; opposing it first by manoeuvres and lies and then by violent action.¹⁵⁸

The role of Gustav Noske, the social-democratic minister, is notorious on this. He did not hesitate to write:

157. P. Broué, *op cit.*, p.173.

158. For the manoeuvres and lies in regard to the population, Ebert denied that he wanted to bring the Army troops into Berlin (the accusation made by the USPD), when he was faced with the first congress of the workers' and soldiers' councils. He said that there was only a question of the troops being brought back from the front which were going to cross Berlin. In fact he really had brought into Berlin the troops of the ten divisions led by General Loquis.

Nobody made the slightest objection when I expressed the opinion that order should be re-established by the force of arms. The war minister, colonel Reinhardt, wrote an order naming general Hoffman as the commander-in-chief... The objection was made that the general would be too unpopular with the workers... I insisted that a decision must be made? Someone said: "Couldn't you do it yourself?" I replied briefly and firmly: "I don't see any objection. Someone has to play the role of the mad dog. I'm not afraid of this responsibility."¹⁵⁹

Nor did the same Noske hesitate to post the following warning on the walls of Berlin a few months later:

The brutality and the bestiality [sic] of the Spartakists who fight against us force me to give the following order: any one taken arms in hand in the struggle against the government will be summarily shot.¹⁶⁰

These massacres were justified in the name of hostility to "Bolshevism". It can be noted, not without a certain irony, that these same people were indignant about the Red Terror against "people taken arms in hand against the government" (however, Trotsky never considered or practised execution of members of the White Army).

But the fundamental fact is elsewhere. Leaders of parties that call themselves socialist take on themselves the right to forbid the broad masses to organize strike or even to organize unarmed demonstrations, in the name of priorities, of "principles", of political judgements which are very far from being shared by everyone, and which turn out to be far from a papal infallibility.¹⁶¹

The Mensheviks, even the left wing, opposed initiatives for workers' control that emanated directly

159. Gustav Noske, *Von Kiel bis Kapp*, Berlin 1920.

160. Cited by Broué, *op.cit.*, p. 273. The Spartakists were the German revolutionary movement.

161. For readers who were not brought up in Roman Catholicism, statements by the Pope ex cathedra (by virtue of his office) are supposed to be infallible, which says a lot about about the democratic character of the very Christian Catholic Church.

from the workplaces in Russia. They even took on themselves the right to repress the workers when they ignored their judgements. This pretentious and paternalist arrogance has the same substitutionist arrogance as underlies Stalinist behaviour. This parallel between reformist and Stalinist behaviour should be highlighted.

Let us repeat: all this is the absolute opposite of the doctrine and orientation of Marx, centred on the concept of the self-emancipation of the working class.

Marx and Engels had a premonition of this substitutionism and its implications when, in their famous letter of September 1879, they condemned the position of the reformist Manifesto of the "Zurich Three" (Hochberg, Bernstein and Schramm) in very ironic terms:

If we want to win to [our] cause the upper layers of society (as the Zurich Three hope), we must not frighten them at any cost. The Zurich Three think that they have made a tranquillizing discovery: the party must show that it is not ready to take the road of a bloody and violent revolution,

but that it has decided...to take the road of legality, that is of reforms. [The logical conclusion of this argument is thus that] if Berlin show itself again to be so badly brought up as to have another March 18 [that is a revolutionary explosion], the social-democrats, rather than participating in this struggle as "rabble burning to climb onto the barricades" [terms used by the "Zurichois"] they should rather "take the road of legality", dismantle the barricades and, if necessary, march in step with the glorious troops against the exclusive, brutal and unlettered masses.¹⁶²

This is a forecast and condemnation of the behaviour of the reformists Ebert and Noske forty years before the facts!

The main justification that the German social-democrats put forward for their policy of opposition to

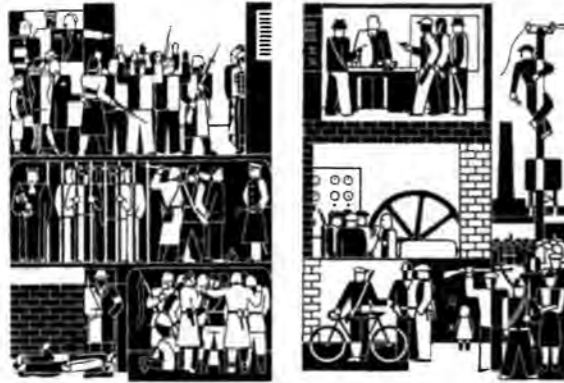
162. Marx and Engels, "A. A. Bebel, W. Liebknecht, W. Bracke et autres, Leipzig", *Correspondance*, Paris/Moscou, 1981, pp. 323-324.



the socialist taking of power during a revolutionary crisis, is that democracy had to be defended, indeed defended at all costs, including against millions of workers — it does not matter here if they form a (slight) majority or a strong minority of the proletariat and the electorate.

To do this they first to ignore or deny the reality of the counter-revolutionary threat.¹⁶³ But by taking the path of repression, by using the old state apparatus of the property-owning classes for this purpose, they opened the road to a process of consolidation of "elites" — thus also paving the way which led to the bloodthirsty regime of the Nazi dictatorship. The Weimar Republic gave birth to the Third Reich. It was in 1918-19, in 1920 and 1923 that all was decided, in the repression of the revolution and the German masses — the reformists not only playing a passive role but getting actively involved in the counter-revolutionary camp.¹⁶⁴

The Nazi dictatorship and the Second World War cost humanity 50 million deaths. That was the concrete alternative to the October Revolution. That is the most striking historical justification for this revolution.



163. This is one of Lenin's argument in his polemic with Kautsky: "The proletarian revolution and the renegade Kautsky", *Collected Works*, Volume 28. Kautsky's work was published as *The Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, University of Michigan Press, 1964.

In the section of this text on Russia, Kautsky does not say anything about the dangers of counter-revolution!!

164. On the German "élites" left in place by social-democracy, and their role in the rise of Nazism see: Arthur Rosenberg, *Entstehung und Geschichte der Weimarer Republik*; Evelyn Anderson, *Hammer oder Amboss*.

The Weimar Republic was established in Germany on November 9, 1918, after the abdication of Wilhelm II, with the participation of many social-democrats.

A government which included the social-democrats sent troops in to Saxony to oust a left social-democrat government which enjoyed broad popular support. (op.cit., pp.774-775).

After having repressed the German revolution, this regime turned out to be incapable of dealing with the social and economic crisis. In 1933 called Hitler into power, who then gradually established the Nazi dictatorship.

Chronology

(International events in italics, others are Russian or Soviet)

1903

Second congress of RSDLP. Division between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks.

1904-07

Russo Japanese War (1904-05)

Rise and defeat of the Russian Revolution (1905-07)

Stuttgart Congress of the Second International (1907)

1907-12

Period of reaction and weakening of RSDLP

Split of Bolsheviks and Mensheviks into separate parties (1912)

1913-14

Basle Congress of the Second International (1913)

Revolutionary rise of workers' struggles in Russia

Start of First World War

Crisis of Second International

1914-17

Extension of First World War

1917

February Revolution: overthrow of Tsarism. Emergence of dual power.

July days: Revolution or counter-revolution?

October Revolution: Establishment of soviet power

Anti-war movements in belligerent countries

1918-20

Dissolution of Constituent Assembly

Republic of Councils in Finland

Signing of Brest-Litovsk Treaty

End of First World War

Beginning of generalized Civil War

First revolutionary wave in Germany (1918)

Revolutionary upsurge in Austria

Assassinations of Luxemburg and Liebknecht in Germany (1919)

Foundation of Third International (1919)

First Congress of Peoples of the East in Baku

Republics of Councils in Hungary and Bavaria

Kapp von Lüttwitz putsch in Germany (1920)

1921-24

Kronstadt rebellion

End of the Civil War. Tenth Congress of CPSU. Beginning of NEP.

New upsurge of struggles in Germany and Italy

Fascists (Mussolini) come to power in Italy (1922)

Final defeat of German Revolution (1923)

Illness (from 1922) then death of Lenin (1923)

1925-35

Gradual establishment of Stalinist regime

End of NEP (1928). Forced collectivization in the countryside

World economic crisis

Hitler Chancellor (1933)

Rise and defeat of Second Chinese Revolution (1925-27)

1936-39

Spanish Civil War (1936-39)

Electoral victory of Popular Front in France (1936)

Moscow Trials, beginning of Purges

Beginning of Second World War

Chapter 8

By way of conclusion

International and Russian reaction attacked the October Revolution with extreme violence during the years which followed the Bolshevik revolution; stating that it only had purely destructive effects.

Great cultural wealth

The French newspapers, particularly *Le Temps*, had whole columns denouncing the "Asiatic barbarism" which had allegedly stamped out all artistic, scientific and literary life in Soviet Russia. In July 1920, the French Academy of Sciences suppressed a report by Monsieur Victor Henri, posted in Russia, on the scientific activity in the country. In 1925, *The Times* of London published a Note of the Admiralty stating that the Soviet government had brought nothing to Russia except blood, poverty and famine.¹⁶⁵

The Prussian country squire Karl von Bothmer, summed up the central argument of this campaign of denigration when he wrote:

No constructive force has shown itself. Nowhere are any creative forces appearing. [The government] only maintains itself through criminal means, without being able to show it has achieved anything.¹⁶⁶

At the same time as von Bothmer was writing this, Beryl Williams more honestly noted that:

The combination of artistic experimentation and intense intellectual debate over cultural matters was to give rise to a period of artistic vigour and utopian dreams in the period of the revolution and the civil war.¹⁶⁷

She noted that in fact at the end of 1918, there were already three times more museums in Russia than before the Revolution.¹⁶⁸

In fact, the rise of the theatre and cinema in the USSR, and of painting, posters and avant-garde sculpture, of urbanism and architecture, or psychology and psychiatry, of analysis of the economic situation, of historiography, not to mention literature, impressed the whole world. This cultural flowering was greater than the famous "golden years" of the Weimar Republic, whose base and material wealth was nevertheless much broader.

The rise of education

The Revolution also undertook an immense effort

of literacy and extension of education. The budget for public education which had been 195 million roubles in 1916 and that the February revolution increased to 940 million roubles, was increased to 2.9 billion roubles in 1918 by the Bolsheviks and then to 10 billion in 1919. The number of primary schools was increased from 38,387 in 1917 to 52,274 in 1918 and to 62,238 in 1919. Pre-school teaching which was practically non-existent under Tsarism, already covered 200,000 children in 1921 and 561,000 in 1921.¹⁶⁹

Unafraid of making himself ridiculous, professor Norman Stone does not hesitate to assert that before 1917 Tsarism was already on the road to successful modernization of Russia. He cites its "rapid scientific and cultural development".¹⁷⁰

But in Tsarist Russia there were at most a few thousand scientists. The great majority of the population was illiterate. Thanks to the work started by the October Revolution, there were, at the beginning of the 1980s, more than two million scientists; 125 million graduates of secondary education; 14.8 million citizens with post-secondary diplomas; and more than 80% of the workforce who had secondary education certificates.¹⁷¹

As for the industrial leap forward, what ever its price the balance sheet is at least clear.

A humanist revolution

So much for the "non-achievements" of the Russian Revolution.

But let us leave the material domain for the moral and spiritual which the opponents of the revolution have talked so much about, not without a certain hypocrisy.

Even von Bothmer has to recognize that the Russian Revolution, in forbidding any sale of alcohol, made alcoholism practically disappear from the big towns. There were no drunks in Moscow and Petrograd.¹⁷²

When we know the extent to which the plague of alcoholism affected Russia before October, — and after the re-establishment of the state monopoly on

169. A. Morizet, op.cit., p. 179.

170. N. Stone, *Sunday Times*, January 5, 1991.

171. V.P. Tomlin, *Uroven' obrazovaniya naseleniya SSE*, Moscow, 1981.

172. von Bothmer, op.cit., p. 47.

165. *The Times*, November 17, 1925.

166. K. v. Bothmer, op.cit., pp. 102, 131, 132.

167. B. Williams, op.cit., p. 80.

168. Idem, p. 94.

selling alcohol under Stalin —, and when we know its ravages in the Soviet Union of today, then we understand quite easily the importance of this question.

In the same way the publicist Alfons Goldschmidt felt himself in total security in Petrograd and Moscow. The streets were clear. In the midst of the famine lorryloads of flour passed. They were not attacked. There was no pillage of food shops.¹⁷³

The humanism of the revolution was also expressed in a generous culturo-moral pluralism, that was touching and also naive. The German writer Alfons Paquet was a slandering critic of the revolution who could not, despite himself, help sympathizing with it.¹⁷⁴

He describes how on the first anniversary of October, a long list of "freedom fighters" was inscribed on the white walls of the former military academy. The list included the names of Victor Hugo, Emile Zola, Ibsen, Emile Verhaeren, Nekrassov, Saltykov, Michalovski, Byron, Chopin, Koltzov, Constantin Meunier, Mussorgski, Pushkin, Rimsky-Korsakov, Scriabin, Beethoven, Marx, Engels, Auguste Blanqui, Bebel, Lassalle, Jean Jaurès, Plekhanov, Spartacus, Gracchus Babeuf, Garibaldi, Robespierre, Danton, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Robert Owen, Herzen, Bakunin, Voltaire, Pertel, and many others.¹⁷⁵

In 1918-19 the works of Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol, Tolstoy, Turgenev, Dostoyevsky, Goncharov, Grigorovich, Ostrovsky, Ryleiev, Zola, Anatole France, Mérimée, Walter Scott, Romain Rolland, Aulard, Louis Blanc, Jean Jaurès, Bebel, Plekhanov and Kautsky (these two firm opponents of the October Revolution), were published in print runs of between 25,000 and 100,000.¹⁷⁶

At the same time, the revolution stimulated a formidable participation by the masses in cultural life:

Theatre audiences were solidly proletarian, dressed in shabby clothes, topped by threadbare overcoats in teeth-shattering cold.¹⁷⁷

On May Day 1920, 20,000 people in Petrograd saw a spectacle entitled *The Liberation of Work*, which told the story of the historical fight for emancipation, from the slave revolts of Antiquity to the Russian Revolution. The celebrated film of Serge Eisenstein, *The Battleship Potemkin*, was filmed with the

173. A. Goldschmidt, *Moskau 1920*, Berlin, 1920.

174. It was Paquet who made the well-known and ignoble accusation that the Soviet regime had "socialized women". He cited an alleged decree by the anarchists of Saratov, which they immediately denounced as a gross provocation.

175. A. Paquet, *Der Geist der russischen Revolution*, Munich, 1920, p. 69. For information on the people named, see appendix.

176. Morizet, *op.cit.*, p. 194-195. See appendix for authors names.

177. D. Mitchell *op.cit.*, p. 156.

participation of thousands of citizens of Odessa.¹⁷⁸

Class spirit

Between this popular-proletarian spirit and the very nature of the revolution in the institutional domain there is an undeniable inter-connection. Let us cite once again Alfons Paquet who nevertheless recognizes what was the essential in this spirit:

The first incomparable contribution of the Russian Revolution is to have taken up, in full radicalism and with an iron hand, the fight against the egoism of capitalism, whether in a private or state form. The merit of Bolshevism is to have made that possible...

The collapse of Europe is happening before our eyes, but the basis of its reconstruction has already been established. Let us try to understand fully the ideas of the revolution and draw hope from them for the future.

And he made this conclusion of striking topicality:

One day, for example, the workers [of the towns bordering the Rhine which are] Basle, Strasbourg, Mannheim, Mayence, Ruhrort [a mining agglomeration], Emmerich and Rotterdam could form a joint council of the Rhine basin and thus could make their influence felt in the transformation of this axis in a great European river route, going beyond country borders and the law established by those on top... The idea of such councils could also, in many ways, serve the European goal, that is the building of a joint peace economy.¹⁷⁹

There is here undeniably a class spirit. It is undoubtedly on that basis that supporters of the power of private property, the power of wealth, put it in the dock. It remains for us in line with the requirements of social justice and historical facts, totally defensible from all points of view, starting with the moral point of view.

Alfons Goldschmidt, in Petrograd, saw this class spirit:

The first impression: a proletarian city. The worker rules. The worker dominates the streets.¹⁸⁰

Alfons Paquet noted:

Councils exclusively composed of proletarians rule the enterprises, the urban neighbourhoods, the villages, the districts and the provinces.¹⁸¹

The Bolshevik government distributed arms to the workers in almost all towns in the country during the civil war. Is this not proof that this was not the government of a clan or a sect but a class government, convinced that it enjoyed the confidence of the majority of this class?

Many historians have asserted that the Bolsheviks lost members and indeed the support of the working class after the Brest-Litovsk peace and the start of the Red Terror in 1918. Even a well-disposed critic,

178. B. Williams, *op.cit.*, p. 93-93.

179. A. Paquet, *op.cit.*, pp. 40, 51-52.

180. A. Goldschmidt, *op.cit.*, p. 20.

181. A. Paquet, *Der Geist der russischen Revolution*, *op.cit.*, p. 75.

William G. Rosenberg, said so.¹⁸² But this statement is contradicted by the systematic call for the mobilization of factory workers in the Red Army, in order to defend Soviet power. In fact, the vast majority of workers replied positively to this appeal.¹⁸³ There were of course undoubted fluctuations in the attitude of the working class in relation to the Bolsheviks in 1918, 1919, 1920. But whatever its critical aspect, the support of the majority of the workers remained.

The Red Army was moreover impregnated with this proletarian class spirit. *The Soldier's Handbook* contained passages such as:

You must be among your comrades. Your leaders are brothers who are more experienced than you. In battle, in exercise, in the barracks, at work, you must obey them. As soon as you are out of the barracks you are absolutely free... If someone asks you: how do you fight? Answer: I fight with the rifle, the bayonet, the machine gun and also with the truth which I address to those enemy soldiers who are workers and peasants so that they know that in reality I am not their enemy but their brother.¹⁸⁴

Chamberlin also notes:

Intensive education propaganda was a feature of the organization of the Red Army. Amateur plays and communist lectures were given in the soldiers' clubs which were established wherever circumstances permitted. Vivid posters endeavoured to bring home to the workers and the peasants what would happen to them if the factory owner recovered his factory, the landlord took back his land and the old Tsarist officials and the Cossacks returned to rule.¹⁸⁵

Among many other testimonies which attest to this class spirit, there is a fact cited by S.A. Smith. When at the end of December 1917, it was necessary to reduce employment in the munitions factories and the Putilov factories in Petrograd, the workers drew up lists of priorities. No party membership, even that of the Bolshevik Party, was taken into account.¹⁸⁶

Hope

The historical meaning of the October Revolution was admirably expressed by Maxim Gorky, who was however a severe critic:

Whoever honestly thinks that the irrepressible aspiration of humanity to freedom, to beauty and to an existence guided by reason is not a useless dream but a real force which, by itself, could create new ways of living — that it is in itself a lever which could change the world —; every honest person must recognize the general significance of the activity of these consistent revolutionaries. The revolution should be conceived as a vast attempt to give shape to the guiding ideas and response envisaged by the chief thinkers of humanity...

Come with us, towards the new life for which we are working..

182. W. G. Rosenberg, "Russian Labor and Bolshevik power. Social dimensions of protest in Petrograd after October", in *The Workers Revolution in Russia 1917. The View from Below*, *op.cit.*, p. 98 f.

183. See in particular Ilyin-Zhenevsky, *op.cit.*, pp. 32-33 and A. Morizet.

184. A. Morizet, *op.cit.*, p. 111.

185. W.H. Chamberlin *op.cit.*, Vol II p. 34.

186. S.A. Smith, *Red Petrograd*, *op.cit.*, pp. 243-244.

Forward to liberty and beauty of existence.¹⁸⁷

There is a further justification for the revolution, supplied by the stubbornly anti-Bolshevik author, Leonard Shapiro, on the basis of his own memories as a young boy in Petrograd at the end of 1920:

Life was extremely hard. Diet was near starvation level ... Yet my recollection, no doubt influenced by the adults around me, is one of enthusiasm and excitement. Life was new, hopeful, it was moving forward to some great future. In spite of the hardships and the brutality of the regime, the spirit of euphoria evoked by the fall of the monarchy in March 1917, was not yet dead.¹⁸⁸

And David Mitchell notes:

Liberarian who like [Victor] Serge, meant business, could feel that Trotsky was right, that a bold, sometimes bloody, but always spirited attempt was being made to usher in the springtime of a new world.¹⁸⁹

We cannot say more. History is a severe but fair judge; it simply has to be given the time to do its work. In 1810, indeed in 1815, there was no longer very much sympathy for the French Revolution of 1789, except in very limited revolutionary circles. But in 1848, not to mention 1889, the judgement had profoundly changed. We are convinced that it will be the same for the verdict made on the October Revolution.



187. Quoted in A.R. Williams, pp. 242-243.

188. L. Shapiro, *op.cit.*, p. 219.

189. D. Mitchell *op.cit.*, p. 166.

October 1917 and the women's movement

N° 17/18

The mobilization of women was much more direct in the 1917 revolution than it had been in 1905. The Soviet regime started the sizeable task of assuring legal, social and sexual equality for all. However, the specific potential represented by the autonomous women's liberation movement was never clearly recognised. This not only weakened the fight for women's emancipation but also the revolutionary dynamic for the whole of society.

Because the history of revolutions — even written by revolutionaries — has left women on the margin and only considered progress for women as a sub-product of general social progress, the explanation of the relationship between social transformation and women's liberation has often been simplistic. As far as the Russian Revolution is concerned, the impression has often been given [before the bureaucratization], during the 1920s, there was a steady progression towards women's liberation and then, imperceptibly towards the 1930s, with the consolidation of Stalin's power, a regression occurred, expressed by changes in the laws on abortion, divorce and homosexuality... Such a balance sheet ignores too many problems and implies too a-critical support for the Bolsheviks' policy.

We have [to use] the progress made in theoretical work on women's oppression by the women's movement in the last ten years... However, to be constructive, a critical approach has to take a historical viewpoint. It is not adequate ... to judge the Bolsheviks and the Russian Revolution with today's criteria.

It is legitimate to ask if a better mastery of the policy concerning the relations between the sexes could have changed the course of events. When we ask this question, we have to consider the policy of the Bolsheviks concerning women's liberation not in isolation, nor in counterposing it to an abstract conception of what it should be, but in placing it in the context of the development of the relationship between the party and the working class, the decline of democratic norms, the growing passivity of the masses, and in making the link between the evolution of the situation and the general political life at the time, while bringing out the independent dynamic of the women's movement; the rise and fall of the "woman question" is not identical with the rise and fall of proletarian democracy or workers' control, particularly as the communist leaders and rank and file did not consider women's problems as of great political importance...

It would seem premature at this stage to try to draw out a conclusion which attributes the failures of the 1920s to this or that factor... But it is obvious that the history of the Soviet Union suggests the important role which a women's movement should play in a transitional period and in a practice of women's liberation, in fighting against bureaucratic and anti-democratic practices and in ensuring that the revolution links the changes in production with a transformation of the family and the elimination of the sexual division of labour.

Alix Holt "The Bolsheviks and women's oppression" in *Femmes et mouvement ouvrier*, La Brèche, Paris, 1979, pp 90-93, 130.

The ideas of the majority of the Bolsheviks on the question of women's oppression and the tasks that this implies for the party were in fact anything but clear: the fear that any activity or initiative taken by the women would be marked by bourgeois influences predominated up to 1917 and afterwards.

The men were not the only ones to be suspicious, far from it. This is clear from the discussions which ran through the Bolshevik leadership at the time of the October Revolution. After having decided in October 1917 to reconstitute the "Bureau" which had existed ten years earlier, the party leadership realized that a simple body for "agitation among the wives of peasants and soldiers" was not sufficient. The success of the first All-Russian Congress of Peasant and Working Women which was attended by more than one thousand delegates overcame the resistance of those men and women who like Samoilova, were still more hostile in 1917 to the idea of creating special bodies for intervention among women. But it took more than a year before the commissions which had been formed after the Congress — then defined as simple technical bodies responsible for applying the decision of the Central Committee — were transformed into departments (Zhenotdel) whose task was to organize locally the women non-members of the party in order to inform them of their rights and win their collaboration in building the socialist state. While representatives of the Zhenotdel were integrated into all the party committees, their functioning was far from being homogeneous. The importance and impact of their intervention depended to a large extent on the attitude of the local authorities towards them. In any case, the question of an autonomous women's organization outside the party was never posed. The resistance which women encountered to participation in these groups, the threats of husbands hostile to the idea of seeing their wives being "politically active", never seemed to shake the conviction of most Bolsheviks that the involvement of women workers and peasants in social life was dependent on the economic changes that the Soviet state would be capable of achieving, and that specific organizational structures were quite secondary.

Jacqueline Heinen, "Introduction" to the collection of Alexandra Kollontai *Conférences sur la libération des femmes*, La Brèche, Paris, 1978, pp XVIII-XIX

Names of people, places, organizations

N° 17/18

Adler, Victor (1852-1918): Founder and leader of the Austro-Hungarian Social Democracy. Located in the centre-left of the Second International.

Anarchists: A revolutionary current, weakly organized but with an important tradition in Russia going back to the 19th century (Bakunin, Krapotkin). Having collaborated for a period of time with the Bolsheviks during the October revolution they turned again to opposition against the new power. Makhno was the best known anarchist leader during the revolution.

Antonov-Ovseenko, Vladimir (1884-1938): Member of the RSDLP in 1902. Joined the Menshevik faction. Officer in the Tsarist army. led a mutiny. Imprisoned, escaped, went into hiding, and then abroad. Member of the Mezhrayontsi, joined Bolshevik Party in 1917. A leader of the October insurrection. Political commissar for the Red Army during the civil war. Part of the anti-Stalinist opposition for a time, capitulated to Stalin. Sent to Barcelona in 1936 during the Spanish civil war. Executed by Stalin when he returned to the USSR.

Armenia: A mountainous country, with a mostly Christian majority. Subject to massacres (by the Turks, 1894-1896, and 1915-16) and to territorial conquests by neighbours. Divided between Turkey, Iran, and the Russian empire. One of the fifteen republics of the USSR. Now independent. Around 3.5 million inhabitants. Capital: Yerevan.

Auschwitz: The name of a territory in Poland where the Nazis constructed one of the main German concentration camps in 1940-45. (Around 2.5 million inmates, mostly Jews and Poles, perished there.)

Austro-Hungary: Founded in 1867 by way of a "compromise" between the Austrian and Hungarian ruling classes. A multinational and linguistic conglomeration including at least 11 nationalities. Broken up in 1918 through the formation of Czechoslovakia, Austria, Poland, Hungary, and the Yugoslav kingdom of Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia.

Austro-Marxism: An Austrian Marxist current, particularly prominent before the First World War. Counted among its representatives Max Adler, Rudolph Hilferding, Karl Renner, and Otto Bauer. Developed original theses on the national question and on workers councils. In 1918-1919, opposed the conquest of power by the socialist movement in the name of "Austrian exceptionalism" and of the "gradual revolution".

Avksentiev, Nikolai (1878-1943): Leader of the SRs. Participated in the mobilizations of students in 1899. Activist in the SR party in Russia and in exile. After the revolution of 1905 deported, escaped, went into exile. Moved to the right. Supported the entrance of Russia into the war in 1914. President of the Pan-Russian Soviet of Peasants after the February 1917 revolution. Minister under Kerensky. Struggled against the Soviet regime from the moment of its formation. Turned up in the East, presiding over an anti-Bolshevik government in Ufa, then in Omsk. Pushed back to Siberia by the dictatorship of Kolchak. Made his way to Paris (1919) then New York (1940).

Azerbaijan: A country between the Russian empire (which

occupied its northern portion in 1828) and Iran. Majority Islamic population, the Azeris. Northern part of the country became one of the federated republics of the USSR. Today independent. Population of around 7 million people. Capital: Baku.

Baboeuf, Francois Noel (Gracchus) (1760-1797): Political figure during the French revolution of 1789. On the left wing of radical democracy, defended a collectivist and communist point of view. Editor of the *Tribun du Peuple*. Main force behind the Conspiracy of Equals. Guillotined.

Baku: Centre of oil production, situated on the Caspian sea, capital of the Azerbaijan Republic. The "Congress of Baku" is the Congress of the Peoples of the East which met in 1920.

Bakunin, Mikhail: Russian anarchist revolutionary. Important member of the First International.

Baltic States: Name given to those countries which border on the Baltic between the mouth of the Niemen. River on the West and the Gulf of Finland on the East. (The Baltic is the sea in Northern Europe between Sweden, Finland, the ex-USSR, Poland, Germany, and Denmark.) These countries formed the Soviet republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania (today independent).

Basle Congress: Congress of the Socialist International held in Basle (Switzerland) in 1913.

Bauer, Otto (1881-1938): Austro-Marxist, leader of the left wing of the Austrian SP. Important German-speaking Marxist theoretician. Prominent figure in the Socialist International. Defended the theory of "gradual revolution" against the seizure of power in Austria during 1918-1919.

Bebel, August (1840-1913): One of the principal founders of the German social democracy. Leader of the Second International where he was part of the center-left.

Beethoven, Ludwig van (1770-1827): German composer. Considered one of the greatest composers of Western classical music.

Bernstein, Edward (1850-1932): Executor of Engels's estate. Leader of German social democracy. Started an important theoretical controversy over "revisionism" (meaning the revision, in a reformist direction, of Marxist conceptions) with his book, *Evolutionary Socialism* (Schocken, New York 1961).

Bettelheim, Ernst: Representative in Austria of the Hungarian communist leader Bela Kun. Tried to organize, in June 1919, an abortive, ultraleftist attempt to seize power when confronted with the passivity of the social democratic leadership.

Blanc, Louis (1811-1882): French utopian socialist and political personality. Minister during the revolution of 1848.

Blanqui, Auguste (1805-1881): Perhaps the greatest French revolutionary of the 19th century, of communist inspiration. Spent more than 20 years of his life in prison for political activities. Gave his name to "Blanquism," often criticized as an elitist revolutionary using

conspiratorial methods because he wanted to conquer power based only on an activist minority.

Blanquism: See Auguste Blanqui

Brest-Litovsk: City in Byelorussia (formerly Polish) where the negotiations took place for a separate peace between the Soviet power and the German bloc in 1917-1918.

Brest-Litovsk Negotiations: Negotiations for a separate peace between the Sovietpower and the Central Powers (above all Germany). Begun in December 1917, concluded in March 1918 with the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. The Soviet regime was obliged to cede large and very rich territories, including the Ukraine. The Soviet government annulled this treaty—made meaningless by the defeat of Germany and by the Russian civil war—in November 1918.

Bolshevism: Doctrine and practice of the Bolshevik current. Often utilized as a synonym for Leninism, but this current included various trends of thought.

Bolshevik: Russian word for "majority." Name of a current led by Lenin which divided the second congress of the RSDLP (1903). Very much weakened by repression after the 1905 revolution. In 1912 constituted itself as an independent party. Gained a new mass base in 1913-1914. In 1917, led the October revolution. In 1918 took the name of Communist Party.

Bracke, Wilhelm (1842-1880): One of the founders of German social democracy. Correspondent of Marx.

Bukharin, Nikolai (1888-1938): Joined the Bolsheviks in 1906. Went into exile in 1910. Member of the Bolshevik Central Committee in 1917. Remained close to Lenin, although he clashed with him during the war on the national question and on the problem of the state. In 1918, he was opposed to signing the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, creating the group of "Left Communists." Defender of the NEP and leader of the Communist International during the 1920s. Allied with Stalin against the opposition from 1923 to 1927, went into opposition and then returned to supporting Stalin in 1929. Liquidated during the Moscow trials. Author of numerous basic works.

Byelorussia: Also called White Russia. Situated between the Baltic countries and Russia, the Ukraine and Poland. During past centuries Byelorussia has belonged to various powers in the region. Became a federated republic of the USSR. Today independent. Population of around ten million. Capital: Minsk.

Byron, George (1788-1824): English romantic poet. Elected to the Greek Committee for Liberation against Turkish domination. Killed after joining the insurgents fighting for their independence.

Caucasus: Mountainous geographical region situated in the southern USSR. Bounded by the Black Sea on the West, the Caspian on the East. Bordering on Turkey and Iran.

Central Powers: German-dominated bloc during the First World War (Germany and Austria-Hungary).

Centrist: Unless otherwise specified, a current which vacillates between reform and revolution (and not a party of the "centre," between the right and the left in parliament).

Chancellor: Name of the head of state in Germany and Austria.

Chopin, Frederic: Polish pianist and composer. Considered to be one of the greatest composers of Western classical music.

Cheka: Political police of the Soviet regime.

Chernov, Victor (1873-1952): Principal leader and theoretician of the SRs. Active during the 1890s. Internationalist during the war. Returned to Russia after the February 1917 revolution. Minister of Agriculture under Kerensky. Leader of the right-wing of the SRs during October 1917. President of the Constituent Assembly which was dispersed in January 1918. Fought against soviet power. Threatened simultaneously by the Red Army and by Kolchak, emigrated in 1921. Active in Paris. Then lived in New York.

Chubar, Vlas (1891-1941): Ukrainian peasant, Bolshevik in 1907. President of the Economic Council of the Ukraine from 1920 to 1922. Joined the CC in 1921 and the Political Bureau in 1926. Disappeared during the Moscow Trials.

Civil War: Unless otherwise specified, the war begun in October 1917, then generalized in 1918 by national and international counterrevolutionary forces trying to overthrow the Soviet power. The imperialist alliance included mainly Germany, France, Great Britain, the U.S., Canada, and Japan. It ended in 1920-21 with the defeat of the counter-revolution.

Cold War: "East-West" conflict between the imperialist powers and the Soviet bloc, begun in 1948. Termed "cold" because there was no world military conflict. But it was accompanied by many "local" and "regional" wars (such as the one, especially devastating, fought against the Vietnamese revolution by American imperialism).

Comintern: Third International.

Communist International: Third International.

Concentration camps: Unless otherwise specified, the camps built after 1933 by Hitler's Nazi regime. This system of camps aimed first to crush all resistance and to impose the Hitler regime in Germany itself. It was already in place by 1939, before the outbreak of the Second World War. Therefore its first inmates were German prisoners (common criminals, political prisoners — particularly communists but also socialists and liberals) and those who belonged to groups earmarked for annihilation (Jews and Gypsies); later those living in countries that were occupied early (Austria...). With the start of the war the camps received members of the Resistance, political prisoners, and Jews from the occupied European countries. Some of the camps: Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald, Dachau, Mauthausen, Neuengamme, Ravensbruck, Treblinka. They were one of the most frightening institutions of the Nazi dictatorship and truly merited the name "death camps," which comes from their inhuman living conditions, hard labor and, beginning in 1942, the construction of an industrial system for mass murder, targeting Jews in particular.

"Conciliators": Bolshevik current led by Rykov and V.P. Nogin. Struggled against the split in the RSDLP between Mensheviks and Bolsheviks—which took place after the defeat of the 1905-07 revolution and was formalized in 1912. This term has also been used in other cases, for example to indicate the Bolsheviks who were ready to subordinate themselves to the bourgeois government that emerged after 1917, or those who wanted to reunite with the Mensheviks despite the split.

Congress of the Peoples of the East: The first Congress of the Peoples of the East met in Baku, Azerbaijan, in September 1920. It included close to two thousand delegates (of whom 55 were women...), two-thirds communists, coming from around 40 different nationalities, most importantly Turks, Persians and Parsees, Russians, and the peoples of the Caucasus and Central Asia: Armenians, Georgians, but also Uzbeks, Khazrs, Kurds, Tadjiks, Chechens, Ingush, etc.

Constituent Assembly: Assembly of elected representatives, established for the purpose of adopting a constitution. The necessity for a constituent assembly was imposed on Russia by the revolution of February, 1917. But when it finally convened, its legitimacy was contested on two fronts. Its members had been elected before the October revolution but it did not meet until afterward; it did not reflect the experience of the revolution—the rapid and profound change in the relationship of forces. It stood counterposed to the legitimate alternative authority of the Congress of Soviets. It was dissolved by the new revolutionary power in January 1918.

Cossack: Originally (15th and 16th centuries) designating the free and militarized communities resisting the conquerors (Tatars, Turks...) and established in particular along the rivers Don and Dnieper. Defeated by the Russians. The survivors created army corps sent to the frontiers of the empire, a personal guard for the Tsar. They were a particularly feared repressive force. Specialists in individual combat on horseback. Furnished an important part of the White armies in the civil war of 1918-21. Many poor Cossacks also joined the Bolsheviks at the beginning of the revolution, and the anarchist armies (notably in the Ukraine).

Councils of Deputies: See Soviets.

"Czechoslovakians": Czech prisoners of war, armed by imperialism (under French command), and participating in the USSR's civil war as part of the fight against Soviet power in Siberia during the summer of 1918. It was the revolt of the Czech Legion, May 25, 1918, which marked the beginning of the generalized civil war.

Dan, Theodore (1871-1947): Leader of the Russian Social Democracy. Spokesman for the Mensheviks beginning in 1903. Pacifist during the war. Joined the right wing of Menshevism in 1917. Opposed the October revolution. Exiled in 1922. Author with Martov of an important history of the Russian social democracy.

Danton, George (1759-1794): Lawyer. One of the principal representatives of the Jacobin current in the French Revolution.

Darwin, Charles (1809-1882): English naturalist and biologist of the 19th century, known for his work on the evolution of species by natural selection. Best known book: *Origin of Species*. His theories, Darwinism, are extremely rich but are sometimes presented in an overly-simplified way (as with neo-Darwinism) and wrongly applied to the realm of sociology.

Democratic-Centralist Opposition: An opposition group which arose at the 9th congress of the CP (1920) including Smirnov, Ossinsky, and Sapananov. It denounced extreme centralization and authoritarian methods.

Denikin, Anton (1872-1947): Russian general. Led one of the counter-revolutionary army corps during the civil war (notably in the South in 1918). Emigrated in 1920 to Western Europe, then in 1945 to the United States.

Desiatin: Surface measure equalling 2.7 acres (utilized in Russian studies of agriculture).

Dostoyevsky, Feodor (1821-1881): Russian writer of international acclaim. Son of a tyrannical landowner, he involved himself in liberal political circles. Condemned to death by Tsarism, pardoned and deported to Siberia. Often depicted the suffering and humiliation of humanity in his novels.

Dzerzhinsky, Felix (1877-1926): Polish. Active in the Russian and Polish social democracy. Eleven years in prison, exiled. Liberated from prison by the revolution of February 1917. Member of the Bolshevik Central Committee from August 1917 until his death. Founder of the Cheka, known for his personal integrity. President of the National Economic Council in 1924, alternate member of the Political Bureau in 1924-25. Died of a heart attack.

Ebert, Friedrich (1871-1925): German political figure. Social democrat, leader of the SPD from 1913. Patriot during the First World War. Contributed to the repression of the Spartakist insurrection (1919). Chancellor of the German Republic (1919-1925).

Engels, Friedrich (1820-1895): Principal collaborator of Karl Marx. Made his own contributions to the development of Marxist theory.

Enlightenment, Age of: Eighteenth century Europe, marked by a profound revolution in philosophical and scientific ideas, parallel with the great bourgeois revolutions of the time.

Estonia: Country on the Baltic. The northernmost of the three Baltic republics of the USSR. Around 1.6 million inhabitants. Capital Tallinn (formerly Reval).

First World War (1914-1918): Called "The Great War" . . . until the outbreak of the Second World War (1939-1945). First great inter-imperialist military conflict over the division of the world. Saw the "Central Powers" (Germany and Austria-Hungary)—and their allies—opposed to the French-English "Entente"—and their allies (including the Russian Empire and the United States). Bloodied a good portion of the European continent, involved Asia, Africa, and the principal seas of the world. It ended in the defeat of the Central Powers. Sixty-five million soldiers were mobilized during this war. According to conservative estimates, it resulted in the death of 18.5 million people.

Foch, Ferdinand (1851-1929): Marshal in the French army. Played an important role in the joint command of allied forces against the Germans during the First World War. Active against the Russian Revolution in 1918-1919.

France, Anatole (1844-1924): French writer. Author of historical novels. Participant in progressive causes.

French Revolution: Unless otherwise specified, this refers to the bourgeois revolution of 1789-1815 and, more precisely, to its first, radical, years of 1789-1794. The principal stages of the French Revolution were the overthrow of the old regime in 1789, the proclamation of the republic in 1792, the government of the Jacobins in 1793-1794, the "Thermidor" of 1794, the regime of the Directorate in 1795-1799, the dictatorship of Napoleon Bonaparte in 1799-1815.

Galicia: Former province of the Austrian empire, situated next to present-day Poland and the USSR. Not to be confused with the Galicia on the Iberian peninsula (in the Spanish State).

Garibaldi, Giuseppe (1807-1882): Patriot of the Italian revolution. Struggled for the unification and independence of Italy against feudalism, Austria, the kingdom of the two Sicilies, the Papacy, and France.

Georgia: Country in the Caucasus between the Black Sea and Russia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Turkey. One of the fifteen federated republics of the USSR. Today independent. Around 5.3 million inhabitants. Capital: Tbilisi.

German Revolution: Unless otherwise stated, this refers to the revolutionary struggles which occurred in Germany between 1918 and 1923.

Gogol, Nikolai (1809-1852): Born in the Ukraine. Writer and dramatist, creator of the modern Russian novel.

Gorky, Maxim (1868-1936): Great Russian writer, sympathizer of the Bolsheviks and a friend of Lenin, although close to his left critics. In 1917, hesitated in the face of the revolution. His journal, *Novy Zhizn* (New Life) was known for its internationalist, unified social-democratic outlook. Adopted a position of critical support to the Bolshevik regime beginning in the 1920s. He capitulated in the end to Stalin.

Gotz, Abraham (1882-1940): Leader of the SRs. Member of the right wing in 1917. Partisan of Kerensky. Actively opposed the October Revolution. Arrested during the civil war. Condemned to death in 1922. His sentence was commuted. Died in 1940.

Habsburg: The house (dynasty) of Habsburg which reigned in Austria from 1278 to 1918.

Herzen, Alexander (1812-1870): Russian writer and literary critic. Was one of the first socialists in Russia and one of the main initiators of the "populist" current.

Hilferding Rudolf (1877-1941): German political figure of Austrian origin. Social democrat and leader of the Second International. Author of an important study on finance capital. Became a reformist. Minister of finances in 1923, 1928-29.

Hindenburg, Paul von (1847-1934): German Marshal and statesman. Was given sole command of the German and Austrian forces during the First World War (1916). Elected to the presidency of the Reich in 1925, reelected in 1932, named Hitler as chancellor (1933).

Hiroshima: City in Japan which was the first victim of nuclear holocaust. The Japanese city of Nagasaki was also struck by an American atomic bomb in 1945.

Hitler, Adolph (1889-1945): Head of German fascism (Nazism). Appointed Chancellor in 1933 by Hindenburg whom he succeeded as president after his death in 1934. Assumed total power as "Reichsführer." Established a personal, totalitarian dictatorship. Instituted the Gestapo (state police) and concentration camps. Imposed single-party rule. Crushed the workers' movement in blood. Designated communists, Jews, and Gypsies for genocidal annihilation. Invaded Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland before the declaration of the Second World War.

Hohenzollern: Royal dynasty appearing in Central Europe at the end of the 12th century. One of its branches ruled over Prussia (beginning in 1525) then over the German imperial regime (1871-1918).

Hugo, Victor (1802-1885): French writer of the 19th century, given broad recognition. Politically active, from a

monarchist family, he became a republican, partisan of a humanitarian democracy. Tried to reflect the political, moral, and literary preoccupations of his times.

Ibsen, Henrik (1828-1906): Norwegian poet and dramatic author of modest origin. Expressed in his writings a social and philosophical inspiration, the flavor of revolt, of love, and of freedom.

International, First: International Workingmen's Association (1864-1876). Founded primarily by Marx and Engels.

International, Second: Socialist International. Broad workers international founded in 1889. It split deeply in 1914 when the majority of its leading apparatus capitulated in the face of imperialist pressures and renounced the fight against war. Reconstituted on a reformist basis in 1923.

International, Third: Communist International. Founded in 1919 on a revolutionary basis. Transformed during the 1920s and 1930s into a diplomatic instrument in the hands of the Stalinist Soviet bureaucracy. Formally dissolved in 1943. Replaced by the Cominform.

International, Fourth: Founded in 1938 on a revolutionary basis by, most significantly, Leon Trotsky. Continued the tradition of the anti-Stalinist Left Opposition.

Jacobin: The most important of the radical petty-bourgeois currents during the French revolution of 1789.

Juarès, Jean (1859-1914): Academic, journalist, and deputy. One of the main representatives of French humanist socialism. Assassinated because he opposed the declaration of the First World War and defended pacifist positions.

Kadet: "Constitutionalist-democratic" current. In 1917 became the principle bourgeois party. Formed the first provisional government after the overthrow of the Tsar in February 1917.

Kamenev, Lev (1885-1936): Joined the Russian Social Democracy in 1901. Deported, escaped. Became a Bolshevik as an emigre and a close collaborator of Lenin. Underground in Russia. Arrested in 1914. Liberated by the February revolution of 1917. Opposed the orientation of Lenin in April 1917, then the decision for an insurrection in October. Standard bearer of the "conciliators," resigned from the CC, re-elected to it in 1918. Remained one of the principal leaders of the CPSU—and also of the CI—during the 1920s. Allied with Stalin against the opposition from 1923 to 1925. Went into opposition from 1925-27 then capitulated in 1928. Liquidated during the Moscow Trials.

Kamkov, Katz (1885-1938): Leader of the left SRs. Supported the October revolution and an alliance with the Bolsheviks in 1917. Denounced the treaty of Brest-Litovsk as treacherous. One of the organizers of the July 1918 assassination of Mirbach, the German ambassador in Petrograd. That event was one of the elements in the "left SR uprising" and was designed to provoke a renewal of the war with Germany. Died in prison.

Kapp, Wolfgang (1858-1922): German political figure. Ultra-nationalist. Organized a coup d'état in Berlin against the Weimar Republic in 1920, with General Luttwitz. This attempted putsch was thwarted by a general strike.

Kautsky, Karl (1854-1938): Collaborator with Engels and executor of his estate. Principal theorist of German

social democracy and of the Second International before the First World War (during which he was part of the centre-left). Became a reformist.

Kerensky, Alexander (1881-1970): Socialist lawyer. In 1917, main leader of the "workers" current. Minister of Justice in March 1917, then Minister of War. Head of the provisional government in July 1917. Became an ally of the bourgeoisie. Repressed the revolutionary movement. Gave his name to "Kerenskyism": the final constitutional option for the bourgeoisie when confronted with a growing revolutionary wave. Emigrated to England, then to France and the United States.

Kollontai, Alexandra (1872-1952): Russian revolutionary. Member of the RSDLP in 1899. At first a Bolshevik, then a Menshevik up to 1914. Internationalist during the war. Rejoined Bolshevism in 1915. Went into exile. Returned to Russia, entered into the CC of the Bolshevik Party in August 1917. Commissar of Health. Spokeswoman for the Workers' Opposition in 1920-22. Under Stalin did not play any political role and retired to diplomatic activity. One of the principal leaders and theorists of Marxist feminism.

Kolchak, Alexander (1874-1920): Vice-Admiral and political figure of the Russian right. Tried to unify the White armies under his "supreme command" during the civil war. Installed a bloody military dictatorship in the territories under his control. Shot after being captured in Siberia.

Koltsov, Alexis (1874-1920): Popular Russian poet. Self-taught. His works speak of love and liberty.

Kornilov, L.G. (1870-1918): Career Russian officer. Commander in Chief during July 1917. Tried to organize a coup d'état. Formed a "voluntary army" during the civil war.

Kronstadt revolt: Unless otherwise stated, this refers in the present text to the events of March 1921: the military garrison of Kronstadt, a port on the Baltic, rebelled against the Bolshevik power. Negotiations having failed, the rebellion was crushed by the Red Army.

Kropotkin, Peter (1842-1921): Russian revolutionary anarchist. Former prince, officer, explorer, and scholar. Active in Switzerland, France, and England. Returned to Russia in 1917. His writings and influence have reached many countries.

Kun, Bela (1885-1937): Hungarian revolutionary. Became a Bolshevik while a prisoner of war in Russia. Head of the Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919. Emigrated. Leader of the CI. Supported Stalin. Liquidated in the Stalin purges.

Larin, Lou (1882-1932): Activist social-democratic student in 1901. Deported, escaped many times. Leader of the Menshevik "liquidator" faction. Internationalist during the war. Joined the Bolshevik party in the summer of 1917. Participated in many groups opposed to positions of Lenin. Capitulated to Stalin in 1926.

Lassalle, Ferdinand (1825-1864): Founder of the first German Workers Party in 1863. This party fused with the Marxist Workers Party at the Gotha congress (1875), giving birth to the SPD.

Latvia: One of the three Baltic republics, situated on the Baltic between Estonia and Lithuania. Incorporated into the USSR. Today independent. Around 2.7 million inhabitants. Capital: Riga.

Left Communist Opposition: Opposition group which formed at the beginning of 1918 around the question of signing the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, begun by Bukharin, Radek, and Uritsky. Proposed a programme for a combined struggle of communists "against concessions," in pursuit of a defensive revolutionary war, for the extension of nationalizations and centralized control in the economic sphere, and reinforcement of Soviet power at the rank and file level.

Left Opposition: Also called "Bolshevik-Leninists." Anti-Stalinist opposition (anti-bureaucratic). Formed in 1923 within the CPSU, inspired in particular by Trotsky. Gave birth in 1929 to the International Left Opposition and in 1938 to the Fourth International.

Lenin, Vladimir (1870-1924): One of the main representatives of the second generation of Russian Marxists. Joined a Marxist circle in early 1890s. Polemicalised with populism and "legal Marxism." Deported. Emigrated. Leader of the Bolsheviks starting in 1903. Ideological spokesperson for the left in the Second International. Best known leader of the October 1917 Russian revolution, of the CPSU, and of the Third International, until his death.

Leninism: Term that became prominent after Lenin's death. Designates the body of Marxist doctrine and the practical politics that he personified.

Lermontov, Mikhail (1814-1841): Russian poet and novelist, part of the tradition popular during the romantic age.

Liebkecht, Karl (1871-1919): German social democratic revolutionary, son of Wilhelm Liebkecht. Distinguished for his antimilitarist activity. Internationalist during the world war. Imprisoned and then liberated in 1918 as a result of the revolution. Founder of the German Communist Party. Assassinated in January 1919 by reactionary forces.

Liebkecht, Wilhelm (1826-1900): German socialist. Took part in the revolution of 1848. Correspondent of Marx. Founder of the First International. Founder of the Social-Democratic Workers' Party (1869).

Liquidationism: Referring to "liquidators," a wing of the Mensheviks who, after the defeat of the 1905-1907 Russian Revolution wanted to dissolve the underground apparatus of the party and pursue only legal activity.

Lithuania: The [southernmost] of the three Baltic republics of the USSR. Sharing a frontier with Byelorussia, Poland, Russia, and Latvia. Today independent. Around 3.6 million inhabitants. Capital: Vilnius.

Lloyd George, David (1863-1945): British political figure. Prime minister in 1916-1922.

Lozovsky, Salomon (1878-1952): Worker, joined the RSDLP in 1901. Bolshevik in 1903. Emigrated in 1909. Became "conciliator." On return to Russia in 1917, partisan of a coalition with the Mensheviks, founded the Socialist Workers Party. Leader of the textile workers union. Joined in 1919. President of the International of Red Trade Unions from 1921 to 1937, then Commissar of Foreign Affairs. Purged in 1949.

Ludendorff, Eric (1865-1937): German general. Close collaborator of Hindenburg, partisan like him of war to the end. Nationalist and anti-Semite, participated with Hitler in the Munich putsch of 1923. Candidate for president in 1925.

Lunacharsky, Anatole (1875-1933): Art and literary critic. Activist in 1892. Bolshevik in 1903. Moved away from Lenin in 1908. Became a Menshevik. Author in 1910 of a study entitled Religion and Socialism. Internationalist during the war. Member of the Mezhrayontsi, adhered to the Bolshevik party in 1917. Peoples Commissar for education from October 1917 to 1929.

Luxemburg, Rosa (1870-1919): Polish revolutionary and Marxist theorist. Played an important role in the struggle against reformism in the German social democracy. Known for her studies of imperialism and the critiques which she formulated with regard to Leninism (on the question of the party, as well as, during the Russian revolution, on the agrarian question and democracy). Internationalist during the war. Imprisoned. Liberated in 1918. Assassinated in January 1919 by reactionary forces.

Makhno, Nestor (1889-1934): Ukrainian anarchist. Organized a peasant and Cossack army in the southern Ukraine after the October revolution. Allied with the Red army against Denikin (1919) and Wrangel (1920). This alliance broke up after the defeat of the White armies. Took refuge in Romania (1921), then in Paris.

Martov, Julius (1873-1923): Leader of the RSDLP. Friend of Lenin. Ideological leader of the Menshevik current starting in 1903, where he personified the left wing. Internationalist during the war. "Centrist" on the question of the socialist revolution and taking power in October 1917. Developed a critique of the Soviet regime during the civil war. Left Russia in 1920.

Martynov, A. (1865-1935): Militant populist in 1884. Arrested. Joined the RSDLP in 1889. Leader of the "economists," polemicized against Lenin. Leader of the Menshevik "Liquidators" after 1905. Internationalist during the war. Belonged to the left wing of the Mensheviks in 1917. Joined the CP in 1925. Worked until his death in the CI.

Marx, Karl (1818-1883): Formulated, with Engels, the foundations of historical materialism (Marxism). Theoretician and militant of the communist workers movement. Founder of the First International. It should be noted, in connection with the questions treated in this NSR, that Marx and Engels stressed the revolutionary (that is to say anti-reformist) content of their outlook. They foresaw the possibility that Russia, given the conditions at the end of the 19th century, might make a direct transition to socialism without passing through an historic stage of capitalist development. (The realization of this possibility in life would depend on the course of the national and international class struggle.) They stood opposed to mechanistic interpretations of their theories and to unilinear conceptions of world history and human society. On these questions see, for example, Marx, "A.A. Bebel, W. Liebknecht, W. Bracke, and others," September 17-18 1879; Engels "Letter to Joseph Bloch," September 21-22 1890; Marx "Letter to Vera Zassulich," March 8, 1881; Marx, "Letter to the editor of Otetchestvennyye Zapisky," November 1877; Marx and Engels, "Preface to the Second Russian edition of the Manifesto of the Communist Party," January 21, 1882.

Maximalists: Ultraleft split from the SRs.

Mechanists: A term which designates a current of materialist thought which overly simplifies interactions, especially between diverse social factors, in order to define a rigid chain of cause and effect. It's analysis of society neglects, in particular, the historical dimension. The

mechanists found their inspiration in the natural sciences of the 18th century which utilized many comparisons with machines, in particular with the internal workings of a clock. According to a mechanistic interpretation of historical materialism, the evolution of the productive forces and the contradictions of economic productive relations determine a unique, inevitable succession of societies (primitive communism, ancient slavery, feudalism, capitalism, and socialism). The dialectical (more authentic) conception of historical materialism integrates socio-economic influences and constraints. But it also accounts for the influence of other specific factors (for example states, cultures, ideologies). It especially stresses the active role of socio-political struggles, the class struggle. This permits us to comprehend that the course of history is determined by the interaction of various different factors, and not solely by the "iron logic" of economic contradictions.

Menshevik: The Russian term for "minority." A current of "revolutionaries of the right," constituted in 1903 within the RSDLP. Opposed to Bolshevism. During the First World War it divided between an internationalist current (Martov) and another, anti-German and favourable to military intervention (including Plekhanov). It divided in 1917 between a class-collaborationist wing, the majority (Dan, Lieber, Tseretelli) and a left splitoff (Martov, Martynov). Opposed the October 1917 revolution.

Menshevik Internationalists: Left wing split from the Mensheviks, including Martov and Martynov. Condemned Russia's entry into the war against Germany and the further pursuit of that war which was extolled by the majority of the Menshevik current.

Merimée, Prosper (1803-1870): French writer. Introduced into the court of Napoleon III. Translator of Russian novelists.

Meunier, Constantin (1831-1905): Belgian painter and sculptor. Seeing the miserable life of coal miners, depicted the conditions faced by working people.

Mezhrayontsi: The "interdistrict" (or "intercraft") committees. Organization which came together mostly in 1917, with revolutionary cadres who did not align with either of the two main factions of Russian social democracy, among them Trotsky. Joined the Bolshevik party in July 1917.

Miliukov, Pavel (1859-1943): Russian political figure. Founder of the Kadet party. Tried to save the monarchy in February 1917. Minister of Foreign Affairs in the provisional government. Political councilor to the White general Denikin during the civil war. Emigrated to France.

Miliutin, Vladimir (1859-1943): Economist. Joined RSDLP in 1908. Bolshevik in 1910. Repeatedly deported. Commissar of Agriculture after the October revolution. Partisan of a coalition government. Director of the central office for statistics in 1928. Disappeared during the Stalin purges.

Misanikov, G.I. (1889-1946): Bolshevik cadre. Member of the workers opposition in 1922.

Moscow Trials: Succession of political trials organized in 1936-1938 in the USSR. During these trials the most bizarre accusations were presented against the majority of communist cadres who led the October revolution, asserting that they had always been counter-revolutionaries. These trials aimed at the physical

elimination, from the CPSU and from the state, of all potential opposition to the faction led by Stalin. They constituted one of the central features of Stalin's purges.

Mussorgski, Modest (1839-1881): Russian composer. Son of a ruined landowner. Close to the suffering of the common people.

Nazism: A contraction of "National-Socialism," the official name of Hitler's German fascist movement. Racist, anti-Semitic, nationalist, totalitarian, and anti-communist current. Ideology of the Third Reich, the Hitler dictatorship.

Nekrasov, Nikolai (1821-1877): Russian journalist, literary critic, and poet. Celebrated for having chronicled the misery of the people.

NEP: "New Economic Policy" put into operation in 1921. Represented a profound break with the command economy of war communism. Liberalized the market and peasant production, favored the development of small private industry, tried to attract foreign capital investment.

Nogin, Victor (1878-1924): Worker. Member of the RSDLP from 1898. Bolshevik in 1903. Deported, emigrated, underground. Conciliator in 1910. Elected to the CC in April 1917. Partisan of a coalition government. People's Commissar for Industry. Denounced after his death as an "enemy of the people" during the Stalin purges.

October Revolution: Without further modification, this refers to the Russian Revolution of October 1917 (and, by extension, to the years which followed). There have been other "October Revolutions," (for example, the Chinese revolution of 1949).

Ossinsky, V. (1887-1933): Socialist, Bolshevik in 1907. Deported numerous times. President of the national economic council in 1918. Ideological leader of the "Left Communists." Alternate then member of the CC in 1921-1930. Arrested during the Moscow trials then disappeared (liquidated in the purges?).

Ostrovsky, Alexander (1823-1886): Russian dramatic author. In the tradition of Gogol, developed a real, popularly inspired national theatre. Depicted the prejudices of the Russian bourgeoisie.

Ottoman Empire: Turkish empire, built starting in the 15th century, became a great power in the Mediterranean, successor to the Byzantine empire and to the Arab Caliphate. Covered at its height (16th-17th centuries) a large part of southeastern Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa. After a long period of decline and retreat, became an ally of Germany during the First World War. Finally dismantled after the defeat of the Central Powers, an insurrection by Mustafa Kemal, and the institution of a republic.

Owen, Robert (1771-1858): One of the great English utopian socialists, founder of the cooperative movement.

People's Commissar: Member of the Soviet government, charged with a specific function (i.e., Commissar of Labor).

Plekhanov, George (1856-1937): Russian intellectual and philosopher. The best known of the first generation of RSDLP cadre. Introduced Marxism to Russia. Founding member of the Second International. Menshevik leader from 1904. Adopted a chauvinist position during the first world war. Opposed the October 1917 revolution which he considered to be historically premature.

Pobedonostev: Lay representative of the Russian Orthodox church at the beginning of the 20th century. One of the models for the "Grand Inquisitor" in Dostoyevsky's novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*.

Pogrom: Anti-Semitic movement, often officially promoted, marked by looting and massacres.

Poland: Country of Central Europe. Between [1792 and 1795 the former kingdom of Poland was progressively divided between Prussia, Poznan, Austria, Galicia and the Russian empire which made Warsaw the capital of one of its provinces in 1915. Poland regained its unity and its independence at the end of the first world war. Integrated into the Warsaw Pact (the Soviet bloc of Eastern European countries), dominated by a Stalinist bureaucracy. Became a people's republic. Broke its ties to Moscow 1989-1991.

Populism: Principle revolutionary current in 19th century Russia. Represented Russian socialism from 1848 to 1881. Complex, it includes diverse movements and orientations (including both rural and urban organizing, propaganda, and assassination attempts against high government officials and the Tsar). Russian Marxism waged a battle against these perspectives (Plekhanov, Lenin). But this current had an impact on the entire Russian revolutionary tradition and, in particular, gave birth to the Social-Revolutionary Party at the beginning of the 20th century.

Provisional Government: Depending on the context and without further modification, one of the governments between the revolution of February 1917 and the constitution of the RSFSR in January 1918. After the October Revolution in 1917, it had the name "Provisional Government of the Workers and Peasants."

Prussia: Former state in Northern Germany. Its origins go back to the 9th century. Formed as a kingdom in the 18th century. Its borders varied according to its conquests (encompassing at times part of present-day Germany, part of present-day Poland and part of the ex-USSR). One of the key states involved in the German unification which was achieved as a result of the war of 1870-1871. Officially disappeared in 1934 as part of the Reich.

Pushkin, Alexander (1799-1837): Russian writer. Imperial functionary, but defended liberal ideas. Condemned two times to exile. Considered to be the founder of modern Russian literature.

Radek, Karl (1885-1939): Born in Galicia. Active in the Polish and German social democracy, then the Russian. Arrested, escaped. Polemicized with Kautsky. Internationalist during the war. Admitted into the Bolshevik Party in 1917. Close to Lenin despite disagreement on the national question. Vice-Commissar of Foreign Affairs in the Soviet government in 1918. Participated in the negotiations at Brest-Litovsk. Occupied with the German question. Worked in the CI. Rector of the Peoples University of the East in Moscow. Opposed Stalin. Died in prison.

Reich: German word meaning empire. Used to designate the German state and three political regimes: First empire or Holy Roman Empire (962-1806); Second Reich established by Bismarck (1871-1918); Hitler's Third Reich (1933-1945).

Renner, Karl (1870-1950): Austrian jurist and political figure. Part of the Austro-Marxist current. Became a reformist, "social patriot" during the first world war. President of the National Council (1931-33), underground during the Nazi occupation. Chancellor in

1945, then president of the republic.

Robespierre, Maximilian de (1758-1794): One of the principal representatives of the Jacobin current during the French revolution.

Rolland, Roman (1866-1944): French writer. Author of historical and philosophical dramas of a humanist and universalist content. Became a supporter of the USSR at the beginning of 1927.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques (1712-1778): Great radical, petty-bourgeois ideologist of the Enlightenment. One of the precursors of modern historiography and sociology.

Russia: Country of Eastern Europe. Became, from the tenth to the twentieth century, the center of a vast empire dominated by the tsar. Great European power (and Asiatic: Siberia). Beginning in 1789 (the French Revolution) became a guardian of order on the European continent (with imperial Germany). Main arena of the 1917 revolution. Incorporated into the USSR at the beginning of 1923. Became the center of the Stalinist bureaucracy, dominating other members of the Union. After the dissolution of the USSR, the Russian regime tried to maintain its status as a great power. Capital: Moscow.

Russian Empire: Empire which was built during the 10th-20th centuries. Extended from Eastern Europe to the frontiers of Turkey, Mongolia, and China, from the Baltic to the furthest coasts of the Arctic and Siberia. The Russians therefore dominated very diverse ethnic groups and nationalities, including the Islamic populations of the South and, in the West, the populations of Central Europe whose level of industrial development was quite high (as in Poland). After the revolution of October 1917, replaced by the USSR.

Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP): Founded in 1898 (but temporarily destroyed by repression). Brought together all of the Russian revolutionary currents which claimed to be Marxist. Divided in 1903 between two main factions, Bolsheviks (led by Lenin) and Mensheviks (led by Martov). Temporarily reunified by the revolution of 1905. Formally split into two parties in 1912—giving birth in particular to the Bolshevik Party—although the local units remained united until 1917. Many independent personalities—including Trotsky—joined the Bolshevik party in 1917. It became the CPSU in 1918.

Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic: Founded in January 1918 by the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets.

Russo-Japanese War: War waged in 1904-1905 between the Tsarist regime and Japan for possession of the easternmost territories. The Tsarist army, (and especially navy) was battered. The Russian defeat contributed to the maturation of the 1905 revolution. The Japanese victory had a big impact in the Orient: it was the first time that an Asiatic power gained the upper hand over a Western empire.

Russo-Polish War: Unless otherwise stated, the war between the Soviet Red Army and the Polish government in May-September 1920. The Soviet intervention, instead of acting in alliance with a revolutionary movement in Poland, provoked a nationalist-defensive reflex. It ended in the retreat of the Red Army.

Ryazanov, David (1870-1938): Russian Marxist historian and militant socialist. Organizer of a Marxist circle in 1889. Arrested, emigrated. Refused to choose between

the main factions of the RSDLP. Internationalist during the war. Member of the Mezhrayontsi, adhered to the Bolshevik party in 1917. Partisan of collaboration with the Mensheviks after October. Founder of the Marx-Engels institute which he headed until 1930. Disappeared during the Stalin purges.

Rykov, Alexis (1881-1938): Joined the RSDLP in 1901. Bolshevik in 1903. Opposed Lenin's orientation to the 1905 revolution and supported the "committeemen". Elected to the CC. Arrested several times (8 years in prison) and escaped. Leader of the "conciliators" in 1910. Commissar of the Interior (1917). Member of the Political Bureau from 1923 to 1929. In 1928 joined Bukharin in opposition to Stalin. Liquidated during the Moscow Trials.

Saltykov(-Shchedrin), Mikhail (1826-1889): Russian writer and journalist. Painted a satiric picture of nobility and of the provincial elite of his day.

Scott, Walter (1771-1832): Scottish writer of world acclaim. Author of historical novels. Dominant influence among historians of the 19th century.

Scriabin, Alexander (1872-1915) Russian pianist and composer. Tried to develop a universal art. Influenced by contact with oriental philosophies.

Shliapnikov, Alexander (1883-1943): Metalworker. Member of the RSDLP in 1899. Bolshevik in 1903. Two years in prison after the 1905 revolution. Emigrated in 1908-1914. Underground in 1915-1917. Commissar of labor after the October revolution. Favored a coalition government. Elected to the Central Committee in 1918. Member of the workers opposition. Opposed Stalinism, then capitulated. Liquidated during the Stalin purges.

Siberia: Asiatic part of the ex-USSR which extends to the far north of Asia. Under tsarism as under Stalinism, political prisoners (often revolutionaries) were sent into internal exile in Siberian camps.

Skrypnik, Nicolas (1872-1933): Ukrainian social democratic worker. Bolshevik in 1903. Spent a number of years in prison. One of the leaders of the Ukrainian revolution beginning in 1918. Member of the CC, under Stalin opposed the opposition, but also resisted the Russification of the Ukraine. Committed suicide.

Social Democrat: Today this term designates the current to which the reformist socialist parties belong. Before the First World War it referred to the Marxist current as a whole, including its more revolutionary elements (i.e., Lenin was then a Russian social democrat).

United Internationalist Social Democrats: A small revolutionary group in 1917. Influenced by the journal published by Maxim Gorky.)

Popular Socialist: See Workerists.

Social Revolutionary: Party that belonged to the Second International. Officially constituted in 1902. Continuation of the movement called "populist" in the 19th century. Dominant within the peasant movement, but also having roots in the large urban enterprises. Weakly organized. Participated, after the February 1917 revolution, in the process of political class collaboration with the provisional bourgeois government. Divided during the summer between a left revolutionary current which grew in strength (Spiridonova, Kamkov), and a right reformist one which grew weaker (Chernov, Gotz). The right wing engaged from the start in a fight against the October revolution. The left wing participated as part

of the Soviet government until the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed, which it denounced as treacherous. It turned against the Bolsheviks and organized, in July of 1918, the "uprising of the Left SRs."

Socialist International: Second International.

Soviet: Russian term for "council." Indicates the structures of self-organization that appeared during the revolution of 1905, then reemerged in 1917: the councils of workers, peasants, and soldiers. Having both a territorial and pyramidal structure (with the possibility of recalling officials from top to bottom), as well as including the factory councils. Formed the skeleton of a new revolutionary state in 1917, the institutional framework of socialist democracy. Lost their vitality during the civil war. Gutted of all truly representative content and of all power by the Stalinist bureaucracy.

Spartacus: Leader of rebelling slaves in ancient Rome (capital of present-day Italy), greatest such revolt in antiquity. Defeated by the Roman army after ten years. Killed in 71 BC.

SPD: German social democratic party. Founded in 1891, included the tradition of the Social-Democratic Workers Party (going back to 1875) through a fusion of the Marxist currents and the Lassalleans. Represented most notably by Kautsky. Became, until the first world war, the main party of the Second International. In 1914 a majority of its leaders capitulated to the interest of their own imperialist power and accepted the participation of Germany in the war. Having become reformist, the party participated in the repression of the German revolution of 1918-1923.

Spiridonova, Maria (1882?-1941?): Militant SR. Shot a general responsible for the massacre of peasants in 1906. Twelve years in prison camps. Liberated by the revolution of February 1917. Leader of the Left SRs. Internationalist. Supported a coalition with the Bolsheviks. Denounced the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Prepared the "uprising of the Left SRs" in July 1918. Arrested in 1919. Disappeared during the Stalin purges.

SR: See Social Revolutionaries.

Stalin purges: Key element in the system of terror put in place by the Stalin regime. Resting on one of the most repressive penal codes in the world, developed during the 1930s. Brought about the mass repression of the peasants in the context of a forced collectivization of agriculture at the beginning of that decade. The purges struck communist cadres in successive generations, at the summit and at the base. First the majority of those from before 1917 were eliminated (through the Moscow trials of 1936-38). Then cadres who had emerged during the revolution and the civil war, then those of the NEP, then those who had fought in Spain (1936-39), as well as many higher officers in the Red Army (from the time of the Civil War up to the Second World War)—and a good number of other cadres even though they were Stalinists themselves. The leading apparatus of the CP was thereby decimated. Hundreds of thousands of people were executed (mostly communists but also former Social-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks). The terror struck the families of the victims. It spread from the political realm into every corner of society, becoming a method of government. Millions of people were sent to camps in Siberia to die (at least six million were in the camps of the Stalinists at the end of the 1930s). The Stalinist terror and purges illustrate the violence and real depth of the bureaucratic counterrevolution which took

place under Stalin.

SS: Section for protection. Military political police of Nazi Germany. Played an important role, with the Gestapo, in the repression and also in the administration of the concentration camps, ("death camps").

Stalin, Joseph (1879-1953): Georgian. Joined the RSDLP in 1898. Bolshevik in 1903. Longtime revolutionary cadre aligned with the Leninist wing of the party. Underground in the Caucasus. Deported to Siberia during the war. Conciliatorist with regard to the provisional government in February 1917. Realigned with Lenin's position in April. Elected to the CC. Commissar for Nationalities from 1919 to 1923. Secretary of the CC beginning in 1922. Strongly opposed to Lenin in 1922-1923 on the nationalities question and on the internal party regime. Became, starting in 1924 and up until his death, the main leader of the CPSU and of the Soviet state. Organized the great purges of the 1930s. Personified the process of bureaucratic degeneration suffered by the Soviet regime.

Stalinism: Dictatorial and bureaucratic regime identified with Stalin as an individual.

Stuttgart Congress: Congress of the Socialist International held in Stuttgart (Germany) in 1907.

Sun Yat-Sen (1866-1925): Leader of the 1911 republican revolution in China. Founder of the Koumintang.

Teodorovich, Ivan (1876-1938): Peasant. Social Democrat in 1898. Bolshevik in 1903. Many years in prison. Elected to the CC in April 1917. Conciliatorist in April and November. Commissar for Supplies after the October revolution. Secretary of the Peasant's International in 1928. Disappeared during the Stalin purges.

"Thermidor": This term originally referred to a political counter-revolution during the French revolution of 1789-1815. Beginning in July 1794 ("Thermidor" was a month on the calendar during this period) after the overthrow of Robespierre, this counterrevolution dismantled the democratic and popular forms of power born during the uprising against the old regime, without overturning its bourgeois character. By analogy, the "Soviet Thermidor" described the Stalinist counterrevolution which liquidated socialist democracy and instituted a bureaucratic dictatorship, without reestablishing capitalism in the USSR.

Third Reich: Hitler's Nazi regime in Germany (1933-1945).

Tolstoy, Leo (1828-1910): World renowned Russian writer. From an old aristocratic family. Author of broad historical novels depicting Russian society.

Transcaucasus: One of the three natural divisions of the Caucasus, situated in its southern portion.

Trotsky, Leon (1879-1940): Social Democrat in 1896. Deported, escaped, emigrated. One of the main participants in the 1905 revolution. Long an independent personality in the RSDLP, though often associating with the Mensheviks. Looked for a compromise between both of the factions during 1910-1912. At that time strongly opposed to Lenin. Internationalist during the war. Broke definitively with the Mensheviks in 1914. Joined the Bolshevik party in 1917. One of the main leaders of the Russian revolution. Head of the Soviet delegation to the negotiations of Brest-Litovsk. Head of the Red Army during the civil war. Opposed Stalin and

the process of bureaucratization in the regime after the death of Lenin. Exiled. Founded the Fourth International in 1938. Assassinated by Stalin's agents in Mexico.

Trudovik: See Workerist.

Tsar: Russian word indicating certain Slavic sovereigns, such as the emperor of Russia.

Turgenev, Ivan (1818-1883): Russian writer strongly influenced by Western European thought. Depicted the conditions of serfs in Russia.

Two-and-a-half International: "International of Vienna," founded in 1921 by centrist socialists who vacillated between the second and third internationals. Joined the reformist international in 1923.

Ukraine: Nation, rich in resources, situated in the southwest of the ex-USSR. Incorporated into the Russian Empire starting in the 17th and 18th centuries. Occupied by Germany after the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in 1918. Engulfed in the civil war of 1918-1921. Became a soviet republic in 1922. One of the federated republics of the USSR. Today independent. Around 50 million inhabitants. Capital: Kiev.

Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR): Created in 1923. Formally dissolved in 1991 and replaced by a (temporary?) Confederation of Independent States (CIS).

Uritsky, Moise (1873-1918): Social-Democratic activist during the 1890s. Deported. Functioned on a leadership level during the 1905 revolution. Member of the Mezhrayontsi in 1917. Bolshevik in July 1917, elected to the CC. Head of the Cheka in Petrograd. Assassinated by an SR.

USPD: Independent social-democratic party of Germany. Split from the SPD in opposition to the war in 1917. Its majority fused with the KPD (Communist Party) in 1920. The remainder, little by little, reconciled itself with the social democracy.

Verhaeren, Emile (1855-1916): Flemish poet who wrote in French. First a naturalist, for a time a mystic, became a socialist, he celebrated the poetry of the masses and of solidarity, of industrial cities, of energy and of machines.

Volkwehr: Armed force of the Austrian social democracy, created after the First World War and made up of socialist workers.

Volodarsky V. (1891-1918): Member of the Jewish Marxist organization, the Bund. Joined the Ukrainian social-democratic party. Arrested, escaped, emigrated. Militant trade unionist in the United States. Returned to Russia in 1917 and joined the Bolshevik Party. People's Commissar for Information in 1918. Assassinated by a left SR.

Voltaire, Francois Arouet de (1694-1778): French writer, philosopher, and historian of the Enlightenment. Principal ideologue of the bourgeoisie, less radical than J.-J. Rousseau.

War Communism: Name given to the political-economic orientation adopted during the period of the civil war (1918-1921), characterized by its egalitarian spirit, a radical program of nationalization, and exceptional measures—such as the forcible requisition of food from the peasants. Weimar Republic: Regime established in Germany on November 9, 1918, after the abdication of

William II, with the participation of numerous social democrats. After repressing the German revolution, it proved unable to manage the economic and social crisis. Hitler was handed power in 1933, and he would by degrees establish the Nazi dictatorship.

Weygand, Maxime (1867-1965): French general, chief of staff for Foch.

"Whites": Term usually used to indicate the counter-revolutionaries, in opposition to the "Reds." A White general is a general in the counterrevolutionary army (itself called a "White army").

White Russia: See Byelorussia.

Wilhelm II: A Hohenzollern. King of Prussia. Emperor of Germany (1888-1918).

Wilson, Thomas Woodrow [known as "Woodrow Wilson"] (1856-1924): American political figure. Elected president in 1913. Took advantage of the weakness of the European powers during the war to reinforce the position of American imperialism.

Workerists: Also called Trudoviks or Popular Socialists. Petit-bourgeois current based on the peasant radicalization during the revolution of 1905. Participated in the pseudo-parliaments of 1906-1914. When confronted with revolution, expressed the conservative uneasiness of the petit-bourgeoisie in the provinces. Was substantially reduced in numbers during 1917. Led at that time by Kerensky.

Workers Opposition: Opposition group within the CP, formed in the Autumn of 1920 by Shliapnikov and Kollontai. It defended the idea that control over production should be exercised by the unions, the purging of non-workers from the party, a return to the principle of electing officials. It opposed Lenin, and especially Trotsky, during the trade union debate.

Wrangel, Piotr (1878-1928) Russian general. One of the main leaders of the white army during the civil war. Assisted, then replaced by Denikin. Set up a counterrevolutionary government supported by France. Defeated in 1920, emigrated to Belgium.

Yudinich, N. N. (1862-1933): White general. Led an attack against Petrograd in 1919 with the support of England.

Zenzinov, Vladimir (1880-1953): Leading SR. Deported, escaped, emigrated after the 1905 revolution. Underground. Arrested again. Freed in 1914. Supported the Russian war effort. As a leader of the SR party he defended anti-Bolshevik positions in February 1917. Aligned with the right of the party. Member of the anti-Soviet government in Ufa during the civil war. Emigrated to Paris, then to New York.

Zinoviev, Gregory (1883-1936): Joined social democrats in 1900. Emigrated. Bolshevik in 1903. Close to Lenin during the period of exile. In October 1917 opposed the decision to launch an insurrection, later a partisan of coalition government. Became one of the main leaders of the new regime. Secretary of the CI from 1919 to 1927. Allied with Stalin against the opposition from 1923 to 1925, went into opposition from 1925-27 then capitulated in 1928. Liquidated in Moscow Trials.

Zola, Emile (1840-1902): Self-taught French writer. In the front ranks of "naturalist" novelists, ardently and precisely described the condition of humanity and of workers, the social reality. Became a socialist, humanist, and participant in numerous progressive causes.

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Although it is no longer "fashionable" to refer to it, the Russian Revolution remains a major experience of this century. Knowledge of it is indispensable to those who wish to understand the contemporary world, or to see clearly how to proceed in the fight for socialism. Ernest Mandel here sets out to analyse it in a polemical and critical essay. Polemical because today this revolution is the target of such a strong campaign of ideological denigration that one of the formative experiences of this century has become incomprehensible. The author, acting as both historian and political activist, comes back to the most essential question: was October 1917 a totalitarian coup d'état or a socially liberating uprising? Critical, because there is nothing less useful than an apologetic reading of history. While vigorously reasserting the deep legitimacy of the Russian Revolution, Ernest Mandel also sets out to situate the mistakes which the Bolshevik leadership made in the period 1917-21. This is a valuable contribution to the discussion on the lessons to be learnt from the history of Bolshevism.

Ernest Mandel: Involved in the revolutionary socialist movement from the end of the 1930s, he participated in the struggle against Nazi occupation of Belgium. Leader of the Socialist Workers' Party (Belgium) and of the Fourth International, he is the author of many works including *Marxist Economic Theory*, *Late Capitalism* and *Long Waves of Capitalist Development*. He has already published a first *Notebook*: *The Place of Marxism in History*.

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